"only for you, children of doctrine and learning, have we written this work, examine this book, ponder the meaning we have dispersed in various places and gathered again; what we have concealed in one place we have disclosed in another, that it may be understood by your wisdom."

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim
De occulta philosophia II.03
Imagine getting run over by the Truth. Just like that, without a warning, a moment of all-encompassing clarity would hit you when you're ironing your floor-length black cape. Or listening to Canaan's Blue Fire or something. Kaboom, a deeper understanding, like a tonne of straw, right there overwhelming you above you upon you all over you. Suddenly, everything would make perfect sense to you. You, and you alone. And I don't mean any partial truths but the whole deal: the truth of truth, the meaning of the universe, the works.

Before you'd even notice, you'd have sculpted a nice, perfectly plausible ideology out of it all. Perfectly plausible and very, very flawed. Or, better yet, you'd have replaced the Truth with a set of comforting lies.

So what am I getting at?

Afloat in the air, upside down, a melancholy symbol of the world being not even as much as a shadow.

Don't sweat. We interviewed Mauro Berchi, the mastermind behind both Canaan and Eibon Records.
Blue Fire can be a bit much in one take. The weight of its melancholic beauty is enough to crush the unsuspecting audience more keen on pennyweight scores...

“We are deeply conscious about our musical offering's weight and depth, as well as of the fact that in order to take a trip through our music, the listener must trepline his or her usual passive spectator role. Personal commitment is required to drain Blue Fire off its real meaning, and if someone lacks the necessary amount of introspection to shift the illusion veil on compositions are embossed with, well that's his fault, and there's nothing we can do. To say the entire truth, we don't care either, as we never expect a total and perfect understanding of what we play. Canaan offers multiple layers of significance. So why should I complain if someone finds Blue Fire boring or too complex to be understood and enjoyed? This can only be a sign of his different mental wavelength, and any eventual criticism shall pass above us without leaving even the smallest trace, just like a drop loses its meaning once fallen into the ocean.”

How would you defend yourselves against accusations that you've merely created an illusion of depth by combining a variety of superficies? Kind of what Peter Greenaway's films can sometimes seem like: stunning and touching but ultimately kind of unfilling?

"I'd have no plausible defense. Coming directly out of my heart, Canaan's music mirrors my ego, a delicate balance between shades of grey, never reaching black nor touching white. I feel I'm just floating without reaching any port, so a criticism of the kind you mentioned would only receive a silent surrender. The extreme stylistical heterogeneity of our band is however destined to evolve even further, so if you really believe that our music is a wonderful balloon full of air, be careful and avoid our upcoming releases, because they'll bring something more than a deeper and wider variety of superficies. Yin or yang? I believe the truth always lies in the middle. Canaan is casting a bridge towards undiscovered musical territories, and I think our key lies in broadening the range of experiments. Is this just a way to hide compositional limitations or does this have another meaning? Make your choice and live with it.”

Are you ever jealous about your music? Do you sometimes think that it may or may not mean to your listeners - if they think they understand it better than anybody else in the whole wide world... Or whether they go to bed or wash the dishes listening to your music?

"Canaan is my own ride of medium-exorcism, and has the only aim of discharging a part of the sorrow I feel inside. I play to preserve my mental equilibrium and maintain a sort of psychic balance; I would otherwise lose. As a direct consequence of this fact, I couldn't care less about what the listener thinks about our songs or my lyrics. I normally tend to isolate me as much as possible from the external stimuli trying to break my mental barriers. I obviously feel pleasure whenever somebody proves to appreciate what we do (who doesn't?), but this is not the main spring pushing me towards the constant Canaan's redefining and evolution we aim at. The band has a meaning that words alone can't express, I would play even if I were the last man on earth just because my spiritual venom needs a way to be cleaned out. Once it is fixed out, Canaan's main purpose is gone, a short-lasting mental equilibrium is reached, and a listener can make use of his prefer of our music - quite simply it's just his own business..."

Would you wish somebody in your family to die if you knew for sure that the grief would refine your art?

"No. The people surrounding me in my daily life are the only humans beings I respect, and I wouldn't like to anticipate their deaths in any way. Moreover, the grief I co-exist with needs no artificial increase the bitch called life already mocks me with enough strength and power, and there will come a time for Death to add his scream to the babylon in my heart too.

It's just a question of time - let's not extinguish a fire that's still burning, yet whose power is already dramatically decreasing..."

How important is the visual side to you exactly?

"Almost as important as the musical one. I believe music is the most complete form of art our limited human experience can taste, and as such it needs a powerful visual approach to complete and integrate its global significance. The work needed to complete Blue Fire laid out took me almost a full year, spent drowning among oceans of books and pictures to find the most suitable for the concept I had in my head. Was the final result worth my efforts? Once again, it's not up to me to find the right answer - everybody is free to disagree and laugh at my disputable opinion. I'm satisfied with the work I did, and that's enough to temporarily quench my thirst, waiting for the next Canaan CD the package of which will make raise your eyebrows and then fix 'em with the nails of sheer beauty.

Some would say that the whole existence of Canaan or indeed, Eibon Records signals the death of songwriting. Are you out to rival silence, or the voices in our heads? Does it all spring from alienation and a longing for silence?

"I only partially agree with you. If songwriting means creating 'canonic' songs made of bass, guitars, drums and vocals then your point of view is correct. My visions about songwriting are definitely broader, encompassing and merging new rumbling drones and female-mung gothic without any relevant differences under the feeling point of view. I think there are just two kinds of music good and bad, no matter how they're composed or performed. Things with Eibon Records will then always move in several different directions I'll keep on producing music I do like, and this will be the only mandatory element for an Eibon band. Expect anything, from metal to dark ambient, from gothic to industrial...

'Verealising the silence in our heads? A quite difficult task to perform, given that father Time laughs at our pathetic mental alienations and desires for a deeper kind of tranquillity. The noises Life fills our heads with can not be overcome as our mental demons are stronger than we imagine; Canaan music can only add a small voice to their ponderous thundering storms..."
Indeed, do you view silence as a competitor? Do you ever feel like asking yourself "Who am I to intrude upon her property? What right do I have to shatter the still?"

"Excellent question. As I told you before, playing in the band is aprimary need for me, and Silence is not an ideal companion, at least while Carman is concerned. Playing music (or singing) brings in itself the breaking of silence - still I never figured out its possible reaction to our intrusions. Moreover, I'm conscious of the fact that a battle against it is a lost one. Silence is a consistent part of our lives (mine at least more than a competitor) I'd then speak about an unconscious spectator, looking at our pathetic activities with a strength that only endless superiority can give. Like an elephant doesn't feel the mosquito flying around him, Silence doesn't care about us, and I doubt our voice could even ripple its sea. The modifications we can bring to its still surface are short-lasting, and quiet will soon come and cover us with its shroud."

Do you try to present complete processes in your music instead of just the results of those processes?

"Carman's music encloses my whole life - ideas, words, desires, images, fears. Processes and their results drawn into each other, and our music's complexity stands as the best example of this melting-pot..."

"Silence doesn't care about us, and I doubt our voice could even ripple its sea." - mano

How about a review of the Italian scene - who are your kindred spirits, who do you respect, who do you hate?

"Nobody is worth my precious hate. The Italian metal scene simply does not exist. The only kindred spirits I admire are Andrea (Anon/Neverta), Tony (Weltchener), Gabriele (Ordeal) and Trebor. The others are walking dust."

The ultimate goal of all creativity is a situation where the artist, the creator, on completing a piece of art feels that the creation completes him. Is that something that happens to you every time you complete a piece or do you anticipate that moment with fear and dismay?

"You are perfectly right. As soon as a song takes its ultimate form, we feel like if a click switched on, and the equilibrium is again our our place. We are one with our music, and this is a feeling that's hard to explain with written words. Energy channels inside us and flows out of our fingers like roots and hands like a magic whirlwind. Fear? Course I'd say! At the same time though, the end of a song brings sorrow, as it means that a new search must begin, in order to keep the blue flame burning. Our composite process is like a never-ending quest: is it better to reach your goal or to keep on searching for something more gratifying? Any search has a double meaning: sadness and joy in an indissoluble mixture, and a song's completion stands out as nothing but a stage of our evolutionary trip. The new songs (those that will build the spine of our next CD Walk Into My Open Womb! brought the dichotomy towards its Zenith - we are ready satisfied with how they turned out yet afraid we won't ever reach such depth again."

www.petshopboys.com

A good moniker is always a good moniker. A good logo is always a good logo. And a good song is always a good song, too. On the '97 demo Spells, Bulgarian metalmers Powerdrive do a cover of It's a Sin by the Pet Shop Boys. If you think that is a sin, what's charming out covers of '80s metal heroes then? It's incest, that's what it is! Powerdrive are just totally ghouls - beautifully unhinged, versatile, wizards of their own game. Calling their music death metal is selling it short - it's a lot more diverse than that.
"Orchegata Worlds and Worlds CD (Fairynale Records/Season Of Mist). As I can find almost nothing interesting on this album I can find nothing interesting to write about it quasi BM w/ synth, poor drum machine and dodgy male vocals. There, y'ee? Last word goes to Sara Svensson for her singing, which is brilliant but doesn't save the record. (a)

Deftones, a name that really is for sure, but that's all it really does. The Swedish group have been around since '91 and I can't recall hearing them ever before. Judging by their second album Under the Blade (Invasion Records), Deftones are no more than a death metal band who want to be At The Gates but don't have the songs for it. Still Under the Blade is an ok album you ought to give a listen if you have a chance while waiting for the new album from The Haunted, but I can't possibly think of any reason to purchase it if you already have all the At The Gates records. And if you don't have any At The Gates records you should go and invest your last pennies on a good halter instead of this CD. (a)

Mithotyn In the Sign of the Ravens CD (Invasion Records). A nice folk metal album that has its moments. Some of the guitar melodies are magnificent while the others bore me after a few seconds. Also the growling sounds inconvenient most of the time. Mithotyn are apparently a promising band but a 30-minute album at this point of their career is too much too soon. (a)

December Death Metal CD (Nuclear Blast). Warming their hands by Nihilists camp fire they were initially mistaken for something great, largely because of The Sound. Up until the debut album, a good song by December was either a fluke or (and this is more probable) written and partly played by Nicke Andersson, and partly like an Ever Flowing Stream a good song by the band is a non-entity. There's something oddly sympathetic about their obvious lack of songwriting talent and that same death lonesome flair - even on the rare occasions when they just about manage to get a song off the ground (the almost nasty but almost nice Misanthropia), vocalist Matti Kärki's lazy growling drags it down in no time at all. And the harmony leads, in Live for the Fear (Of Pain) for example... um, yeah, very nice. (a)

December Will Be Caustic Again

Time for some serious goodtime music from the artist formerly known as December. Derek Rush now calls the project Dream Into Dust, and its first release is a four-song twenty-six-minute MC, No Man's Land/Chthonic Streams, distributed by Enemesis.

Sweating the sheer austerity of the release, I find myself thinking how a bout of closely typed analysis would be both fitting and very wrong at the same time. My alienation is mine. Rush comes across as a man obsessed with emptiness; his gasping vocals, sometimes spoken, sometimes not, quiver with depression of a deeper kind - one Reznor comes to mind. The tension captured in the guitar feedback and electronic effects is abrasive yet numbing.

"...elements of classical, industrial, experimental, doom, and dark folk..." enrolls the accompanying blursh sheet, and hits the nail right on the head with 'while being none of them'. Season in the Mist is based on acoustic guitar, whereas elsewhere (Dissolution, most importantly) it's more alethic experimentalism of sounds and spaces. Very impressive through and through. (a)

The Dark Ages of Discovery

I was just thinking how easy it would be for me to say something seemingly constructive about the eighth song of the latest Centinex CD Reflections (Emancipation Records) and borrow a couple of lines from their bio, like "a well-known and legendary band in the underground scene" and "one of the most individual sounding Swedish death (black) acts". Yeah, that would make a nice little review that would make a lot of nice people happy and we all could live nicely ever after. Maybe next time. The 4,000 mega watt truth about Centinex cannot be hidden any longer. Swedish death metal was great and it's been said that all great things are discovered a number of times in a number of different ways. True, but then again there are discoveries and then there are discoveries.

There's this 8-year-old kid who lives across the street who's been interested in all sorts of molluscs for as long as I can remember. He walks around with frogs in his pockets and once he even dragged a bucketful of anhills in their living room. About four years ago I was chatting with his mother on the street and the kid was proudly showing everyone a worm he had captured in an empty bottle. I don't know where he vanished for a couple of minutes but the next thing I saw was him running back to his mother with a look of great discovery on his face. "Look mom, the worm isn't lonely anymore," he yelled, brimming with joy the way only kids can. Yes, there were two worms in the bottle now, or two halves of a worm to be exact. That's the kind of discoveries Reflections is all about.

Yes, without hesitation I can tell you that Reflections is a boring album. When I try to describe how boring it really is, I run out of words that are big enough. The first song feels like an eternity and so does the second one, and all the seven others that come after that. What do we actually get when we have nine eternitaries? Eternity is like infinite. Infinite plus infinite is infinite and nine times infinite is infinite. According to this logic we've experienced just one lousy eternity after listening to nine eternitaries worth of Centinex. We aren't really getting anywhere, are we? Well neither are Centinex. They're trying hard though, even flirting with Satan in the hope of a little extra push but it doesn't sound all that natural or sincere. Or what do you think of the following extract from their lyrics: "Destroy, burn the book of lies/Sacrifice, the bastard son Jesus Christ?" Cronos guys, give up. The Devil doesn't care but God may still be able to forgive you. (a)

Coercion's Forever Dead (Reverted Taste CD): ditto. Nah, be fair, it comprises woodpecker drums, some Dog-given death growling from Kenneth Nyman and utter brutality (now that's a word!). At their slowest (Crawling in Filth) they remind me of constipation metal à la Crowbar, but mostly it's fast-paced and actually works pretty well. All in all, a blast of very unpretentious death metal. These five guys from Skärholmen could probably teach Centinex a thing or two about making songs to-the-point and driving (cf. Curved with Existence).

Nonetheless, it's the doomy and drawn-out final act Grief Beyond Belief with lyrics graving over a friend's death (a bad fit with the "I tear out your entrails/soon the feast begins" approach of some of the other tracks) that I like the most. (a)
The music that wouldn't write itself on Amnon's El Khela (Eibon Records CD) defies description. Other things that it defies include the law, the weather and the constitution. And the understanding of the common man. It goes by the name of "dark ambient" but for me they're all dead-end sounds, every last one of them. Drone is such a nice word. I think I'll say it again. Drone. And again. Drone drone drone drone... Sotto voce flow veils drift drone. Drone. Drone. Drown.

Another interesting packaging solution from Eibon, by the way - the cratadigipak has an added layer of greaseproof paper on it. Interesting, I said. Not sure if it works. (d) I Am That Which Is. For some reason this fascinating title of American Scholomance's five-track demo '97 reminds me of the timeless truth that the greatest and most baffling secrets are always full of nothing, except maybe centuries worth of stale air. The concealment is all. Like Pavlo Havliko in his poem It is hard to begin, to write on a blank page (1966), one should consider separating letters and envelopes, and only keeping the latter. Then looking at an envelope would enable us to ponder what it might have contained, what isn't there.

It may be the time, the place or the context that brought up this thought, I don't know. It probably says more about my life than I'd like.

In any case, Scholomance's compositions and lyrics are both very alive. With keyboards, near-psychedelic guitars and machinerized drums (the latter not a good idea) they weave a carousel of inner turmoil that falls into darkness and death. Very unlike everything I've heard coming from the USA lately (which isn't a lot, really). I Am That Which Is offers a pleasant journey into dark metal promises. The band's vision is intriguingly crooked and may provide us with some truly excellent music in the future, and for that alone, the demo is worth your salt.

Black Winter Daze

It's garage days revisited with Crimson Midwinter's Promotional Demonstration Tape '97. One of the brightest hopes of the Finnish blackdeath underground for some time now, the men with spotless haircuts and colourful jackets were this x close to a record deal when they recorded these three songs on an &-tracker in their drummer's garage in June. The Burden of Mortality displays the usual Crimson work ethic about songwriting, a varied, modern death metal song ("When your flesh decays, your soul fades just the same") defying the distinctive elements of the genre. Hopefully the fast parts will kill when given a proper studio treatment. The next song, aptly entitled Passionate Inferno, is more emotional, a blend of scarring mid-tempo bits and lots of black metal influences. On the wings of blackish riffs they glide into Crawling Ahead, which is a weird tale of a drunken saviour. I also heard an extra rehearsal track (minus vocals) that sounds equally promising.

Will, Mercy and Severity

This could take all day you know. Figuring out what to say about Endura's Great God Pan (Misanthropy CD) is not all waltz and jitterbug. Since opinion is so trivial, let's stick to facts. It's their fifth album (so only four years) and their fifth label, too. The fact that Great God Pan was originally recorded back in the winter of 1994-5 may have (facts phase out of the window here) it was fun while it lasted something to do with its partial lack of Will, Mercy and Severity. It's as if in their equation of darkambience, the 'dark' could be replaced by cold and the 'ambient' by something like 'august baroque ciphers', I'm not sure. Vocally, the range is from scarce to nonexistent.

It works well as an additional soundtrack to Halloween II. I know because I'm testing it right now, listening to the mix of Carpenter's trail of horror and Pinnick and Walton's sculptural march of whispers, but storing this screen full of words but the sight of Jamie Lee Curtis' lungs wouldn't get me distracted (you know, spell the effect with Fath Called Will, my beloved, something). (e)
ever met a longtime Beatles fan who gave away his entire Fab Four collection the day he heard about Paul McCartney doing a duet with Michael Jackson. Me neither. Have you ever met a longtime Beatles fan who didn’t mourn in the prospect of an entire generation being brought up to know Macca and The Beatles from Say Say Say just like he mourned John Lennon’s untimely demise? I think I feel reasonably the same when I hear people saying nice things about a new Mercyful Fate album.

Well, things happen, people die.

Receiving a demo by a bunch of Dutch death metallists claiming to be mainly influenced by Mercyful Fate and King Diamond was pleasant to begin with, and actually listening to the damn thing is a taste of the kicks that the underground still can offer from time to time. Nocturne hit their untitled 1997 demo off to a great start with Dawn of the Damned, showing that the members of the band have a great deal of experience with death metal (including bands like Fatal Vomit, Forever Mortal and Baboonic Plague) and a keen interest in occult metal, which makes for a charming mix. Vocalist Pepijn Houwen alternates between death growl and “King Billy on a bad death day” (or Temis Osmond from Sabbath) shrieking. Other significant details include the fact that the synths lead a life of all their own, and the inclusion of Sherman/Pedersen’s Black Funeral (wrongly credited to King Diamond and Mercyful Fate in the inlay). The talent, the promise is still raw and unpolished, though.

On an even more cracking form, but a tad less obviously influenced by Mercyful Fate, are Ancient Wisdom from Sweden with their second album The Calling (Omnivore Music CD). “Their’s, did I say? It’s actually a one-man-band consisting solely of Marcus Norman aka Vargher (also in Bewitched and Throne Of Aha).

Building fright black out of horror infernal (classic soundtrack moods), oath unbroken (Mercyful Fate atmospheres) and December dances (Katatonia sights), Norman does the impossible comes up with an album of monumental stature of - please pay attention now - tasteful and slow Swedish black metal. Lyrically, half of it is about blasphemy and the other half about grim coldness, but the gloomily blossoming epiaphanes that the guy conjures out of his instruments just don’t leave much room for any murmur. Length wise, the songs range from 6:22 to 10:56 (if you don’t count the introduction and And to the Depths they Deserved a Short Instrumental piece). and cannot entirely evade repetitiveness and running out of steam, but then again, sometimes on records like this time does go slow. Hail time, hail wisdom, hail the ancients.

And then we have this Dan Swanó guy who uses the studio like most people use their bathroom. Sometimes great ideas pop up while sitting on the throne, but usually... nash.

Infestus’s Hellraiser CD (Eruu) consists of 24 tracks all in all. Angeldeamon, Hellborn, Poltergeist, etc. Suffice it to say that listening to it in full is not very tempting. In fact, it’s not even an option. (8)

The Pride
(of the Damned)

Wallchka aspire to join the sympho-black aristocracy of Arcana and Thy Serpent, but since a lot of the stuff on their self-titled debut (Velvet Music CD) merely resembles lazy goth, there’s only so far they can go. Lan Stavlid’s piss-poor black metal vocals make the ludicrous concept of Wallchka as a name for a Norwegian band singing in Norwegian pale in comparison. The drum programming isn’t quite as poor and the synths actually work here and there, but the songs are a wee bit drawn-out (e.g. opener "Fullmoon Over figures" is 10:56; one-hour rides seeming rich in experiences but turning out heaviest on the buttocks.

This is one of those demo-on-CD affairs (four tracks in 29 minutes), but from my point of view it makes no difference whatsoever because they sell it for too space (oh wait a sec, their new flyers say it’s only 99c now!). Their first real album may be worth our while, though. For the time being, while in need of a symphonic drizzle of darkness, I’d stick to the aforementioned two bands, as well as Tartaros and the obvious...

Emperor.

(8)

As far as demo re-releases go, things can’t get much better than Obscurity’s Damnation’s Pride (To The Death Records). Essential Swedish thrash from 1987, raw and mean, respectfully layered out and delivered, all done in cooperation with what’s left of the band and limited to 666 copies. Feels right. Obscurity are, along with Mefisto, the greatest legends in obscure Swedish thrash, a band that did everything right and then disappeared.

Oh by the bys of the whores of the ancients, it is religious when Graves Of Rebirth kicks in with the words “A light has gone out, Christ is dead!”. The intensity and ferocity of vintage Venom, early Slayer and pre-Viking Bathory (old Sodom and Carnivore, too) hitting you straight between the ears, making you thrash around the room like a mindless maniac. You swear Dani Ville isn’t singing all the lyrics in the fast parts (the titletrack, ferristance), you promise yourself you’ll never utter the words “oh, I like some of the retro-thrash stuff”, you taste blood in your mouth.

Despite this being the first release on To The Death, the code of the record is TTD 002 - not only because Damnation’s Pride was the band’s second demo, but also as a “tribute to the proud old Polish fanzines who skipped their first issues and went straight to #2”. Fucking ace. The first demo, Ovations To Death (88), is available on a 7 picture disc, also on To The Death. Be quick or be stupid. (8)

ENDVRA (1st Christian Walton
and Stephen Pennick)
The stillborn concept behind *Awakening: Females in Extreme Music* (Dwell Records CD) is diminished by its unbelievable implementation. Were it CD number 26 in an ongoing series of presenting underground bands with female musicians, roadies, girlfriends or mothers, then it could be just about understandable. Now, though, the conclusion to draw is that Witches still rules on the rest of (wannabe) female bands from a great height without actually being more than quite ok. Featuring groups like Gehenna, Demonic Christ and Nocturnaphobia, on the other hand, begs the question...

Where's The Great Kat? It's borderline criminal to put out a compilation album presenting metallic extremity of the fairest sex and ignore her! A compilation entitled *Awakening* in particular, the concept of waking everybody up being so close to Katherine Thomas heart. Even Kerrang! said in its "Heavy Metal Madmen" photo supplement (issue #960) that The Great Kat would make a great alarm clock.

For all of its eight-minute playing time, you're treated to an obviously gifted musician redefining metal-classical with an incredible dose of energy and breathtaking arrogance. And somebody somewhere is at least a total short of a full house. I'm sure. Rodney's Barker of *Savile* served it in a 24" version irrespective of whether you're suffering from attention-deficit disorder or not. Feast of the Dead, meanwhile, is an impure orgy of screams, axes crashing, metal mayhem. Her fingers up'n'down the fretboard (your fingers in your ears) mercilessly, maniacally, furiously. It's all Kat, guitar, more Kat, more guitar. Everything else (drums, bass, etc.) is simplistic, irrelevant or not there. Far ahead of the time! Or total shit?

**Wild and Sexy and Demonic**

Time to let her speak. Or yell, more like. Kat, do you think the world's better prepared for The Great Kat domination now compared to when you put out the debut album?

"When The Great Kat's debut album *Worship Me Or Die* came out, all the inferior metal morons became furious and jealous at the concept of a powerful female virtuoso guitarist coming in and dominating everyone! Those same ignorant, inferior metal morons have now succeeded in destroying metal! Now The Great Kat has to resurrect classical music and heavy metal! Now the world desperately needs The Great Kat's domination! On your knees!"

Right. Before we go any further, I'd better mention that we had to touch up her answers somewhat: e.g. (that's very exact and official) unnecessary exclamation marks were edited. We apologize.

Anyway, The Great Kat is still alive and kicking, that much is obvious. What have you been up to during all these years after *Worship Me Or Die* and what is the plan from now on?

"What has The Great Kat been up to?"
were there only one heavy metal band left on earth, wouldn't you buy their record and dig them out of some stainless steel seance of duty, I mean, regardless of how good they are?

Perverse Incest

Nowadays, a random sample of metal - say, to records or so - supplies any young musician with the kind of musical firepower that may pave the way for only one composition... his swanson.

It's not like I'd been waiting impatiently for someone to take the malformed, belching monster that is the name of the current underground metal scene (the fans, the musicians, the market in general) and throw it all up right at my face, but now that it's been done, fine, I must admit it was really quite cathartic.

Hello metalhead, meet Dead Meat.

Their Promo tape is encompassed all the leftover junk that passes for raw material with people who are a bit crazy and all lost in the woods the consistency of The Great Kat, the elegant atmospheres of Hagar's Runedance, a few shades of goth from their fellow Portuguese Moonspell. Not to mention the grizzly frolics called from OLD and Nuclear Death (the lyrics of Perverse Incest are partially stolen from the latter's Bride of Incest) as well as the same thrash deconstructions resembling the likes of Exterminator and Cult (the 1994 colossally limping all-star thrash project involving Jason Newsted, Devin Townsend and Tom Huntington). And the absolute lowest points of American death and Norwegian black thrown in for good measure. It needs to be heard. And experienced.

The female vocals by Xana alone, singing lyrics in both English and Portuguese... the word "unreal", at least, is in order. Jason Grider does well too, growing away like a man possessed: "Satanize your feelings!", "Evilly with God/No place in my mind for a dog", etc. etc. And the band rush from one thing to the next... and the one after that.

is to wake up everyone to the new music of the ant century, cyberspeeded, and to own all of classical and metal music by the year 2000. Now get out of my way and let me get to work!

Oh sure, but what exactly do you mean by "owning all of classical and metal by 2000?" I mean, you can have all my Relapse CDs right now if you want them.

Well, not sure if she does - at least her assessment of the current musical climate, black metal and all, is none too subtle.

"All of pop and metal music has actually gotten more inferior, more grunged out, more drugged-out, more moronic, and more stupid! To hear the only exciting music, run to The Great Kat guitar goddess website and get a jolt of cyberspeeded musical energy and wake up those lethargic, drug-dazed, brains! The Great Kat's vicious cyberspeed music is more demonic than any of that fake, empty, poisonous, faggot garbage 'black metal' music!"

A Grave Diet

The Great One once claimed that she would not make another album until Worship Me or Die goes Platinum. Well, maybe the comparative lack of commercial success can be put down to secret evil machinations. Have you faced many censorship or conspiracy related problems?

"Tons of censorship! From peas, inferior record stores, record labels, magazines, fanzines, and radio stations who were 'offended' at The Great Kat's loud, brilliant, obnoxious, arrogant, egomaniacal, genius personal"

She describes the music press as 'all failed musicians' whilst the English metal magazines are granted an even more flattering verdict: "all failed musicians who have low IQ's." But it was the NY scribe Don Kaye who once wrote, The Great Kat takes all of Katherine's potential and flushes it down the drain" and thereby vocalized the opinion of many people. A lot of metalheads think that what you do is a bastardization of metal. Where does your conviction and energy spring from?

"The fact that The Great Kat is on a mission to resurrect classical music and bring it into the next millennium! Metal and classical music both have to be updated to get into the 21st century! The Great Kat's cyberspeeded shredding screams, guitar genius, violin demonic brilliance, and classical/metal riffs are the wave of the future! Whether you like it or not! Hear this - The Great Kat..."

She says Ludwig van Beethoven is her first. She also says that classical music is dead. Are the Beethoven and Rossini covers exercises in necrophilia, then?" The Great Kat is resurrecting Beethoven, Rossini, Paganini, Bach, Mozart and all the great composers for the moron masses! Call it cyberspeeded necrophilia if you like!"

Okay, I will. But do you really think that the youth of today is likely to become interested in classical music in any shape or form? The heavy metal kids, for example, worship bands like Yentl or who can't
The Great Kat

Weaponry

Gould Electric Guitar (favorite)
Jackson Flying V Guitar
Gibson Flying V Guitar
5 other various guitars
1 Italian 18th Century Acoustic Violin
1 English 18th Century Acoustic Violin
3 other various acoustic violins
Marshall 200 Watt Amp
Kat's secret metal pedals to get that ripping, vicious, finger-bleeding, ear-piercing cyberspeed guitar sound!

You're So Alive
It Makes Me Sick

I'm sick of hearing people say that I'm not interested in anything. It's so obviously not true. My being interested in something is all about distance. Much as I admire some directors, authors and painters, for example, I don't think I'd particularly want to live with any of them. Watching their films, reading their books, enjoying their art... that's fine, but I don't even want to see them in person, or shake hands with them, or have their autographs. The art’s enough. All about my preferred distance, see? In the case of music, with many a band it's not hearing distance.

To get to know that in Hungary somewhere there exists an entity called Dallas Distribution is actually enlightening. Being sent a copy of the Slovakian Suffocation's Unborn Suffer demo '96 by head Dallas honcho László Kapovári is maybe getting a little more intimate than I'd like. Suffocation's brand of gory death metal reminds me of something I wrote in Inter '94 (in 1994) if somebody played me Embrionic Death's Degradate the Dead demo and then asked, 'Is this the sort of stuff you've mostly kept listening to for the last four years or so?' I'd probably break down in tears.

Interestingly, Suffocation have a song entitled Evasive from the Damned Group. Just what I'll do, but not before I've told you that the music isn’t quite as bad as I thought. Actually, it's excellent for its genre, tight, furious, even melodic. But still!

Speaking of furious, Horna's Hissidentorri demo '97 (released on CD by Solitariittum now I think) is substantial black metal with Finnish lyrics. Only I think they'd have to use arcane, half-forgotten words for it to be really effective. Some arcane, half-forgotten chord progressions wouldn't hurt either.

On the whole, Hissidentorri is a gristy effort, a stinking challenge hurled right in the face of the big sympho/psycho-black wave.

They play their instruments for shit... Doesn't that discourage you to any degree?

The Great Kat is making classical music exciting and energizing for everyone - young and old! The entire world will need and demand this cyberspeed jolt of powerful energy!

I think that the ultimate goal of all creativity is a situation where the artist, the creator, on completing a piece of art feels that the creation completes him or her. I'm afraid your persona will always remain superior to whatever it is that you're performing.

And I'm afraid you still don't understand: The Great Kat's godly persona and music! The Great Kat is god and The Great Kat's music is god! Wake up!

Excuse My Bach

Then she commands us to run to The Great Kat guitar goddess web site at http://www.greatkat.com for the umpteenth time. Isn't the Internet the worst place to look if you're looking for geniuses? Exactly how enthusiastic are you about the great modern technology and all the cyber junk? And why?

Wake up! The Internet is meant for fast-thinking, pushy, energized people who demand their information fast, short, and to the point! Everything in the future will be online and in the information superhighway. Everyone will own a computer and get plugged into the information age! This is a fact.

Oh joy. I'd rather call you non-thinking, concentrationally challenged Duracell people who don't care what your information is like, on a scale from unnecessary to incorrect. I'll gladly be a roadkill.

Anyway, The Great Kat web site features such cyber-goodies as a premiere of the Kat music video Dominatrix (Kat dominating her submissive slaves, Kat in hot and sexy dominatrix outfits, Kat on stage shredding on my cyberspeed guitar, Kat covered in blood... and slaves begging, bowing, licking her boots and being whipped and humiliated!), Kat 'paraphrasis' (Wild and sexy Great Kat photos, like 'Kat in Pink Lingerie', Dominatrix Kat' and 'Lick My Bloody Leg') and samples of her music ("Get ready to get your skull thrashed in with blinding finger-bleeding music.").

Now run.
The Greatest Band

Names of All Times

by Tiziana of Misanthropy Records

Allerseelen: Grey wintry mood of Vienna in November is captured perfectly with this name. Allerseelen (All Souls, at November) is the day of the dead, associated with thousands of death lights flickering at a vast graveyard, of better, the graveyard of the nameless in Vienna. The word Allerseelen carries an overall morbid and mystical vibe.

Impaled Nazarene: A classic! Need I say more? Thumbs up for huge entertaining value. The Impaled Nazarene goes hand in hand with Hecate Enthroned... quite literally.

Laihbach: Original German word for 'Ljubljanica', which sounds great. I also like the rather silly word-game of 'Laib' (loaf) and 'Bach' (river). Laihbach are gods and can do no wrong in my eyes.

Neurosis: I like what the word stands for and how it suits their rather neurotic, almost psychotic music.

Devil Doll: An excellent name. A devilish doll - innocence meets wickedness. Vikernes calls me a devil doll, so I might be biased.

Ataraxia: I love this name purely for phonetic value.

Einstürzende Neubauten: Hard, German, brilliant. Can be translated as 'Crashing down new buildings' or something, which sounds crap in English. I love the way nobody besides Germans can pronounce it.

Fire and Ice: Opposite elements. Has occult undertones without being obvious, and is so simple and basic at the same time.

Lustmord: Makes me think about sexual homicide and has great phonetics, too. Lust entangled with death, strangulation - you name it. Very erotic.

Joy Division: I like the quite sarcastic and double-edged meaning of this name, stems from my interest in all things to do with the Third Reich.

The best has got to be though: Bishop Of Harem. I mean, get real! A bishop of witches? Do witches have a bishop? Is a bishop a High Priest in disguise? Or Harem a village in Israel, and the band dedicates their name to their bishop? Are they catholics in disguise? Or do they mean bi-shop, a shop for bisexuals? Questions upon questions to muse upon endlessly... will we ever know?

Just looking at the cover of the split 7" Street Lights Records of Japanese Magnesium and Gorgon sends shivers down my spine. Heavy Metal Fever, it says and shows a hand rising from flames with a guitar. Not exactly unlike the cover of the legendary compilation Heavy Metal Heroes, the very first LP release from Heavy Metal Records back in '85. In fact both Magnesium's Tell Me and Gorgon's Cold Hearted Woman would perfectly fit in on that LP too. This is NWOBHM the way it was always meant to be: no gimmicks, no bullshit - just heavy fucking metal. It's true that the platoons of boys defecated by the hoard one wouldn't even call this metal, but all the metal-loving men and women familiar with Praying Mantis, Treppe, Demon and Diamond Head know better than that and grab this disc before all the 300 copies are gone by a storm of steel.

The Sabbatical maniacs among you might be interested in knowing that Magnesium is the brainchild of former Sabbat drummer Sami (Geno's brother Shinji Tachi). He writes the songs, plays guitar and does all the vocals. Despite the absence of a permanent drummer and bass player (Honda and Sazuki left the band earlier this year), Sami and the second guitarist Satoshi Ishida are looking for a label to release more Magnesium. They have enough material for a full-length album already. We can see rocks in the sky again!
Mark Knopfler Has Joined Holocausto's Former Disciples!

I confess, I sort of liked Black Crucifixion's Promethean Gift when it was released so I was actually looking forward to hearing Promethean’s debut CD Gaining the Invisible (Avangarde Musik). The album begins with promise but mid-way through the second song the guitarist starts to play tribute to Mark Knopfler. Fine, I need that like a knife in the back. I can stomach a lot of things and I can live with a few more but I happen to have zero tolerance for Mark Knopfler’s playing. Even Robotic’s, the ruler of Avangarde Musik, admitted that some of the songs are really annoying but asked me to give it another chance since some of the songs are very good in his opinion.

Okay, maybe I will but not in the near future. It seems I still haven’t got enough distance to the year 1984. Do you remember what it was like? Brothers in Arms being the first album ever available on CD, every single self respecting radio station in the world felt obligated to play it day in day out just to convince the poor people of CD’s revolutionary sound quality. Of course the average listener who owned an ageless mono receiver with no antenna could hear no difference but Dire Straits were on the air 24 hours a day. Ever since I’ve done my best to avoid touching a Dire Straits record let alone having to hear one. In record stores I always skip the D section because just seeing the front cover of Brothers in Arms makes me indigested and thinking about a typical owner of that record sucks out the rest of my verve. In the 90’s he probably bought a new CD-player every six months just to find out the most suitable one for playing his one and only CD. By the late 90’s he has bought 18 CD-players but only 1 CD: Brothers in Arms, The Best of Queen Vol. 1 and Totos Fahrenheit (with a mid-price tag attached to it). Am I making this all up? No fucking way! I’m talking about my ex-neighbour. Back in 80 when I was planning to buy my first CD-player he tried to sell me one of his old ones for 100 marks. For almost two weeks I managed to come up with kaledioscopic excuses but eventually I had to tell him the truth - I’d much rather pay 1200 marks for a virgin CD-player than 100 marks for one that’s only been used for playing Brothers in Arms.

So, Promethean, inter arma silent criticius. (a)

Options

Tenshi claim that their Kertomaksia demo 97 is all about the art of nature and myths. It’s interesting that many of these glorifiers of folkloristic aura hail from Helsinki and not some place more outland like northern Karvia. It wouldn’t be a terrible injustice to call Tenshi the Finnish answer to In the Wood...; the calm prog aesthetics are about the same and some budding Omnia greatness is visible in the likes of Nokian laulu. The relatively poor sound quality only enhances the effect. Visible are the hints of dark metal that give it away that this isn’t a true Finnish prog. I can say I’m thrilled about that, but those of you usually interested in this sort of thing, take heed. Yada yada yada. Who am I kidding, they probably have a deal by now anyway.

When Candlight spotted some signs of future greatness in Austria’s Own Of Dreams and signed them, of course the band were too impatient to wait, and wanted to record right away. Amber, their debut album, is something they may end up being embarrassed about in a couple of years, but not a hopeless bad album as such. In fact it starts off very promisingly with Like a Sandpiper in the Rain - an atmospheric number not unlike Thaum in their prime but then pushes all the wrong buttons with its resemblance to Amorphis (Remembrance, etc.) and sleeping pills becoming more apparent. Sebastian Jan and Ralph Chris do beat Messer. Kongkina and Koluvaiuri in both the clear voice and the gruff death styling departments, and the music is - pleasantly enough - notably metallic, but not intense enough to hold the whole together and make it a nourishing supper. Impersonal Sun probably packs more potential and is a taster of the Dawn’s two future options well-written passion ridden atmospheric metal or hollow goth.

Daddy Cool’s Nectar

They seem capable of picking up the groceries. Now if only some kind soul provided them with the recipes, everything would be swell. Withering Surface’s Scarlet Silhouettes (Euphonion Records) does work for the first two songs especially Scarlet Silhouettes still sounds good, but by the time we’ve reached the one idea nonwonder A Lily White Sign. I feel like getting out quick. I’m quite sure I don’t want a cross-looking Danish guy (trench physique, curly hair, black lips and black leather vest) to share me with his erotic fantasies, most repugnantly in And She Blossomed. "Her walter abdomen/Thicker than silk/A vestige of heavens/aard genitalia invite me in and the nectar of our orgasm/Runs down her thighs". Secondly, either the band or myself is OD’d on Goteborg. Probably both.

Scarlet Silhouettes is well done, but it sounds too easy. I like the fabrics, but it’s all last year’s design. They should blow up that nice little puzzle of melodies, superficial aggression, catchy choruses, Gote- fucking-borg, amorous melodies and at, and then put it back together again using some other cookbook. (Just like I’m creatively mixing clothing industry, country and game metaphors all in one paragraph.)

As for vocalist Michael H. Andersen (of Mighty Mag fame) and his complex problems, well, it truly is a chapter of its own... and subject to scientific study (some other time, some other planet). In Farewell the assisting girl singer, Josephine I think her name is, insists on pronouncing the title ‘Fur well’, but I’m all like, ‘Don’t you dare go and leave me with that sugar daddy guy...’.

Megakone Strikes Back

The recent successes of Samue and maybe a few others have done little in my mind to wipe away the suspicion that the combination of metal and machines spells danger. Evenmaster have used a 115 Mlia Pentium as a session drummer on their In Thine Majesty demo 97 only because a suitable human percussionist was not found. Alright, sufficient.

I’m glad about the new breed of classier dark metal bands popping up in Finland at the moment. It goes way back, the tradition of Finnish black metal runters with little or no interest in the finesse of the art - need a list? I think not. Evenmaster are great, purveyors of sophisticated and lordly Darkmusic, not terribly original, but sincerity and effectiveness will do fine. The only thing that bugs me, apart from that gamma drum, is the shameful fact that a lot of the melodies on Lacrimae Mundi and The Divine Ambience are accomplished with synths instead of guitars. Yeah right, big brigs. As J.T’s vocals are as convincing as the compositions are thought-out, I would call Evenmaster a band well worth examining.
some simple megalith

"Rose is a rose is a rose," claimed Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). Hunt it in the dark. Cold Heaven, to me, is not so much of an album than it is a religion, a universe, a reality all its own. Happily lost in the Cabala of its melodies, riffs, lyrics... its profound gnostic Iuere, I know all and I know shit. Go analyse it your way. Kiss it or diss it. Hell, you can even go so far as to say that its ridiculous to call yourselves Babylon Whore (sic) when you come from Finland. The Devil doesn't care, and neither do I. Things happen, people die. And true inspiration will always survive any measure of commentary. (8)

Therefore...

to do (and I love guitar-squeaks - always have, Clarence, always will), while Flesh of a Swine begins like the greatest song Dave Mustaine never wrote: bleeding-fist-against-strings bass, pounding tribal drums (not totally unremissant of Santana's once-teenage prodigy or the Woodstock crowd rain chant), a perfectly-timed Tom Warrior grunt, and 7-string guitar that defines the metal genre at its best... I'm in cold heaven for these 45 seconds before it all devolves sharply back to a matted background for the vocals which simply do not do the music any justice, sounding like Maza Walkyier in those disastrous Skydlad moments when the latter thought brooding narration was what other people quite rightly called pointless inaudible murmurings.

For me this is the flaw in the whole record. Cold Heaven is a surprisingly heavy album and Ike Vil is a fine and original vocalist when he stands loudly and really pushes the words aggressively out but, much like all blown instruments which need a modicum of force to produce a tuneful sound, when he sings quietly it all just gets winy and even sometimes jarringly off-pitch, as on Omega thesis with its upbeat central riff oozing the kind of catchy decadence to be found pouring out of Santana's Passage (appropriate, since Omega thesis seems to be about the angel in question) and on the slightly Therap-sounding Babylon Astronaut. It's a pity really, since one only has to listen to opening stormer Deviltry to hear Ike Vil giving it his best shot, with slight shades of an ultra-heavy Dinosaur Jr., or the too-catchy In Arcadia Ego (annoyingly sung "Win Arcadia Ego"), a song otherwise burdened by an irritating initial high-pitched riff and twittering birdie sample which never fails to have me craning my head out of the window and reach for my Desert Eagle. Meanwhile Ike Vil sings in a way that makes me wonder whether he's been dosing out on Caffeine or whether the two simply drink the same pancakes. The slightly Sisters of Mercy (but otherwise very heavy) Enchiridion for a Common Man probably confirms the latter.

Cold Heaven ends with the title-track, which initially sounds like a Kari Aualainen song with the Kari taken out of it, before segueing into a lush keyboard flood that only makes me with the Whores had had enough spare cash to pay a classical orchestra to play it instead. Well, there you have it. I guess I'm entitled to my wrong opinions...

Mikko: But would you go to see them live?
Kalle: Absolutely.
Suckers Sing
I Love You

It's a worthy, noble cause. I'm all for the 'Headbangers Against Disco' campaign devised by a mob of chic loads close to the Swedish Primitive Art Records. Just that the propaganda is wearing thin. The first Headbangers Against Disco? was great, Sabbath's criminally cool Baby, Disco is F**k stealing the show and putting a mischievous smile on every true metalhead's face. Granted, there's the problem that a legion of tenderfeet will now regard the Japanese masters as a part of this whole retro wave which is an injustice. The size of calling Hecate Enthroned a rather good band (i.e. a righteous display of monumental stupidity, almost reaching the titanic proportions and nightmare angles of Mr Wrath of Enochian Crescendo).

Anyway, Sabbath rule, whereas Headbangers Against Disco II* (Primitive Art Records) offers the following smorgasbord: Uzurer's Anno Satanus, Unpure's Metal Night and Nifelheim's Witches Sabbath (a Vulcano cover, apparently). American Frost wannabes and Swedish oldschool bass metallers with a 15-year-old drummer whose parents wouldn't let him play with the Gustavson brothers in the band because they considered Maurus Tyrant and Heilbutcher a bad influence in the boy.

Anyway, Primitive Art ran out of bands and songs, plain and simple. Apart from Sabbath, the first EP had Inferno's slightly Exodus-sounding gem Metal Attack and Gehennah's surprisingly tasty singalong Discodeth plus some twobit Australian band doing some shit song (but that's unimportant).

On the third act of the series, Terror Squad from Japan do their Dark Angel thing with Disco Bloody Disco. Iron Rainbow from the USA do their Obscured Trouble thing with Rockbringer. The former have amusing and appropriate lyrics, the latter have a weak vocalist. The remaining space is filled by death zombies Clainde and Loundpipes, a punk band featuring Katri from Merchants.

In Punishment zone the label's boss Paul Staver wondered why no one has done a cover version of Oz's Turn the Cross Upside Down. Exactly! So let's think of some other campaigns worth undertaking: Oz back on the road! Rehabilitate the right Gallagher brothers John and Mark! Conserve Lemmyn's warts in the British Museum! Cover the historic signatures and tags at the backstage of Masques and other clubs of that statute with white paint! (0 0)

The elegent shades of crimson and violet that the brand new Nuclear Blast signees Agathodaimon from Germany have in their musical palette put all the "black upon black upon black" jokers to shame.

"To us it was important to form a band that isn't necessarily limited by the restrictions of genre..." recounts guitarist Sathonys. "It's just limited by our musical taste and playing/composing abilities. We don't feel the need to use 'Hail Satan' lyrics and stuff like that as we don't try to be more 'evil' than others. 'Evil' is just one of the many adjectives that describe our hellish sound! See, if you once move into a 'blacker than black' suburb, you hardly get out of it later on. So we walk around and visit as many interesting places as possible to find some new colours to add to our composition." I bring up Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk and Sathonys immediately takes my cue:

"I remember when I still was kid enough to use my paint-box, I always got the same dull, black colour when I mixed all of them together... but Emperor proved again that it's still possible to find some very dark colours that haven't been used before."

Agathodaimon follow their own 'No rules at all' doctrine. What for some bands is a death sentence is their lifeblood - even at their less electric moments there's undeniably something eminent breathing at their core. Windswept dreams, two darknesses, the bitterest words.

"Everyone of us has his own (not only musical) taste, and Agathodaimon simply is the joint essence of our musical and aesthetic tastes. Therefore we always try to create a song that pleases everyone, and as we've often different opinions, we now and then come to song structures that differ from the typical style."

Since Carpe Noctem, the band's debut demo from 1996 is deemed not worthy of inclusion in Sathonys, a fervent lament from the olden times (it's a good first effort, though, trust me), let us take a look at their '05 demo Near Dark to clarify that point. Banner of Blasphemy reminds me of Sentenced's excellent North From Here, whereas the epic elegance of Near Dark is what Cradle Of Filth could do.

* For those who didn't know, Spinal Tap is a band.

** For those who didn't know, Sabbath is a band.

Sabbat (Gezel): steel sword into the fashioned pussy
Grasp the Night

In spite of being of Romanian descent, ain’t “Vlad Dracul” kinda pushing it a bit far...?

“Yeah,” Sathorys agrees. “What can I do? I told Vlad that it would sound strange, perhaps childish to some people. Of course it’s as clever as if I would call myself Marquis De Sade or Gilles De Rais, but it was his wish to use this name as he feels a lot of respect for the historical Vlad Dracul, and therefore I respect his choice. It’s not that he thinks he’s Count Dracula or something like that... He might be crazy sometimes (as a good artist should be allowed to), but if you talk with him, you’ll notice that he’s everything but dumb.”

Agathodaimon: Sathorys (guitar), every mother’s favourite son-of-Satan-in-law

Stand Up and Be the Count

Agathodaimon’s goal is that each and every song of theirs entertain the listener.

“It should kindle the same emotions as a good book or movie, and therefore we sometimes try to do something special to round out the danger that we might bore anyone. In other words, stagnation should be a word unknown to us. Evolution is a very important aspect in music and of course in ‘real’ life, too...” This longing for constant progression is expressed even in the name of our band... the name Agathodaimon has different meanings, I just reflect the most important here, namely the riddle of the Agathodaimon. It’s an old riddle, held in the style of the late antique ‘sybilism’ oracle. It was often tried to solve it, but even scholars like Mohrbach or Leibniz failed to do so as it’s not really sure today how to translate it correctly. It’s just said that it forms a kind of spell, a certain magical word... and the one who knows it would be initiated in the wisdom of the gods. Agathodaimon is a symbol for us, a symbol to strive for perfection both in life and music; of course knowing that real perfection can never be reached.”

What exactly are the different forces and opinions within Agathodaimon that Sathorys already referred to? As regards music, style decisions, lyrical themes, image, etcetera? Sathorys himself (Martin Weinler of Ablaze Magazine) in civilian life is obviously the black metal poster boy...

“Aaw, I’d call myself the one who keeps most of the traditional elements (spikes, facepaint on stage etc.) in this band alive. Although there are many bands that push these things too far! I don’t want to look like a hedgehog on stage. Matthias, our drummer, is a person that also likes black metal very much, but doesn’t care about the visual aspect. I would say that we share a very similar musical taste, although we sometimes quarrel because there are some LP’s that I adore (like Altar Of Madness for example) and he despises. Same goes for Carl, these ignorant fools! Anyway, Carl is more into the death metal-side of things, especially having a penchant for weird structures like At The Gates used to have on their first LP’s, or Chuck Schuldiner tried to create on his last albums. About Marko Osmak, he’s the idle pole between us, he mostly keeps out of discussions at first, but always has an opinion that helps us to find a decision. Last but not least (oh no, not least!) we have Vlad Dracul, one of the most impressive people I know. He’s what I’d call a pure artist or maybe the most impressive artist I know but full of genius. He often gets me near a heart attack right now he’s in Romania where he takes his driving license and a few other weird things like promotion for our band, besides that he’s after everything female on two legs. Sometimes I think he’s the embodiment of chaos, as he often has the strangest ideas. But luckily, also many really great ideas, he’s responsible for most of the songwriting and all lyrics, that should tell you enough.”

Embracing a Mummy

Does Sathorys feel like I do that the gap between leaders and followers in black metal is getting bigger all the time?

“Well, if a high quality band like Emperor sells lots of records, it’s more than okay as they really deserve it. Sadly there are some bands that are far away from delivering good music but sell lots of CDs. Of course music always is a matter of taste, but sometimes I can’t believe that certain bands even get a record deal. I don’t put much attention to class A and class B bands anymore, although every now and then I stumble upon some band and think ‘Oh my g... satan, why do they have success with those crappy songs’. On the contrary, there are bands like At The Gates who didn’t get the attention they deserved. But that’s life, I try not to care about the injustices/victims of this business, or this talk about being ‘true’, ‘trendy’ or ‘fake’. Oh, and by the way: I just want to warn true elitist underground people not to read any further, you might get blind by reading this interview as we have recently signed with Nuclear Blast and therefore are a bunch of hyped shit, a danger for the whole ‘drac’ meant ‘dragon’, ‘ul’ meant ‘the’ and ‘a’ meant ‘son of’, so ‘dracul’ meant ‘son of the dragon’.
Sathorys hummmms. "Comparing Emperor to other bands isn't that easy I'd say. Emperor is one of the few bands that still manages to create something new, thus setting trends that other bands sooner or later follow. It should be made clear by now that the shadowthrone belongs to the Emperor. But an emperor isn't immortal (oh, that's ambiguous!), so perhaps someday Forsth will take over this role! No one knows what the future holds."

What, then, is Agathodaimon's key asset in taking the world by a storm, dethroning the... king? "I have a feeling that we could be a very good live-act in the future... we made a steady progression with every gig we had and I see gigs as the most important (or pleasant) aspect. Perhaps I should define

what I'd call a good live-act? That's not only special effects, pyros or pigheads thrown around the stage, it's an intense physical presence, comparable in some points to Samael, which I consider a great live band. But that's just an example. Agathodaimon in its ultimate form would need a different, darker style for its stage presence. I just can't stand bands that don't move on stage, which doesn't mean I like the NY hardcore style, jumping around. But I've seen dozens of black metal gigs until now, and sometimes it can be as entertaining as watching your CD player. It isn't enough if a band just can play their songs live, the musicians also should

know how to act on stage. Music is feeling! Feelings need to be expressed! What about your girlfriend, would you like her to lie still like a mummy in bed everyday you want to exchange some body fluids? It can be entertaining two or three times, but then it gets boring and you'll wish she'd fuckin' move! Same with a good gig, or what do you think?"

Nine-to-five Beyond the Gates

How many times have we heard the cliché 'Only the best bands will survive when the trend is over'... isn't that statement essentially a load of crap? Apart from assuming a great deal of intellect and good taste from the fans, it's just generally flawed in many ways. What happened at The Gates, for example? The greatest things in life are sometimes the most fragile in some ways - and the people with a hell of a lot of persistence are often people with little or no talent, self-criticism, etc. Look at Razor... Look at ZZ Top.

Sathorys agrees. 'It’s not the best bands that survive. Only the bands that sell a lot of records will survive more than three or four albums I think. Every band (black metal) has to keep in mind that it will be nearly impossible to make a living with their music. Okay, bands like Dimmu Borgir make it into the media control charts and already sell a lot more than Emperor, and it might be possible that they make enough money to pay their expenses, food etc. even in the future. But will they ever reach such a sales number that will enable them to lead an enjoyable live when they quit music in the distant future? Black metal might get more and more commercial, but probably it will never get into such a high position that one can earn lots of (or better sufficient) bread with - except for the label of course. As you know, a band normally has to pay everything studio, cover, layout, touring, videos... the label just offers the money in advance and then the band has to pay it back (cause it will be subtracted from the royalties).'

Perhaps at The Gates split up as they knew that they would have to lead a life after the band... it can be frustrating if you record an album, go on extensive tours, put your sweat into new songs and rehearse like crazy, and then you just manage to get the money back that you put into your music, but don’t get the success that you deserve. How long can you stay like this? It’s okay after the first album, as you still are a young and unknown band to most people. The second LP... well, you notice that you get bigger, perhaps you think that you didn’t reach the success you wanted or are optimistic to get the awaited breakthrough soon. The third CD then is in most cases the ‘make it or break it’, be it Reign in Blood, Master Of Puppets, The Number Of The Beast or even Enthrone Darkness Triumphant. Sadly, At The Gates didn’t make it. Why? I think not because they didn’t learn how to write a good song. Slaughter Of The Soul was a great, outstanding album! But nowadays, promotion and current trends are the most important aspects in this business. Look at the impressive press campaigns for Dimmu Borgir. I think At The Gates could be still among us if they had received this support from their label. But on the other hand, their music was quite uncommercial to any time I'd say...

it was great, but not everybody's cup of blood. So probably sooner or later they had to make a decision continue with the band although almost nobody seems to care that their music already is near perfection since years... and risk that they’ll end as poor suckers, or quit and get lured of a nine-to-five dayjob that at least provides them with an old age pension someday? Well, to be honest I don't know which decision led to their split and I heard that some of the musicians continue with other bands, but the example I mentioned could be valid for many bands that are in this business, having what we call 'success'. You simply can't go on for ages... okay, ZZ Top can. But imagine Dimmu Borgir, having this enormous energy ZZ Top nowadays have. That would be raging, wouldn't it?

Oh great, a taster of German sarcasm. Let’s ask him a
trickier questions how do you deal with the fact that your compositions can never come out quite the way you've pictured them inside your head? Is it like a mirror - a bastard twin sentence to eternal left-handedness?

"To make this clear - I'm left-handed, although I play guitar the 'normal' way. So I don't have any problems with that. Honestly, it's okay that our compositions sometimes get through some radical changes until they are finished and banned unto tape or (hopefully soon) CD. In this case, it's a positive progression focused by the talents of us. What I can't stand are these moments when I have a somehow nice idea to start a new or extend an existing song and don't have an instrument at hand to work it out. In most of these cases I simply forget this idea before I have the opportunity to unfold it. Or I only remember fragments of it... but even worse are ideas that exist (sometimes even in a very detailed version) in my imagination, due to some strange reason, I can't get them out the way I want it. In these cases I wish I had the same natural talents people like Vai or Malmsteen have."

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At The Gates Tomás Lindberg (vocals), through gardens of grief into the dead sky

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Quit Essence

Would Sathonys quit writing and performing music if he came across a band that does everything he's ever aspired to, but better - a band that solved the riddle once and for all?

"No, I wouldn't quit. In the past, I often came across bands and thought 'wow, this is the way my band should also sound like', but luckily,

I never found a band that does everything I've ever aspired to do. It's simply impossible as I like too many styles... imagine a mixture of Slayer, The Doors, Emperor, Morbid Angel, Samadhi, King Diamond, Malign and lots of other bands... to combine all their styles into one band would sound everything else but good. Interesting perhaps, but not good!"

The question is, of course, would one ever even recognize such a band? What I'm referring to is the ancient saying "Only the shallow know themselves" - how conscious you are about your goals, how specific they are...

"I think so. But about our goals, we try to stay on the ground, therefore I divide these into 'realistic' and 'still something you can only dream of'. Until now, so many things have happened that I didn't even dare to think about two years ago when we started this band. We released two demos which got great reviews, played with many good (and some shitty) bands and already received offers from various interested labels. So that's really a dream come true... The next goal will be the first CD and then hopefully a tour. I'd say that's specific enough at the moment; it would be pointless to think about further plans."

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Hellbastards

Devastation Violent Termination CD (Defiled Records).

Sometimes I feel like I have to make more shit than a toilet bowl. This is definitely one of those moments. Devastation's debut LP was sloppy shit (a bunch of Texas doing Show No Mercy, enthusiastically but with very little success) when it was released and that's all it'll ever be. This CD re-release contains four bonus live tracks. That's exactly what I need - more sloppy shit. Anyone care to flush me? (6)

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After having heard that Earache have signed English Dogs (now called Jamsa Stark, or whatever) and are doing their best to find some legal loophole to get Ganzal out of their deal with Dark Matter Records, I actually got thinking... Does the label have any real cash cows left these days? And lo and behold, as if someone had read my thoughts, soon enough I was sent a promotional copy of Earplugged 2, their new low-priced v-/s track sampler.

Let us dig one truly good track from a band that is no more (Blinded by Fear from At The Gates), one good track from a retirement project (Undead by The Haunted), one okayish song from a good band that is on their roster no more (Stranger Echoes by Entombed) and one fairly amusing curiosity track from a band nobody cares where they are at the moment (a commentary on high-tech from Aniš Cant in the form of Technology's Gym... Then there's Cathedral (Stained Glass Horizon), Dub War, Misery Loves Co., Iron Monkey, et cetera. It's a shame really that there are no labels left that are a guarantee for quality and Ruins the way there used to be in the murky past. (9)

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Lest the truth about true grit and metal mastership be forgotten, let us observe Sabba's Scandinavian Hammerageddon + (Primitive Art Records). To begin with, there's Blinding from Ear, a heavy metal standard, a flag-bearer of the first order - it's best to let everybody make their lists of songs and bands with whom there's some kind of link there. A live version of the Envenom (96) track Reck of Cremation can also be found herein, as a proof of the devils trip's immense live force. Jummu, the B-side track with lyrics in Japanese, is arguably the most blackened of the three. Marrying a morbid sense of march-like solemnity and a high-speed refrain, it's yet another fine addition to the Sabba songbook of Satanicisation and Metalastic Fanatikism. (7)

Sea Of Tranquillity/Pat Morris Deal Winter/Defiant split CD (Cursed Productions). Two US death metal bands on one CD, what a bargain! Sea Of Tranquillity play technical and excessively brutal death metal and Pat Morris play "progressive death". Yes, it's a fine line between Cannibal Corpse doing an Atheist song and Atheist doing a Cannibal Corpse song, but to me it's all beyond sensible. (6)

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A bunch of Gothenburg teenagers, surrounded by dark tranquill grotesques distorted by their attitude-ridden aspirations, make for an immediate plunge into metal hell, late 90's style. Gardenian may be Lauren's "Psuedrop" Morit's latest discovery, but the group's Two Feet Stand CD (Lestivable Records) fails to impress. The opening titletrack packs enough local colour to please all Göteborg fetishists, while Flipside Of Reality throws in some harmonic trad metal vocals, but the rest is no rose garden to please my desolate heart. The further it goes, the more forcefully the aggrometal vibes kick in and the more boring it gets. (2)
I find *Third Journeys* (Black Tar Records CS-EP) a slightly tricky mix of exceptional promise and ungrievous homemade Viking values. I know there's a bit of a buzz going for the band already, but whether there's a gap in the market for a new English metal band or because there genuinely possess that much potential is a point open for debate. In either case, this Doom Metal Overkilling Russ Smith's discovery most certainly warrants your attention and you'll only do yourself a favour by checking them out, provided that you aren't immediately put off by the single drop of *Storm* and the Bathory Viking albums.

There's a healthy streak of Anglo-Saxonish pride and a decidedly non-BM wannabe attitude to be spotted in this trio from Yorkshire. Uninviting, yes. So much so that while the music is bombastic it could do with an additional dose of bite and spark so that we all could merely shrug and say 'Hell, that's the spirit!' when vocalist Alan Gaunt goes a little overboard with his carols.

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**Pruett Records** inform us that Parkinson is a project of some mysterious but well-known Danish ambient/drum n' bass artist. Ahh. His *Klopp* is interesting but not in the sense of seizing attention. It's neither violent nor gloomy enough to be really impressive. No harm in trying though. While Mr Parkinson fails to turn the disco into a hellhole, Sch. Merz's vocal contributions and Allan Tvedbrink of Withering Surface's guitar are both a little too mild to validate the term 'torture ambient'.

Do any of you guitarists out there ever think how over and between sorts of beats and samples it's easy to sketch with the guitar, leave crust and lose ends hanging about quite neatly, whilst in metal it's all precision precision precision? To Mega Therion and Mental Funeral are so fantastic because they're the complete anthesis of the clean-cut, flourished black metal that gave their guitar a good name in the guitar industry circles in the first place. (x)

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The Finnish label **Woodcut Records** prompted us to interview their local (Vasa) singer *Thrones Of Damn*. A suggestion well worth consideration, we thought, but boo-boomed the idea at the end of the day, having given the band's *Kakshalla CD a fair number of plays.

*Thrones Of Damn*'s greatest accomplishment is never losing grip of what there is of a song despite heavy reliance on the quasi-Yngwiesque musicism and heavy metal heroism. The material is of respectable quality, too, for the most part.

The downsides, then. To start with, the vocalist does not have much of a voice. To listen to him struggling through the album is a bit of a trying experience. You hear yourself groaning out loud, 'Oh give up - there's no need for you to try so hard to be black metal'.

Secondly, the idea of mixing trad metal with blackness isn't exactly new. Competent though it is, *Thrones Of Damn*'s execution of the scheme fails to set stereo (and mixed) alight. Moreover, the footloose catchers (*The Night Belongs To Us*) and the sweetness of the synth *As A Spirit* irritate me endlessly. Still, it will please many and I'm happy for you all. (x)

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I have no idea where this copy of *Aghanocles* 'Thanks For Your Hospitality CD (Marbled Records)** has been lurking for the last seven months but I remember scaling the case with a sticker when it arrived so no one would inadvertently place the record in the CD player. And now without even breaking the seal I can tell you in front of the Devil and everybody that *Aghanocles* are one of those bands who should have stuck to releasing 7" EPs instead of full length albums. After so many years you just won't hear their music no matter how closely you try to listen. (x)

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If stating the obvious can be seen as a good and useful thing then Peter H. Gilmore's article: *Time Travel - Cheap And Easy in Battle of Bewitchment* (Sweden) is exactly that.

Gilmore propounds a way of travelling in time that has been practised by many on this globe for over a thousand years at least. And it is simplicity itself you find the time-period you are enamoured of, the one you want your heart drawn to and you live in it, as far as you can and/or want to, no matter what present you superficially happen to be in right now.

There is nothing wrong with this. After all, the sum of human experience becomes worthless if mankind is, socially at least, continually reinventing the wheel rather than looking back at the past with one eye and keeping alive those things that our ancestors got right before us. Progress, and I mean true progress, not just new and more varied ways of killing as large a theoretical number of people as possible (theoretical, since "we" already have the capacity to annihilate the planet several times over), cannot be achieved without what has been positive in the past being kept alive and used as a springboard for newer and greater things. This selection of keeping what has been good in the past and discarding what clearly wasn't such a good idea in retrospect is part of a balanced approach to life. It is those poor blue bottles that perpetually cycle around the ever-mutating dogfight of fashion that might be considered deserving of our pity that don't waste your time sparing a thought for them - life is too short, unable to enjoy anything for more than a quarter of an hour. As Seizer once rapped, "Fashion is something so ugly it has to be changed every fifteen minutes."

Myself, I try to take what I like best from each time period that succeeds in pulling any of my strings.

And then there are the few who, having one single glorious epoch with their name stamped across it by Old Man Lady Time, will try as hard as they can to live in that era with a burning zeal as indiscriminate as a forest fire. One such is Brian Death Cobra...

The first I heard about Death Cobra was Kola mentioning that he'd met this guy called Brian who was growing his hair so that it'd be long enough to perm and make it into an '80s metal cut. He himself had admitted that it'd 'look crap' but said he couldn't compromise - he had a burning urge to live in the '80s and that's what they did back then.

Kola proceeded to explain that Brian had a band called *Death Cobra* 666 [date on he dropped the '666']. Only it wasn't much of a band, just a logo basically. He said he was not in a hurry as he has 'forty years or so to get something off the ground.' That's an attitude that I can respect.

More notes from the life of Brian followed. He loved old Mayhem, Morbid, Destruction (pre-Cracked Brain), Samael, Sentenced, Inferno and Iron Maiden. He'd officially changed his last name to 'Death Cobra.' He'd got it in his will, with his mam's consent, that Buried Alive is to be played at his funeral. He used to say he wants to move to Germany 'where they take metal seriously' but stopped doing so when he found out he was quite unwilling to learn German. He was planning to have "Metal Merchant" tattooed on his left bicep, and so on.

This is all starting to sound like an obituary, which it isn't. Brian did disappear, though, his ambitions intact. Apart from *Death Cobra* he dreamt of having a label and a shop in northern England, signing real metal and punk bands and reissuing classic deleted albums (Sarcophage and so on) and also the first *Dark Angel* for the first time on CD. Also a Sodom demo and... Kola admitted it'd been a pleasure to know him (a real breath of dark grave air).

Over a farewell meal and beers, the following interview was conducted.

**What is your favourite band?**

Brian: "The first three Iron Maiden albums - I've never heard anything like them."

**Is there a particular quality of Maiden's you'd love to possess?**

(Brian falls silent)
Money?
Brian: "Yeah - to be a millionaire!"
But were they then?
Brian: "No, not then."
What would the ideal band and the ideal music be like? I'd say that it's not the same thing as your favourite band.
Brian: "The ideal band is a bunch of musicians who wouldn't work together, like Middlesex Football Club - it's full of star players but they're no good as a team (Forest still death) or like Ritchie Blackmore and Ronnie James Dio, or Eurythmics and Krest Krishna."
But Eurythmics...
Brian: "...was never that good a guitarist, yeah." Well, definitely not now.
Brian: "Actually, the day I have respect for Faust is the day he kills Krest Krishna. Ooh... look at that light!" (Looks at one of the ceiling lamps)
It's shaking...
Brian: "It must be the occult influence of Death Cobra!"

Kola (left) and Brian (right): a bear, a cobra, two beers and a middle finger

In The Guardian (UK), Peter Stanford wrote "Crowley was fond of goats. He and his disciples had sex with them". He also quotes the latest of Crowley's biographers, Snoop Wilson, as saying "that was Crowley's real dark secret - he wanted to be fucked by men but could not admit it openly or even to himself, and so surrounded it with rituals." Brian, however, loves Sodom and Impaled Nazarenes' Impure Orgies.
Tell me again about your feelings concerning Rob Halford. You told me you couldn't function for a week when you found out he was gay.
Brian: "Literally, I lay in bed so stressed out, I couldn't believe it. I know I'm into Sodom and buggery, but into reading lyrics about sodomy and buggery not into it."
Would you wish somebody in your family to die if you knew for sure that the grief would refile your art?
Brian: "No, because it wouldn't - that kind of grief will only affect your lyrics if you care about your family at all, that is, not your music, and even though I worship Satanic lyrics, or true metal lyrics like Gehenna's, old Sodom's, or whatever, they aren't as important as the music. Like, even though the new Sodom album has mainly political life metal lyrics, most of the music's still great."

The last we heard from Brian is that "Death Cobra won't happen until 2000, the first year of armageddon with a mini-LP entitled Apocalyptic Raids 1999 A.D. but the title will be the only rip-off... The first song, (Your) Rock n Roll Nightmare is being rerecorded and my voice will be a hybrid of Johnny Van Zant and Lemmy." Oh yes, and, "Death to everything except Death Cobra, Emmerdale, peeled plum tomatoes & Budweiser!"

Meanwhile, we at listen raise our horns of foaming ale to you Brian and shout 'Cheers mats, wherever you are!'
Here's to time-travel...

Strangulation Between Nothing and Eternity CD (self-financed). How unlistenable can techno trash get? Try this! Strangulation are trend-challenged trashers from Brazil and as hard as you like to think of nice things, you'll come to the conclusion that the cover of Death's Spiritual Healing is by far the most decent thing here. ()

+++ FATAL EMBRACE +++

Fatal Embrace, a bunch of youngsters from Göteborg made a demo and got signed for three albums. Bloody typical, just like the quartet's début CD Shadowsworn's Garden (Candlelight). With song material as distinctive as theirs, they could have made an excellent album but somewhere during the process they've lost all the energy and heaviness. Fatal Embrace aren't exactly alone with this problem. There's an entire generation of pseudo-energetic Swedish death metallers who can only dream of achieving the primitive power and rawness of At The Gates and Dissection.

According to the bio, the next Fatal Embrace album "will take a perhaps more controlled metal direction" which means that the band have realized their problem. It also means that the band aren't ready to record yet. These days when there are more labels than there are bands worthy of a recording deal the young bands should have the courage to say "no". The labels that sign bands who are still in search of their own identity after one demo or so are nothing but child molesters, that's what I say. ()

+++ CROWN OF AUTUMN +++

Crown Of Autumn, The Treasures Arcane CD (Elnor Productions). An Italian band successfully fusing cuckoo clock metal and dark atmospherics. Heavy metal, melodic and proud, meets bombastic keyboards, and flutes and stuff in A Lyre In The Vesper's Calm, one of the strongest tracks here. Their session drummer doesn't entirely manage to avoid sounding like a scat singer drummer (the lowest point being the same bit right in the middle of the title track). In the great crossover between two different but equally good vocalists, Diego Balconi's ted hard metal style and Sgatifer's death/black vocals, I can only state: very good, driving, melodic, well written - not terribly original though. ()

+++ OVERKILL +++

I lost interest in Overkill's doings completely after Under the Influence (1988) but now in 1997 I'm actually curious to know what the band is up to on their From the Underground and Below CD SPV/Steamhammer's Bobby "Blitz" Ellsworth, although still a very powerful and recognizable vocalist, isn't quite what he used to be and the same goes for the music as well. Still, Half Past Dead is a great song title and that alone is a lot more than what most of their contemporaries have to offer these days. ()

+++ EVER DARK +++

Ever Dark, Not of God CD (II Moon). Ho hum, another Gates Of Ithtar hero. Well, what I mean is that I have nothing against christ sitting around with a buncha naked winnin, but why does he have to be painted so badly? And why are people too wimpy to use photographs instead of pictures? Maybe it's a lack of willing girlfriends (or christa) - ed... I guess Marduk are the biggest wimps of all in that respect.

Anyway, none of this has anything to do with Ever Dark's music which on first listen came across as overly-long, very boring US death metal with very bad Satanic lyrics only vaguely referred to by a few seconds of good drumming on Within My Chilling Grasp and of nice vocal panning at the very end of In Darkness, I Dwel. Subsequent listens, including lying on a black leather sofa at midnight with all the lights turned out, did not make this listening experience any more interesting. Maybe that's because I was on my own. Ho hum. (I)
metaluciferian vibes

Neal Tanaka - Heavy Metal Drill in action!

Very notably and thoroughly blown away by Metalucifer’s two metalismonic CD’s, Heavy Metal Drill and Heavy Metal Hunter, we wrote in Madchen, “The highpitched vocals, the crushing riffs, the uplifting choruses, the diehard attitude only hopeless wimps will disapprove”. Legions of metal lovers the world over have since joined the hymn of praise.
Kristian Pihl of Iengrim Magazine wrote in his ed, "All I can say is that I pity you if you haven't heard either of Metalucifer's CDs."
You can say that again.
And Gezelucifer, Metalucifer's songwriter, bass player and vocalist (also known as Gezol from the mighty Sabbat, but don't tell anyone) has a treasury of killer quotes to share with us: "Great headbanging rhythms and damn good riffs and very impressive solos!" and "For a band to create a sound like this in the late '80s is admirable beyond comprehension!" and so on and so forth.

We had no choice but to interview both Gezelucifer and Mr Neal Tanaka, Metalucifer cover boy, bucking vocalist and metal authority supergiant. As you will no doubt realize, the metalie du jour's answers are printed as received, with the metallic grammar, metallic spelling and metallic punctuation left intact.

"Leave your all to the sound!" – gezelucifer

So about the response first of all...
Gezol: "I'm very glad that many Metal nations still are existing in this Hell. Also, I was surprised by US guys' good response. I was expecting first the responses from Europe. I honestly thought that America is dying completely... So. But a matter for regret is that there is no response from your guys.
Neal Tanaka: 'I've heard that Metalucifer is the true to the last Heavy Metal. The guys that understand the 'true' are never many... The guys that don't understand it will never understand.'
Gezol: "But the cover is f**king great!"
Neal: "Sure! I could be very famous with Metalucifer. When I went to see Sabbat live, I was asked handshaking. The guys said that you're the drill killer on the Metalucifer cover. I was glad a lot. Next time I wanna be asked by ladies. Ahah!

What are the most un-metal instruments that you can think of?
And why?
Gezol: "Drum machine! F**k off! I f**kin' hate it! The thing that we need necessary is man's spirit and power by blood and sweat. That's too poor!"
Neal: "Yes! I also hate drum machine! And trumpet and sax! Those are not Heavy Metal!"

Isn't it great how the force of Heavy Metal exceeds all language barriers?
Gezol: "The art is so. No bound! Metal music has power, spirit, anger. They come down to listener's mind without difficulty language. Metal is very simple primitive sound and wakes up man's instinct.
Neal: "Heavy Metal spirit is boundless! I love Metal a lot worldwide! I can not speak English a lot. But I know one. This is very important words! When I went to a secondhand record shop, I wanna look more this store's stock!"

What they're referring to is the Sabbatical European Assault in the spring of 1997... as well as the Maniacal Vinyl Hunting Tour throughout Europe's finest metal shops. Which somehow leads us to the heavy questions like what is the ultimate goal of Metalucifer?
Gezol: "The goal? There is no 'goal' on the Heavy Metal. If you hope any Goal, I say it... Metalucifer is already the ultimate Goal! But, to exceed the goal is the most important matter for us I think. The art has a possibility of infinity.
Neal: "Sure! Metalucifer's goal is vinyl LP making! And Debüt in Europe and USA! And to play with Blitzkrieg and Manowar! I wanna see it! It will be of course GREAT!"

Are there a place for women in heavy metal? Do you welcome headbanging women as well?
Gezol: "In the case of Japan, some female headbangers exist sometimes. Moreover, 20% of audience is women. So I don't think it's strange. But I'm always welcome headbanging women that don't consider the matter with the womb.
Neal: "Woman headbangers are no bad. But I love woman pazzybangers more than woman headbangers."

What are the most metal hard names of all time?
Gezol: "Except Metalucifer it's Manowar.
Neal: "Judas Priest."

Aren't you afraid that this fun project is going to get more attention than your serious efforts with Sabbat?
Gezol: "In honest, I was afraid. But I become comfortable that Sabbat and Metalucifer are quite different in kind of Metal. And guys that like both bands exist. This a very big point. The people has interest for any new one. But also, there is the case of Sabbat gets new support by Metalucifer... The guy did not first interested in Black Metal. The guy was thinking Black Metal is trendy blast-beat without guitar solo. And after the guy listened Metalucifer (of course, the guy praised Metalucifer with Excellent!), interested my the first project Sabbat and heard Sabbat... be said I don't like this, but later on, the guy tried to listen Sabbat sometimes again... and the guy's thoughts has changed: Sabbat is Black Metal. But including great guitar solos and old but flesh riffs... This is very Blacking Metal! GREAT! I like it a lot! Sabbat got new fan through Metalucifer. So I don't care at all now."
Neal: "Also, when Sabbat played in Berlin, one German guy told us his opinion that I listen only traditional Heavy Metal. So I like Metalucifer. I don't listen Black Metal. But I listen only Sabbat. Because Sabbat is Metal-kings so..."

Metalucifer, the killers themselves (l-r): Elizaveate (drums, guitar), Gezelucifer (vocals, bass) and Elizabigore (guitar).

Neal: "Metalucifer is 80's age Heavy Metal messenger. Metalucifer is already RARE in the now."

So what about the other way round, do you have any second thoughts about releasing the track Baby. Disco is F**k as Sabbat? For many people it seems to be the first time they hear Sabbat and they immediately think you are one of these retro-metal bands like Gehemath and Inferno... How do you feel about that?
Gezol: "No problem! Sabbat has created always tunes of many various styles. Sabbat is retro-metal, black metal, deathbrash metal, doom metal, old fashion metal, old school black metal, satanic metal... so I called it Blacking Metal. It's meaning of the evolution from all darkside-Heavy Metal. Gehemath and Inferno are very good bands. But the copy is not. They must find more new something I think."

What are the most metal words in the English language that you can think of? And why?
Gezol: "Man Of War! I think this is the true word of Heavy Metal. Metal way is very hard, too hard. Metal is battle with yourself! We must win through all difficulty and trouble and suffering... Metal is like man's hell life. There is many battles on the life..."
Neal: "I like Heavy Metal Mania of Holocaust. Mania is myself. The most mindblowing word is!"
Kid Ye Not

Time for a confession. On our last productive moments we have actually considered the idea of sending some of our demo to select zines, along with phoney bios and brand new covers and all that jazz, just to see what the reaction would be. With the Czech band Ritalin's In Nomeni demo (9) things take a peculiar twist: is somebody making fun of us now? The cover, the titles, everything about the tape screams 'Black metal' except for the music, which is brutal gothic death metal. I dare say no more. Je te mémorise.

Red Roots

P. H. Blackcoh and R. E. Kotelichmke make Coles from the Czech Republic group that should attract the attention of all Root fans around the glog. The line-up is completed by the former Dark vocalist J. S. DeSade who amicably lends guest vocalist Big Boss take over the microphone on offer to one of eight tracks on Bonds of Togetherness. Musically speaks Coles are close to Root's final work Kargers which doesn't come as a surprise since T. H. Blackcoh has written all the music for Coles and most of the material on Kargers came from the same pen. Additionally, both were recorded in the same studio over the same time. There's a great deal of Sentenced vibes into the bargain too.

North of No South

It may be only a demo review, but I'm delighted to see a local (Tampero) band on these hallowed pages of ours. 'The scene' around here has been as good as dead ever since the speed metal parties calmed down and withered away all those moons ago. Withered Garden used to be known as Halls Of Mandus, and their Watcher In The Nightsky demo '94 shows a band eager to leave their mark. It may prove surprisingly difficult though, if what you're dealing with is fast and melodic death black, and Withered Garden are obviously novices in the science of the style.

Tempo changes, NWOBHM melodies, and a deadly rasp from lpf Untruth make up the band's merchandise, and the five guys do a reasonable job all round, but it annoys me to read the 'trvying to get a deal' stuff in their biography, standard fare though it is. Watcher In The Nightsky should be defined as an intermediary report from a young band's trials towards finding their own voice, not as their passport to all things dali and shaggy and disy.

Another thing entirely is that a lot of current Finnish metal is rendered unnecessary just thinking about a certain milestone from 1989. Just consider what Sentenced did with North From Here: they took what were the useful elements of Atheist and Death, black metal's icy malevalence, the impeccable sense of melody from the finest purveyors of trad metal and four northernmost hearts full of hate and angst, and made a modern metal classic. Interestingly, I find it easier to deal with Sentenced's post-North From Here releases (good stuff but nowhere near as unique): the legions of bands that have subsequently aspired to make the perfect brew of death 'n black 'n heavy metal...

Mean, I mean, if it was some Zeitgeist of intersection that was actualized in North From Here, The Sombreland and Skydancers, it doesn't seem to stop metalheads all around the world from seeing it as an eternal present. I'm just stepping out of the page here, happily ignorant about Jon Nodveid's whereabouts, considering Dark Tranquillity a long-lost hope and basically sending banshees like the Danish Aurora to Coventry. The sunbathing fellows have put out their II Cry Alone? through Prutten Records and it doesn't take a genius to guess what their 'melodic death metal at its best' sounds like. Black Tears on the flipside is more Maiden speeded up, precisely delivered all the way through, but splendidly dawning above splendid are to be found somewhere else entirely.
A graphic designer working for Spinefarm Records was looking at a logo, Gate Of Ish... something, it appeared to say. "This is a mess, I can't use this," thought the draughtsperson, and called Ewo at Spine and told him to deliver a better copy of the obscure group's obscure emblem for him to use on the record cover he was designing. Being the man of action he is, Ewo immediately got in touch with the label's new signing Gates Of Ishitar, the Alban metallers, along the lines of "no logo no cover no record you see". The gatekeeper on the other end of the line promised to do all he could. And lo and behold, soon enough the off-sax machine at the Spinefarm towers was scraping to the primal rhythm of occult art. Voilà, there it was; a new version of the Gates Of Ishitar logo, in all its glory! Mathhafesting great one, too!

But what about the band's music then? Is the fact that their second album, The Dawn Of Flames (Invasion Records CD), was the last record recorded at Dux Spanka's Unisound the only thing that may make the disc worth remembering?

Image isn't important, so it doesn't matter that the band photograph shows three typically boring-looking Swedes, Henry Rollins in a blond wig and Jabb the Hutt at the back... but then if image doesn't matter why is this photograph reflected on reviewers' Similarly, I have nothing against kneeling naked women wielding morning stars to quote Joey De Maio, I find it 'visually powerful'... but said cover of The Dawn Of Flames is so badly painted as to present a pair of breasts that went out with Sam Fox, bondage gear that was probably found in the bargain bin at Anne Summers and the horror, the horror the ubiquitous horned helmet that makes true vikings the northern hemisphere over reach for their axes with murderous intent.

But what about the music? Well, I'm already on edge having read in the bio that Gates Of Ishitar's debut album "shocked the whole Metalworld" - you're a liar liar with your pants on fire! The Dawn Of Flames is less interesting than its predecessor: well-produced, Gateburg metal as boring as the album cover is bad, with riffs that were probably found where the afore-mentioned bondage gear was. This record isn't even worth getting for quantity over quality. ☹

Clear Felling

When listening to Empyrium's debut album A Wintersunset... (1996), for a fleeting moment or two I thought I'd been misguided. But hurry, the lucid sparkles of promise on...er wein Blitz vom Himmel fel... the duo's 1994 demo were the real thing after all. Songs Of Moons & Mystic Fields (Prophecy Productions CD) is a work of tremendous beauty and grandeur. The songs Ode to Melancholy and Mourners actually beat Katatonia in their own sport. No fun, take my word for it.

It sounds a lot more processed and mature than the debut. Nonetheless, when you hear someone calling it kitschy or corny you have absolutely no way to defend it.

Markus Nöck's vocals will take most of us some time to get used to, and chances are that some people never will. His (black) metallic vocals are great, a breath of fresh air compared to the bored or bad black/death/doom vocalists, but I still find his gotb-emotional stylings pretty darn awful in places. Not as bad Under Dracontias on the previous album, but rather heroically cromorne just the same (most upsettingly on Lover's Grief). "I'm no Garm," the man says himself, with the kind of modesty that only true artists can afford. ☹
Nebulah from Wisconsin, USA, claim to be deeply influenced by "older, more powerful bands such as Barathry, Celtic Frost and Darkthrone". Are they confused teddies or what? Well, I must admit that keeping up with the next generation as well as the new generations is always a little difficult, as is listening to the Nebulah demo in fact. Half the time I'm busy wondering whether Costa Stoios of the German metal fanzine Tales Of The Macabre would consider it a tribute or a despicable scam! As far as I'm concerned, Nebulah's one and only problem is that they aren't Darkthrone. But let's ask Costa what he thinks...

"The music of Nebulah sounds as if everybody is playing just on his own, no matter what the others play. It doesn't sound horrible if you listen to each musician, but together, as a band, it's total shit, amateurish chaos..."

Thus beginneth our chat with Mr Tales Of The Macabre. We may disagree with the man on a few points (um, no, I don't mean Nebulah...), but it's certainly reassuring to talk to somebody who believes in metal the way Costa Stoios does. So many have neglected the study of metal's Chokmah Nestorah, or, the Secret Wisdom Tradition to be found on jet black vinyl, in raw and evil sounds and vigorous headbanging. Costa knows it all. Let's find out more about the man behind the fanzine known for its Tom G. Warrior covers and endless enthusiasm for total metal, preferably '80s style.

I like cherishing the olden times, too, but I think that looking too ardently into the past can be fatal. Emulating the elders, indulging in all things retro - what good can possibly come out of that whole angle? My advice is, at least, should be rooted in the present, gazing into the future. If heavy metal doesn't exist here and now, it doesn't exist at all. We should all continuously question the justification of our existence in heavy metal, and in the underground. I mean, the likes of Apezil from Ancient who say they don't listen to black metal any longer should obviously be punished, but how about the editors who spend much more time listening to their old classic records than the latest crop of atmospheric art metallists, for instance? Ern, how did we get into these deep waters so quick? Let us take a step back and delve the concept of the "real headbangers" first. That is a wording that comes up in Costa's reviews rather frequently. As in "Take this for real headbangers" and so on. This is very much, Mr Stoios, how about a definition, please?

"Real headbangers are maniacs who totally dedicate their personality and life to Heavy Metal music. They are people who show emotions if they listen to music they really like, like they are 'acting like a maniac', going wild and crazy. Nowadays you see many childish black metal wimps at concerts who just stand there and show no emotions, because they're too cool and evil... they just wear long hair to look good, and because their evil idols have long hair as well, but they don't use their fuckin' head to bang along to the pounding rhythms and crushing riffs. These people aren't able to act like maniacs (I mean, burning a church, using clownpaint, and so on, that doesn't have much to do with Metal, does it?)."

"People from our local Heavy Metal fanzine 'Hellbangers Moselfranken' are real headbangers. They spread chaos and insanity. And yes, I'd say that I'm a real headbanger because I still have the fire burning in my soul and I still know how to bite on my teeth when a new great hard guitar riff finds its way into my deaf ears. I'm still hot and hungry for Metal music. I still like to go wild at concerts if a band really knows how to kill. Heavy Metal is my life... or to say it in Metalhead's words, 'Heavy Metal is my way'

Cult of the Damned

Four issues of Tales Of The Macabre so far - what has the ride been like?

"The ride has been long and difficult, but I'm still alive, hahaha, still ready to deliver the goods. It's of course always a pain in the ass to sell the mags, write to every fuckin' small distributor there is, having tons of stamps, writing till the fingers bleed, getting ripped off by evilites like Alan of Earthside distribution, Ireland, or other wimps, but... in the end it's always good when people respect and understand all the work and say kind words. The biggest afflitions have been not getting paid, all the business shit and all the labels that want to fool around with you (no good review, no distribution... but I always do what I want to do, no matter what. If someone doesn't like a review, then it's his problem. Let the readers decide.

How would you explain the mission of Tales Of The Macabre in layman's terms?

"To support bands that come up with great music, preferably music that is a bit different and not sounding like the usual trend shit. Even if Tales Of The Macabre has grown (issue one edition was 300 copies, issue four 2000 copies), I do not fear to feature bands which aren't the most popular or beloved ones, because the meaning of an underground magazine is to present bands or interviews that can't be found in every second fanzine. Additionally, I try to present bands when they are still small, possibly still making demos, so it's still interesting for everyone to read those interviews after the bands have released some albums. I think you know what I mean... this makes a nice cake. Remember your Isten issue "Playing with Fire, all the cool info about some evil black metal wizarps were from old school!"

Hugh, My granny is old too and she has a load of ancient stories but I wouldn't call her 'cute'. But go on, tell us, at Tales Of The Macabre currently about total metal?

"In the past I also cared about bands who really weren't Metal, but now I stopped doing that, because I think that some of today's metal music has become too close to the scenes with all the high tech shit and sound manipulations in the studio. I should rather concentrate on bands who still know how to play good music without tons of synth sounds in compensation for their instrumental impotence. It's time to declare war against those who try to ruin Metal music, I think every real headbanger will agree, huh?

How big would you want to see Tales Of The Macabre grow? Or is the size, categorically, a journal for a small circle of metalheads? How much success would you feel comfortable with?

"Tales Of The Macabre's growth has stopped. I still have quite some copies of issue four left, so you see... it's not like selling all copies within a couple of weeks. Of course I'd like to reach as many people as possible with the magazine, but I'm only interested in people who understand the contents of the mag. That's why I don't want Tales Of The Macabre to be distributed by e.g. Nuclear Blast, even though they could be a big help for me getting rid of the mag... but I'm sure that 90% of their customers are trendy suckers and definitely not underground people, and..."
Malevolent Assault of Yesterday

There is nothing quite as perfect as the Heavy Metal Anthems. Dead serious and uplifting, they are the battle hymns that we depend on in our eternal war against the false ones. Catchy slogans! Power chords! Gimme gimme gimmme!

We asked Costa of Tales Of The Macabre to list his top 5 of the greatest Heavy Metal Anthems ever. Not an easy task, it turned out.

"Are you crazy? How can you choose only five songs without forgetting so many others that deserved much more? You should've said 30 songs, that would be a lot better!"

"Slayer - Reptilics. When I first heard this song, I thought 'Wow, this is real powerful heavy metal' and I spontaneously bashed my head to it... This is the kind of music I love, with great rhythms and riffs, not too fast, not too slow... a perfect headbanger! I know that this song is influenced by Iron Maiden's Phantom of the Opera, a great song as well, but I don't care. I love it! It's a pity that Slayer stopped playing that song after Hell Awaits came out."

"Hobbi's Angel of Death - Crucifixion. Like Crionics, a perfect headbanger. Great wicked vocals, great riffs, perfect, intelligent drumwork, what more do you need? And after nine years, I still worship this tune. This is way more evil and metal than 99% of all of today's black metal shit."

"Hellhammer - Messiah (the version from Satanic Rites demo). Total heaviness, total darkness, with apocalyptic lyrics ('Father killed by son... Only death is real, World War Three...'). Very primitive music but 100% effective, that's art for me! The rhythm is, once again, not too fast which makes intense headbanging possible."

"Exciter - Invasion/Writing in the Dark. This was one of the first speedy metal songs I heard, and what I like in this song are the pounding hard riffs and rhythms of Invasion, the straightahead speed, the screaming vocals, the calm mid-part with all those acoustic sounds, and last but definitely not the least the great guitarwork... Pure heavy metal guitar riffs, a bit complicated and metallic, but still with the necessary energy... It still fascinates me and forces me to play air guitar while listening to this song. I know that not many people think that this Exciter album is their best one, but... who knows... perhaps you think it's cult in 30 years, hah!"

"Buddha - The Derby. Not a very complicated song, but a pure hymn that people can shout along with. I think this tune was ahead of its time, as well as Neurodeity, the titillating track of the last Buddha studio LP. The Derby can be seen as a thrash/death metal anthem."

Yeah, I can hear the full crowded Giuseppe Meaza stadium singing along, "Milan! Milan! Milan!". The song's about football hooliganism, not metal, goddammit!!! Didn't the Scorpions do a record with the German team for Euro Cup '90? Shouldn't that be included as well?

At least we can't accuse Costa of patriotism. German anthems are the greatest, after all - the Finnish jury gathered here at Isten HQ would've included at least Helloween's Heavy Metal Is the Law, Running Wild's Chains & Leather and Warlock's True as Steel.

"I think every 'real headbanger' will agree it's time to declare war against those who try to ruin metal music." - Costa

Rewind to Termination

In Tales Of The Macabre #4 Costa snaps at Tom G. Warrior for him not being courteous enough to answer an interview. It's quite unbelievable. For the sake of argument, I would say that true supporters would not do that...

"Hmm, well, you're right, but let me explain. When I got in contact with Tom Warrior, he said that he would do an interview for Tales Of The Macabre, and he was kind of proud to see himself on the front cover of #1 which I sent him. He also wanted to do an interview with me, and I thought it was the perfect opportunity to pose for the cover of #2.

"I remember we discussed music, and he was really into the music we were doing. He told me about how he was really into Metallica and Slayer, and how he admired those bands. We ended up talking about the music scene and how we could help each other. I think it was a great opportunity to get to know a new musician and to share our passion for music.

"Unfortunately, the interview never went through, and I never got to see the cover of Tales Of The Macabre #2 with me on it. But I hope we will get to work together in the future. I think it would be a great opportunity to share our passion for music and to create something new and interesting.

"In the meantime, I'm working on my new album, and I'm really excited about it. I think it will be a great album with some really killer songs. I hope you will all check it out and support me. Thanks for your support, and I look forward to hearing from you all soon."

I'm not doing all the hard work with the magazine for such kind of people. So, you're right, the magazine is a journal for a small circle of metalheads. I myself don't care about being very successful...

"..."
What Are the Cultists of the Cults?

And what's so cult about them?

"The old bands that survived in my heart and still spread their magic like years ago—..." says Costa Stolos of Tales Of The Macabre. 'To be real 'cult' you have to offer something special and original, or at least to have the real feeling for a certain musical style.'

"Okay, fire away..."

"Hellhammer - still the heaviest! Razor - still the most underestimated! Slayer - still the fathers of satanic thrash... all the recently called German bands like Destruction and Kreator are great as well, but will always walk in the shadow of old Slayer."

"Venom - Welcome to Hell being their masterpiece... music can't be dirtier! Slaughter - Craftapadi's raw energy still rules... no wonder why I've chosen Tales Of The Macabre as the name for my magazine. Hobbs' Angel Of Death were one of the most ridiculed bands of the late '80s, but their debut album is one of the best and most satanic releases ever! You may laugh now, but that's how I see Peter's world!"

"Bathory - the old stuff is still blacker than most 'black stuff' of today... The epic stuff was ahead of its time and still excellent. Bulldozer for being hated by the bigger press due to the band's illegality... It's great to see that the Bulldozer LPs are very hard to get nowadays, and that people have to pay a lot of money to get them! The Unsane for just being simple but raw and evil Slayer clone..."

"It's roughly at this point when it becomes apparent that the term 'cult' is sold wholesale at the Stolos household. He goes on to list albums like Behemoth's The Oath Of Black Blood ('so anemic, so badly produced, so dirty, but still more wicked and darker than 90% of all modern black/death metal releases'), Mayhem's De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas ('impressive energy and originality; a proof that Euronymous was a special person with a special musical taste and attitude... a sign of this is Attila's appearance on the album') and Rott's Zyvrenti ('especially because of Big Boss' original and perversion dark vocals had, perhaps, for being one of old Burzum's influences')..."

About Burzum, Costa says: "The magic of Burzum and Aesir is perhaps gone nowadays due to all the Burzum influenced music around which we are tired of, but when those two vinyls came out, it was great to hear such simple but very effective cold music, especially at a time when death metal got more and more technical and less dark. I think almost everyone who bought these vinyls when they came out on DSP, and not the re-release some years later when black metal was much bigger and trendy, will agree that Burzum was fascinating in the very beginning."

Guten Götterdammerung!

Although Sian Johansen has never been on the lunatic fringe of the metal population he's obviously avid for success, that numerous have been his bands and projects during the years. If we don't take his French visit in Mayhem into account, Ragnarok must be the best thing he's been involved in so far. They make music that flows smoothly between black metal and Gottergjøt death metal.

What bothers me with their second album Arising Realm (Head Not Found CD) are the peculiarly positive vibrations that it emanates. With songs like My Hate Is My Spirit and God Is Wasted, I'd expect to hear something raw and downtrodden, but the record just peps me up every time I put it on. I suppose it's justly good then. (9)
The Press Corps of Below

What does a review of reviews show? Unsurprisingly that dead fish drift with the current, that language is not always a tie that binds and that even where never is heard a discouraging word, there are still plenty to be read. A great-sunt of the reviewer Fredrik J. Heinemann used to say that if you don’t have something nice to say about people, then become a reviewer, but his cynicism unfortunately does not apply much to the reviews in Fear Of Life Magazine. There are not many people living in stone houses throwing glass. It is heartening to have so many releases that many of us will never have time (or inclination) to listen to treated with such respect.

Fear Of Life Magazine is now dead. It’s funny that editor Arco van Winder should call it quits now that his magazine started to be more to my liking. In hindsight, the FOLM review in (The Return of the) Dark Lord was actually a little too positive since the whole Morticia/Nunskull school of zinemaking seriously grew off me at some point. The final issue of FOLM is a definite improvement from that style despite some backward lapses in the layout department, e.g. the dull review sections. Taken as a whole the magazine is nicely put together and looks good, too. I liked the interviews a great deal – Arch Enemy, Theatre Of Tragedy (that Raymond guy oughta forget all about the music and become a fulltime interviewed), Paradigm and so on.

After its glory and proffessional vol. II (submitted In Somnial Zone), Dawnrazer from Norway is apparently headed back to more zinexique glory since captain Einar Sjøqvist is now on his own without shipowner Anton Morkell. Every time you push the fantastic envelope to the outer reaches, you’re begging for heavier scrutiny. In that respect, Dawnrazer #2 fared well. Interviews with Tom C. Warrior, Theatre Of Tragedy, Aura Noir, Paul Chain, Monumentum and Lydia, as well as lots of snappy reviews more than made up for the fact that the computer layout was competent but not awfully creative.

In Mighty Mag #80, editor Bjarke Aaland gets all upset when The Great Kat comments that drinking and doing drugs is stupid. “Come on,” he says, “you usually combine metal music with getting drunk – it’s a part of the game, at least here in Scandinavia.” Kat probably remains unconvinced, but Bjarke does have a point – I would make anyone planning to take a field trip in Danish metal cold sober a very brave man. And I mean Danish metal after Don’t Break the Oath and Terror Squad.

In terms of circulation Scandinavia’s biggest metal magazine may well be true, but Mighty Mag #80 is a mighty anecotic affair: 40 pages and 9 of them filled with adverts. Nevertheless, the text is tiny and it definitely is a mighty job dealing with all that demo debris and disc deluge.

Computers turn the entire world into one huge Legoland. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fanzine world. Look at the pictures in Punishment #6, for example.

That and the generic printing/photocopying job aside, Punishment is a very pleasant colossus of a fanzine. With many very nice in-depth interviews (e.g. Dew-Scented, Necrophobic, Mark Grenning and Crimn Midwinter) it’s amusing and entertaining to skim through. As for the tonnes of reviews herein, I should not and cannot scold anyone for liking metal too much, but being as lenient as editor Crille Janson and his cohorts are most of the time, it tends to get on my nerves ever so slightly. A solid feel-good metal fanzine written by a true fan who wasn’t born yesterday.

From the Leg-observance, Snakepit #6 is even worse. But editor Frank Stover truly hits rock bottom in his review of Oa’s Fire in the Brain re-release, calling the band Swedish! I mean, give Amorphis, Corporal Punishment, Impaled Nazarene and Stormwarning to the Swedes anytime between right now and immediately, but any fool who was there oughta know that Oa were from Nakkila, Finland!

Snakepit is Frank’s post-Voices From The Darkside project, an exercise of heavy metal nostalgia. The Body, Nasty Savage, Tygers of Pan Tang, Rigor Mortis and Armored Saint plus some Aura Noir and Hammerfall thrown in as well. Yesterday’s news, basically – but admittedly rather charming, in spite of resembling a prog rock magazine in spirit. If it was someone other than Frank at the helm, it could be a nightmare, but Frank knows his old metal. In his Sabbath review, however, he wonders who’s buying all their stuff – surely a valid question coming from a man who’s putting out Warhammer and Lunar Aurora records...

Inhotep #2: From Dark Till Dawn can be a sweltering read, what with it elongated and rather incoherent interview (Moonspell, Monumentum, Walls Of Atlantis...) that admittedly also measure up interesting territories quite frequently. Layout-wise it has improved from the previous two issues, but still strikes me as being somewhat clumpy. At 48 pages it’s a big fat piece of read, but a lot of the writing is decidedly unfiltered and unprocessed, with
editor Roy Kristensen spending an awful lot of time and space explaining and re-explaining things that are really quite obvious to begin with. Contributor Russ Smith’s interview with Taisian of Misanthropy Records is the highlight of the issue for me.

Isengrim is an astounding newbie from Finland. It’s a rush to come across writers as good as Kristian Pullila. The layout in his debut issue is kind of formal and stuff, more newspaper than Twin Sister, but the exceptional writing more than makes up for it. Some of the interviewees (which include Helheim, Necromorbus, Carsten Moltor of Soliditimum Records, Fleurety, Teemu Kantoenen, and Crimson Midwinter) do their best to drag the interviews into average county, but Kristian’s wit and insight save the night.

We were also sent some sample bits from his second issue (interviews with Alex Kurtagic of Supernatual Music/Benighted Leans and Bethel, for example), and they are all well beyond promising - a star is born, that much is evident. Kristian’s Crystalline Creations distribution is well worth checking out as well.

If you want your humour overstated and outdated, Godfresh from England could be for you. Issue #6 has all the black metal mockery and juvenile cartoons that you could possibly crave for. Editor Crin had heard something about Isten and apparently thought he’d found a kindred spirit, but I most certainly disagree with him if he thinks that the scene is too serious. Quite the contrary: unintentional humour beats inane jokes in at least 66% cases out of 66%. I’ve received one too many of these “humblestic efforts” out of our Playing with Fire issue and I must say not one of them has been anything that I could identify with - and in most cases not even remotely funny.

Crin insists on writing everything in capitals exclusively, which is a drag. The interviews (with Emperor, Merciful Fate, Entombed, Morgoth, etc.) are rather nice and the reviews rub up the right way for the most part.

Finally, an English zine that is much more to my liking. The Dead Sea II somehow reminds me of The Crypt, the defiant fanzine of Gregory Whalen, who went on to launch a great journalistic career in Terrorizer. Some witty writing and a neat (nothing more, nothing less) layout are basically the reasons why.

Honesty and devotion abound in the reviews and the interviews (Samuel, Cradle Of Filth, Thy Sinister Bloom, Gehenna, Beyond Dawn, etc.) are mostly good as well. There may have been too many writers involved but I place my faith in editor Nick Moberly despite him threatening to only do newsletter type things from now on (drop him a line for more details) instead of “these 60-page things that take up too much of my time and money”. Yeah, you’re got to be fucked in the head to keep doing this year after year.

In any case, The Dead Sea II should be of interest to all you Isten fans out there.

Kols: “I love the sea but its inclusion as a sample here is simply irritating. Floating Tears & Withered Flowers have nice acoustic guitars and drums (though not worth buying the Swansong album Seven Art Music CD) but Manfred Beran’s vocals - oh dear! The last thing I want to hear is some German talking about naked skin...”

Forums: “...yeah, it’s fine when he’s not talking. Why is it that people think they can just speak over some music and get away with it?”

Kols: “He sometimes sounds like early Darren White. Narration is a difficult thing to do at the best of times (though awesomely done on Anathema’s Eternity) but Manfred’s is just fucking crap... the only track he’s not appalling on is Fallen Leaves. The non-metallers in the house started to hum along to ...And I Drown... which just further reinforces my growing suspicion that Necroideal of Inferno was specifically referring to this album when he spoke of “some crappy wimp record with flowers all over it, and songs about Love and mother nature and children.”

Shocking news... or maybe not. Dissection’s early recordings have now been put on CD. The bit entity is entitled The Past & Alive (The Early Mischief) (Necropolis Records) and it includes the Into the Infinite Obscurity & EP, The Somberlain promo tape plus one demo track, one rehearsal track as well as two rehearsal tracks by Satanized. All in all about 21 minutes of Swedish death metal at its apogee. A critical consumer might point out that the 7’’ EP and the promo tape material would’ve easily fit on a MCD, but true fans won’t complain... more value for your money. But hmmmm, where’s Rabbit’s Carrot then? (4)

Nirvath Headly et al. Nirvath CD (Abstract Emotions Records CD). Were this humour I would not laugh. Some kid with bobbed hair and a sabre in his hand standing in the woods, trying to convince us about his artistic integrity. For a debut album consisting of three songs in three acts of Polish pagan symphonie black with lyrics in their native language, this is definitely the best I’ve heard. (4)
To Frost and Flame

Originally conceived back in 1984, Isten officially came into being in 1987, the year of such monumental works as Into the Pandemonium, Killing Technology and Under the Sign of the Black Mark. The debut issue had Quorthon on the cover and stuff on Kreator, Celtic Frost, Coroner, Enthos, and Merciful Fate inside. Started out right and went on from there.

Kingdoms have come, empires have fallen. Music has made the ancient walls of the Isten towers shine like divine marble. Isten has been sculpted by the loving knuckles of frost and flame.

Fly Into the Istenumogram

After three issues in Finnish full of speed and thrash, the transition to English was made with issue #4 in 1989. Carcass, Sepultura, Anthrax, Metallica, Grave, Coroner, and Sadus all took part in the ceremony.

The death metal boom rushed forth and life went on. Issue #5 featured Darkthrone, Xymnus, Entombed, Paradise Lost, Dismance, Thervis, Pilegigion, Invocator, Order From Chaos, Funebre, Master’s Hammer, and Abyss - to mention just a few, it was a 92-page mammoth of an issue.

Only four pages shorter and a hell of lot darker was 1990’s issue #6, subtitled To Hell and Back. Still considered to be the epitome of Isten’s cryptic underground journalism by quite a few, this classic volume contained the likes of Dark Tranquillity, Sentenced, Samhain, Impaled Nazarene, My Dying Bride, Furbowl, and Masacre. The hottest item of all, however, was our no-holds-barred interview with Euronymous. I hate it when people say that they’re into death, and when it comes to the point, they’re just life-loving humanitarians false trendies”, et al. Isten #6. To Hell and Back has been worshipped and copied by many.

Intelligent and Rebellious

Onwards, ever onwards we carried on our trail. #7 was loosed from the vaults cryptically. At the time, we were critical of featuring such obscure bands as Katatonia, Sabbat, Beyond Dawn, The Equinox Os The Gods, Decorysh, Divine Eve and Bizarro, but we did know what we were doing very in-depth interviews with bands that we believed in, most of whom had only a tape or two under their belts back then.

#8, subtitled Playing with Fire, followed. A pamphlet of fire and frolics, it was a limited edition thing of that was sold out in no time and became an irreplaceable collector’s item. Playing with Fire put the P in black metal - P as in “penguin”, that is. Again, the concept and the torque have been copied by many, while Isten was already rushing headlong into new adventures.

With the great online “Black Metal - Yellow Press” as its emblem, 1990’s (The Return of the) Dark Lord was yet another giant. It’s the ultimate in grim entertainment and therefore a great place to start for newcomer Istenites. It was only ostensibly connected to gutter journalism - the articles on Darkthrone and Rotting Christ, for example, set whole new standards for in-depth metal journalism. Also Sentenced, Mortiis, Emperor, Xynna, Diaboli, Kari Ruuslätten and others were featured. The underground had never experienced anything quite like the Dark Lord. As Isten’s self-satisfaction department reports there’s more inspiration and innovation to be found on its 68 pages than many zine editors can put into a lifetime.

Cold Lake, then again, was a freezing batch of words like toothpicks under your nails. Ice melting in the dark. Scraps upon the mirror of the soul. Very limited edition, very low profile and truly an acquired taste. For six months the words were as one with icy waters in the grip of Finnish winter, and then it was rescued on June 6, 1990. The response was puzzled more than anything else, “What have other people said about this?” being more or less the most expressive reaction.

Who’s That Girl?

Machinen, the first part of the Headwind trilogy came out in April 1997. We went for the jugular, the core of profane myths and sacred trends, with Opeth, Cultus Sanguine, Babylon Whores, Sigh, Thy Serpent, Tiernes and so on. Many of the interviewees were chosen not only because of their music, but also because we suspected that they’d have something to tell us all about their angels, their dark rivers, the state of their art and their united states of mind.

Words have flowed. Some exceedingly comprehensive interviews have been conducted, some corrosive reviews put together. Cyanic and wild-eyed enthusiasm meet on the pages of Isten, become friends, and go headbutting together.

Isten has been called intelligent and defiant but also arrogant and irresponsible. Love and hate in equal quantities is just the reaction that we crave for, since there is undoubtedly an element or a dozen to this journal that are quite suspicious. Our brand of independent and irresponsible iconoclast should’ve brought about our ruin a long time ago, but we’re still here, at our wicked and sinister best.

Hereby we proclaim that our next volume is a special jubilee issue entitled Isten 100. Nail yourself to the cross.

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#6
Darkthrone, Entombed, Paradise Lost, Xynna, Funebre, Dismance, Order From Chaos, Master’s Hammer, etc. 62 pages of vintage death. $14.95/DM 5

#7
Katatonia, Sabbat, Decorysh, The Equinox Os The Gods, Beyond Dawn, Bizarro, Divine Eve, etc. 36 pages of gothic frost. $14.95/DM 7

(The Return of the) Dark Lord
Darkthrone, Sentenced, Rotting Christ, Mortiis, Diaboli, Kari Ruuslätten, Darkety, Drowned, etc. 68 scandalous pages of black metal - yellow press! US $14.95/DM 10

Cold Lake
The coldest words in the coldest order. $2 (separately), $8 (with other orders)

Machinen
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Take your average newcomer, look at things from his point of view. When he has to make a choice between the new Rotting Christ album and the new Old Man's Child album, he knows that the former has a back catalogue of a dozen or so releases, most of which are either very hard or just plain impossible to get and probably wouldn't even work if one wasn't there when they came out. The latter, then again, are a product of the late '80s just like our young newcomer himself - no sweetering tasks of getting familiar with the group's previous releases, no need to prove to anyone that he's a true fan of the band. Just instant gratification.

Old Man's Child. What a bloody name is that for a metal band?

The occult experience of first laying eyes upon the Passage to Arcturo gatefold sleeve. The secrets buried beneath the less-than-tight playing and ungracious production on such old gems as The Forest of N'Gai. The leviathan swath of black authority and misty atmospheres that was Thy Mighty Contract. Live onstage, Sakis Ntormayhem spewing out impressive gobs of spit while doing King of a Stellar War, heroically combating acute lineup problems.

It doesn't get much more metalphysical than trading recollections of Rotting Christ's glorious past. Except that it does.

And Stormes Insee the Stormes Before that Went

Plenty of poetry has been written since Rotting Christ released their classic Passage to Arcturo MLP through Decapitated Records in 1991 (not forgetting the legendary Satanas Tacedum tape from 1989). A few record labels, some unforgettable tours, a lot of superb metal. Barrreing Magnis Wamypx Drololith's two-year stint with the band, the Rotting ones only recently went through their first real line-up change with bassist/lyricist Jim 'Mutilator' Patsouris leaving the ranks for family reasons (as well as concentrating on running his metal specialist record shop in Athens - something he started after selling the Storm Studio). And yet, the Greek legends march on victoriously, their new album being something that doesn't make you long for the days when Euronymous swore he'd get busy with Rotting Christ right after he'd got Marduk, Immortal, Samoth, Tormentor, De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas and a couple of reissues out of the way.

Well, let's do this right: A Dead Poem is not only the record
Rotting Christ have always wanted to record. It's also the record that legions of bands have wanted to make for ages. Half a dozen Finnish bands come to mind. Swedish, too.

These other bands are happy if they can come up with decent pastiches of these elements - dark vibes, black (death, alternatively) roots, melody, heavy metal spirit - but Rotting Christ have what it takes to say a final word on things. A Dead Poem rebuilds the world. There's a bit of a difference there.

"Always nice to hear such opinions from people that are not an lickers," muses guitarist/vocalist Sakis Tolis. "Yes, for me it is by far our best release - better done, the best as far as both composing and production are concerned - so I feel proud. Pride is the only feeling that helped me all these years with Rotting Christ. A Dead Poem is by far our best release, but we have to work really hard to prove it. You know, there are thousands of releases from thousands of bands out there, so it means hard work."

You can tell that these guys have learned a lot in their 10 years of existence. Musically not least of all. A Dead Poem comes across like an ideal piece of new, familiar, meet New... New, meet familiar. Screeching guitars greet an added layer of accentuated finality. Same of these Apocalypse Emphasized dramatics could have something to do with last year's touring companions Samael. In your mind's eye you can almost see Mamisseim jumping to the beats and breaks in Semigood, for example.

Yet of Xy (Samael drummer, keyboard player, songwriter), Sakis merely comments that he was there. Producing the record, playing the keys. Afterwards the band have brought in a guy called Panayotis to handle the keyboard duties. The music is still exclusively written by Sakis.

What better example than Among Two Storms, track number two on the new album - Rotting Christ's incredible brand of dry™ guitar sound taken to some previously unexplored heights of metallic majesty via a chorus made in heavy metal heaven. Even that Fernando guy from Moonspell on additional vocals fits in splendidly. I think the word "wonderful", at least, is in order.

So Sakis, just out of curiosity, are the first songs on the album the newest ones? "Fuck! How did you figure that out? Yes, they are the newest, along with the last one, Iris Inversion."

How Have the Mighty Risen

1999's Thy Mighty Contract was Rotting Christ's French visit to Omnose Productions. Sakis' guitars ruling eternally, going from deafening squalls to chukka-chukka rifting and back, melodies flowing like the river Styx, gems like Transform All Suffering into Magnes and The Coronation of the Serpent made it an influential black metal masterpiece. Had it not been for certain occurrences in Norway, we could've experienced a wholly different golden age of black metal, with our Greek friends in the centre of attention. Musically speaking, it wouldn't have been any less thrilling, that much I can tell you for sure.

After a tour with Immortal that went horribly wrong, the band and the label both concluded on their respective sides that the entity on the opposite bank wasn't "professional" enough for the co-operation to go on. There was no love lost, but while Hervé Herbaut & Co. went on to reap black metal wealth with successful releases from the sons of northern dinna and lads fetishists alike, Rotting Christ made the biggest mistake of their career by joining forces again with Panos "Decapitated" Tsanetatos who in the meantime had rechristened his label Unsound. The band still didn't have too much respect for Panos for the things he had done for them last time rounds the awful flyers for Passage to Arcata, the Dawn of the Iconoclast? ER Ripoff (homemade cover artwork and all), but at that point they apparently didn't have much of a choice. The result was Non Serviam, a respectable album in its own right, but not quite the kind of follow-up to Thy Mighty Contract that the hordes of Retainers were hoping for.

In retrospect, does Non Serviam feel like a minor work in any sense, compared to the other records?

"Yes it does, in spite of the fact that to me, it is a good album," says Sakis. "The bastard from the label didn't put any money into the promotion so it just disappeared."

A lot of the disappointment had to do with the way the album was silenced to death in the metal media. Every time I listen to Non Serviam, it hits me as being the sound of a band who are on the lip of discovering something great and beautiful, but still not quite there yet. Excellent tracks like The Fifth Illusion never fail to get me going though. Guitars parched with thirst and all the more murderous for it, Sakis' vocals just about the same - whilst Magus Wampyr Dazoth's synth parts were already obviously past their sell-by date.

The progress of Rotting Christ has been extremely logical and dynamic. It begs the question, has there been a masterplan all along from the very start, or have you just gone step by step?

"No we didn't have any masterplan from the beginning. It's really impossible to construct anything like that at the age of 30! So as we grew up we had different influences, we listened to other kinds of music and just followed our hearts and created the last album."

The one band that, Trinity of the Lost Lovers was the band's first for Century Media. An absolute godsend (just a figure of speech) of a record that took the theorems of the decaying son of goD onto an even more metallic plane, exhibiting an arch's worth of emotion and songwriting
talent. Building on a sound so distinctive, so their own, Rotting Christ are in an enviable position to begin with, and when they come up with jewels like King of a Stellar War or One with the Forest, no superstitious will suffice. The greatness of all great heavy metal of all the great past decades soldered together with the trio’s own characteristics.

At roughly the same time, the band had a MCD planned that was supposed to consist of covers from Frost, Kreator, Destruction... that kind of thing. There's no one here at Isten headquarters who's smart enough to fool himself and take the credit for it, but we were among the ones who boo-booed the idea straight off. Rotting renditions of Tormentor and Flag of Hate/Plasure to Kill survived and were released as bonus CD tracks.

My current favourite on Triarchy of the Lost Lovers is Archon, a fairly up-tempo piece about the return of an emperor. Interesting, then, that Sakis knew in advance that A Dead Poem would turn out predominantly slow - a clear deviation from the nature of that track. So what is it like, do you already have a vision of the next album?

"We just felt like that... About the next one, hmm, who knows, might be more experimental or might be in the vein of Thy Mighty Contract. It depends on how well we are at the specific period of time."

Who does the lyrics nowadays? Any changes in the subject matter lately?

"Jim did them as always, and I tried some as well on this album. Apart from the classical Rotting Christ philosophy about fantastic ancient stories, we deal with new matters like emotions, the dark side of the mind, and I could say that they create a dreamy atmosphere that fits well with the Rotting Christ music."

A Triarchy of Two

In 1999 it dawned on Roberto Mammarella da Milano that it was probably his last chance to have his then defunct musical endeavour Monumentum documented on record. The Museum Hermeticum demo pieces Nostalgia of the Infinite and Nephele, backed with Feast of the Grand Whore from the Rotting ones (a new version of the Sargaz Tedeum track) became the grand split 7” EP that sold like hot stoves from the garden of Eve. Without neglecting Monumentum's musical merits, it was the name Rotting Christ that did the trick. There's no question that without that cult release there would be no Monumentum today.

Therby began Rotting Christ’s abyss of being used and abused, viewed as little more than a line extension, or a price possession the exact use of which has remained all but clear to its owners. In 1996, Rotting Christ teamed up with Century Media, considered by many a rather surprising move in fact. Do you feel you've finally found home, does it feel easy to work with the German label? "Yes, seems like we finally found a 'home' and we still have enough to learn on this label. We'll see in the future."

During these Century Media years Sakis and Co. have done quite a lot of touring especially and generally put all their time and energy into the band, instead of side projects like Thou Art Lord and Varathron (at least to Sakis, Themis and Jim these always were nothing but extracurricular activities).

The Woodhouse Studio alone is a big bonus for Century Media, don’t you think? How important would you say that has been for Rotting Christ? "I can’t say that it is a big bonus, it’s just a very good studio that helps the bands to record professionally and to have a nice sound. I would imagine that there are other studios around Germany that are just as good. For us, yes it was important because we always had such a god concerning sound quality."

Whatever that means. Anyways, we’ve heard through the grapevine that the label is suffering from temporary financial problems at the moment - is that something for you to be concerned about?

"Hmm, you can hear so many hilarious things. I really haven’t been involved with Century Media’s financial affairs but it seems a bit difficult to believe that they’re facing serious financial problems. Maybe temporary, but who knows? This is confusing. Anyway, if it’s true then things can get difficult for everyone."

Being on such a powerful label seems like a dream come true to most of us, but can it really be all happy happy joy joy? Without even speculating whether Century Media concentrate too much on the holy trinity of Sabata-Moonspell-Tiamat or not, there are some signs that suggest that the label isn’t too sure what to do with Rotting Christ. They must understand that in A Dead Poem, the band have come up with a record that sure as hell stands on its own, yet they opt for coupling the albums with that relatively poor Darkness We Feel sampler as an additional sales incentive. A passive marketing play of the heaviest calibre, but not the all-gun blasting type of thing done for the three bands mentioned above. When we remember the mess that Sabata got into with theirrish lyrics (To the Martyrs) it may be that the folks at the label are afraid of going for a full-scale advertising campaign with a group called Rotting Christ. Merely speculating here of course.

Anyway, how about artistic freedom, musically and otherwise? For example, whose idea was it to drop the classic Rotting Christ logo in favour of that bloodless quasi-logo on the cover of A Dead Poem? "It was our idea in order to create a more readable logo. Nothing else! Now don’t you say that we’ve sold out as a band just because of the logo?"

Of course not, it’s just that to all of you avid fans the original logo was a big part of the Rotting Christ brand name - therefore it is a big deal emotionally, whereas commercially the demand for that change is quite arguable, I would say. I mean, with a name like Rotting Christ you’re not getting any more accessible for things like the US market or such, no matter what the logo looks like.

"We only wanted to make it more readable, so it would be easier to find out that Christ is Rotting and therefore it’s even more anti-trendy! We don’t give a fuck about specific markets. We keep on going with such a name..." Through thick and thin?

"Yeah, we don’t want to be rock stars! And additionally, metal music is extreme in itself and it needs names like that."

Most importantly, however, metal needs bands like Rotting Christ: irreplaceable, vigorous, and metal to the bone.
Shadows prevail. I imagine hearing echoes pass. Looking down from a hilltop at the right moment, any provincial town dozing away in the mist in a valley beneath can look exactly like the hatchery of evil that it is.

Is it all in the lighting? Is it all in my mind?

Might sound like a wildly theatrical way of introducing a Finnish dark metal band, but it's amazing what a good demonstration tape can do for you. Strange how big a thing it can be. My usual sense of detachment vanishes into thin air. The typical 'yeah, but...' clauses slip uncannily out of grasp.

Bethel's Northern Supremacy is a very good demo.

In League with the North

With Sir Holm, the band's vocalist, drummer and lyricist, we take my batch of questions roughly from behind. So but not least, that's next in store for Bethel in the future?

"World domination. I mean, to spread the name of Bethel as wide as possible to get the attention we deserve. Right now we are only constructing the edifice of the grand castle of the dark realm of Bethel... That means there will be a second Bethel demo at least..."

I beg your pardon?

"Let me explain. When today's scene is what it is, full of incompetent and untalented bands releasing CDs, we want to gain reputation, appreciation and respect as a demo level band instead, which is not too common these days. Therefore we'll do at least one more demo with some huge push to buck it up, so when we finally decide to expose ourselves, Bethel, to a wider audience, people will rush and fight their way into record stores because they can be sure they'll get value for every single penny they have spent. Then also we can be really satisfied that we once decided not to hurry but do Bethel in long terms when we see from our towers that people are yelling and shouting and yes, even sacrificing in the name of Bethel to get their piece of our art... black, that is..."

"Stupid as it may be, I would describe Bethel apart from Holm consisting on Sir Salminen on guitars - a session guy called Kimmo Hynninen played the keyboards on the demo as an archetype of the class Finnish dark metal band. They don't sound particularly Norwegian or anything else, and there are shades of both Thy Serpent and Sentenced in their style and sound."

"Stupid?" wonders Sir Holm. "It's very well said and I agree with you but I cannot understand where the hell you all can find those parallels to Sentenced as you are not the first one. I agree with these Parkele, salmon kuskotus than Jarvasla, sattue 'sound like Jarvis', the former Sentenced vocalist Tanelli - ed comments about that brief moment where the lyrics start in the first song on the demo, but that's just a shade of old Sentenced and that's really... Otherwise it's very well said."

"Thank you. Northern Supremacy is not a demo in the traditional sense as it was actually released by Ominous Productions."

Sir Holm (Bethel): the profile of the perfected black metalizer

How come?

"At the time when we went in to record the demo we had some serious economical problems. Actually, we were totally broke. Anyway, after the recording sessions I was thinking. How the hell can we release the demo in this situation? I just asked Mr Jarvio if he could help us as he's an old friend of mine, and besides, he had intentions to release something already a few years ago (but that's another story), so I thought it would be the time at last... I have no complaints, the deal was that Mr Jarvio releases the demo and takes care of the sales, so I cannot be but grateful for his great help."

Never Happy

What would Sir Holm say is his band's main forte?

"Of course it is our abilities to create superior black art and along with that the fact that we are very well aware of our potential ourselves. If you are insecure with what you're doing you cannot be 100% dedicated to the cause. Bethel is very a confident and serious band and I live and breathe for the cause, heavy metal that is."

For the first couple of times I listened to Northern Supremacy I craved for more chaos, more discord and dissonance in its sound. Then at some point it dawned on me: I was just wanting Bethel to be Emperor! They quite shamelessly make a cat's-paw of melodies, capitalizing on them to the max - clearly they don't feel like they should deepen the mystery, so to speak, by sounding more obscure, making the harmonies less striking...

"Uhh, well, you're right. Our picture of what we're trying to accomplish is crystal clear and soundwise we know what we want when we get enough time in the studio. When it comes to style, I put this as simple as possible, it has to be dark, but it has to be varied too. Not over the top blackness all the time but versatility. Oh yes, I'd like to point out that we don't try or pretend to be something original or unique but quality."

He then goes on to quote one of Macken's mythical maxime: Originality means nothing as such, you've got to have Style. As for...

"...capitalizing on the melodies to the max? It's an interesting point as I haven't thought it that way, maybe it's just a coincidence and the next release will deepen the mystery? Maybe there'll be more chaos, discord and dissonance in the future," he says, obviously misunderstanding the question somewhat.

Is it hard to let the music just happen instead of over-rationalizing the whole process?

"No, it's not. I don't give a shit for any restrictions of the genre, that is for the unsure, insecure and wannabes... I have my own restrictions though but I can tell you, that's very hard to explain and shouldn't be discussed privately so I just say our music will always be dark - in a wide sense of the word - and stirring in many ways on an emotional level but never happy. There might be some, hmmm... 'cheerful' melodies but no happy feelings at all because I'm not a happy guy but a man with a dark and misanthropic, somewhat perverted mind and there is nothing or no one who could draw me away from that kind of embrace. There's another side to the coin also. I really do appreciate the moments of joy, my friends and my woman.,
Of Darkness and Twilight

So, Holm, in *Northern Supremacy* you have put out one of the greatest dark metal demos in the '90s - do you feel there's more where those songs come from?

"Aye, but no matter how great our first demo is, there's absolutely more where those songs come from! Sometimes it feels a bit odd when we are in trouble with arranging a song because we have so many riffs, melodies, etc. You know, it feels like this is too great, it won't work in the end but that's not a problem really. Confusing it is when you have some brilliant stuff but when putting it together it seems it's too great! Let's put that confusing in quotation marks because after short moments comes the state of realization and emotional outburst, or satisfaction if you prefer - how great this'll sound when polished to its ultimate! And as the 'spring' of *Behel* is gushing incessantly, it is enough whenever.

What he's referring to is his permission to him the question of the current metal climate and whether 'great songs from a Finnish band is existing enough a proposition these days. The magnum between class A and class B bands in black metal is getting bigger all the time at any rate.

"Indeed, I can only agree. And what I think is the most irritating, or even sad, point in this matter is that when nowadays everyone - if they can't find a guitar - wants to have his own Nrocorhoro Ultraforest label, they seek some kids in their neighborhood who happens to play black metal and when these bands, oh so lacking in quality, have their first releases out kind of commercially, the scene loses its credibility in the eyes of the real fans who are too few already. As a new band in the scene it surely bothers me 'cause we also have our first demo released by someone other than ourselves, but it doesn't worry me at all as it's far from rubbish. I'm also very purposeful as a person, so sooner or later everybody will know (like we do ourselves) what we are, and also what we were, capable of. High quality black art from the very beginning.

Judging by the track titles alone (Wandering, Ashes, Land of Dark & Frost, etc.), Sir Holm's lyrics don't seem exactly groundbreaking.

What are your ambitions with the lyrical side of things? - if your music is quite aptly visualised in the beautiful photo on the demo cover (and freelers), then - ideally - what are your lyrics a picture of?

"How very true, my lyrics are not groundbreaking, nor are they intended to be. The scope of my writing is actually very wide though all inspirations or sources for them stream from the dark side of nature in one way or another. Sometimes they are pure blasphemous attacks with a poetic approach, or reciprocally, dark and obscure poetry with a satanic approach... And from the other side of that 'scope' we find a lyric filled with misanthropic self-loathing and oh, there's a tale about pride, power and pride and misanthropic, true metal spirit you know!!

"Anyway and in any case, darkness remains. Also, my lyrics tend to be shrouded in mysticism and symbolism and that's actually a big part when it comes to my ambitions as a lyricist. I want them to have their own lives. Does this sound weird? What I'm trying to explain is that I don't want them to be just a thing that goes along with the music but I try to capture my emotions and feelings in them, intensely, so that they work without the music as well. They should evoke the imagination of the listener to create some sort of scenery or scenarios when the tape proceeds and convey all bits of concentration, when done under the right circumstances of course. And accompanied with the music, it grow in something monumental... Well, it doesn't have to be that heavy but I did make a point, didn't I?"

So what is *Behel* all about?

"Darkness. The existence of *Behel* is based on darkness, devotion for Satan, craving for self-expression and love for heavy metal."

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**Thrash Beyond Dawn**

*Inferno* *Downtown Hades* CD (Osmose Productions). While bands like *Paradox* and *Apocalypse* are giving the thrash scene a welcome sense of maturity with their technical and sophisticated material, there are always those who don't have the brain to give the dumb satanic lyrics the heave-ho and do something a little more intelligent, musically as well. A new breed of thrashers is emerging from the Bay Area intent on ripping the thin film of bullshit away from a stagnating genre and showing everyone that there is still life and plenty within thrash, but unfortunately we still have bands like this Norwegian gang who continue to peddle with a bunch of cliché songs with titles such as *Thrash till Death* (that's a Whiplash song title, you riffopit!), *Rit in Hell*, *In Bed with Satan*... Get the picture? Real imaginative. I guess this is what 17-year-old wannabe call heavy metal.

You put the needle in the groove and you get the same regurgitated riffs for the next 45 minutes. Admittedly, any thrash band at random gives away quite nicely, Necrovore's pallid pummeling filling your little boy's Chicken Red room, Aggressor's voice filling the gap between Conrad from *Vemon* and Schröder from *Destruction*. But *Inferno* thrash through the whole album with only one good idea, and that doesn't compensate for a touch more scope on the material front. Anyway, if you want something heavy and obnoxious to annoy your mum then this is it. (2)

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**Hammer**

Repeat after me, girls and boys, ‘Heavy Metal!’ - stress on the word ‘heavy’ at first, and then stress the word ‘metal’ even more. Till it hurts. Till it sounds like war.

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**Solstice's Halycon** (Black Trent Records) is blah epic metal from the north of England. More atmospheric and devastating than the band's *Candlight* debut *Lamentations* (1994) and definitely a good choice when you don't feel like giving *Nightfall* that one additional spin. May I emphasize, that is no mean feat, not a small assignment, when you think of it.

Played back to back with *Solstice's Atemru* Into the Depths of Sorrows (considered a minor classic by many a doom buff around the globe - can't really see why, myself), Halycon wins by a yard or two or many. It's a hell of a lot heavier, its riffs bite, it's nobody else's clone.

The band have recently been snapped up by Misanthropia. Looking from the outside, the deal came at precisely the right moment. It's a marriage made in heaven a label known for true believing in its signings and a band that's gone through hell and back into a lighter time ever, but it's also very much of a surprise move from *Misanthropia* - not only because Tiziana didn't use to be one of the biggest *Solstice* fans in the past, but she's also commented that she already has too many ex-Halyzed bands on the label...

Rich Walker, *Solstice* guitarist and lead guitar comments, "Yes, it was of course an absolute shock when *Misanthropia* contacted us. We had already begun to contact a host of smaller labels with a view of securing a deal, but before negotiations had reached anything serious with the majority, *Misanthropia* stepped in. For one label in particular this was a huge shock. But we are to be considered more conservative in taste than *Misanthropia* (and to their disadvantage too)."

Rich especially wants to hail one man for his contribution to the *Solstice* conspiracy.

"None of this would have happened if it wasn't for the hard work put in by Russ Smith - he has put in so much effort into helping us over the years and I count him as one of the most honest and courageous brethren I have. Truer metal warrior you could not find. Russ released the vinyl version of *Halycon*, procured interviews and mailed out copies of the rehearsal tape (*Drunkens Dungeon Sessions* - 4) to various people including Tiziana. From there on after the excellent reviews, and the quality of the music.
we write, I believe that Tiziana began to view us as a viable addition to the already excellent Misanthropy roster. Although I don’t like a couple of the bands musically, and one both musically and ideologically. As for the Candelight connection - Solstice, Primordial, Mayhem, etc. - we are really the only ones who have actually released anything on Candelight, the others all realized the lack of professionalism was getting too much and opted for other deals.”

Fires of the Titans

"Doom heavy with a singal" and "Solid melodic crunch" is what we wrote in ’94 about Lamentations, Solstice's debut on Candelight. I would still call it a very good album and I'm certainly not suggesting that it was too much too soon, but it is a bit on the lengthy side and there are a few weaker moments amidst the gems...

"I like it still," says Rich. "But I always try to be objective about it. It was recorded and mixed in one week on a very small budget, and so for what it is we couldn't really have done much better. Actually, I think that it's the right length bearing in mind that we had a host of songs which we felt were worthy of recording. If I had the option (which I don't, but for the sake of this question I'll speculate) I would have mixed the guitars louder... and that's about it really. I really do still like it!"

A lot has happened and not happened after that album, i.e. label hassles and line-up changes. I heard you had an American guy on vocals for a while for example?"

"Since Lamentations, well, we toured the UK with Sweden's Count Raven, toured the mainland of Europe with Anathema, recorded Halocon for Stormstrike Records of Germany, played a few UK shows, Simon (vocalist Mattavres - ed left, Tom Phillips of US doom band While Heaven Wept joined, Stormstrike fucked us around for a year and a half... We then licensed Halocon to Godhead Records of Italy and replaced Tom with Mozi Ingram. Oh yeah, prior to this John (guitarist Piras - ed left and was replaced by Hamish Glencross. Godhead released the Halocon CD and quietly folded without telling us. Black Tears released Halocon on vinyl, Staveley Steels (drums) left, Rick Busby joined on drums, played a couple of UK shows, signed to Misanthropy Records and, well, you can guess...

"Tom was replaced as basically he sings in the key of D and we play in B - it just didn’t sound too good and we both felt that commuting between continents was really too unfeasible. It would have been awesome if it had worked out, sadly it was not to be. Tom is one of my greatest friends and it was a hard decision - thankfully Mozi has worked out just fine in my opinion."

"Do you think your music would be as good as it is if things had gone smoothly for you from day one?"

"Possibly, or maybe not. A certain amount of ill fortune can serve to stoke the creative fires and in my case personally, to strengthen my own convictions and resolve. But on the other hand your question is about the music - and as a whole I would see us inspired by some of the greatest titans that metal has produced rather than circumstance.

"Still, another way to look at it is if things had gone smoothly, then I would not have arrived to the line-up of musicians that I have now who each individually contribute to our overall sound. I would have been still playing with the same weak fools who went on to form Serenity. And we all know what finally happened to them... On my own, I am quite capable of writing great songs if I sit down and put my mind to it, but with extra input and objective opinions I feel that Solstice is a lot better in terms of variation and composition. Besides, without the other four people in this band, I wouldn't have a band to speak of!"

The Men Who Lost the Sun

It must be frustrating to be a kind of training ground for rock stars. First John Piras goes and joins Cradle Of Filth and then Shaun Steeds leaps to Anathema. A soldier of metal like Rich isn't likely to spend his days sulking about the situation, but say, are you still on speaking terms with these two traitors as well as former vocalist Simon Mattavres?

"We haven't spoken or heard a thing from Simon since he left - he became too unreliable and began to lie a lot, steal from other band members and act like some sort of 'rock god.' It was for the best. He was however under a lot of pressure with the death of his father and so I understand how he
must have felt. I wish him no ill fortune.

"John, well, he was going through a bad time with his girlfriend, he left us of his own choice and then he tried to rejoin. He was turned down as we replaced him within 24 hours much to his dismay. And so he joined black metal's answer to Cloven Hoof. I still speak to John as once again we are brothers, and although we have our differences I love him dearly as he helped me when I was down. I wish him nothing but the best, and to some extent he's got what he really wanted - easy 'success.' But honestly, he's one very talented person if a little vague and full of times.

"As for Mr. Staveley Steels, a true example of a liar, cheat and vain mediocrity petty jealous little turd you could not find. His envy of John was unfathable. He cheated his friends and his girlfriend in his quest to be superior to all others. I sincerely hope that something hideous befalls him and his cohorts. And this is the opinion of all the members of Solstice, not just me. How could you even begin to trust anyone who was always telling you either how big his drumkit or his penis were? Both lies as well! Good fucking riddance...."

So about the current line-up - what's changed?

"We enjoy playing together as a band, and 'hanging out' in taverns of ill repute consuming heroic amounts of ale - eye! Before, everyone was tense due to friction caused by Winter's Steels - sorry, but no one has ever called him Winter, it was his sad black metal phase he went through after he borrowed an Emperor CD, he really was a clueless twat! Anyway, what has changed... there's a slight change in drumming style, I believe that Rich is a little more conservative (if that's the correct term) in his interpretation of some of the drum patterns required for the new material. No bad thing, as it sounds a lot more powerful in places than it did. Hamilton's solos are a lot more pre-potent than John's and a lot less blues-based, and Moz has a lower register than Simon. I'm happy all round at the end of the day - and that's very important for me now."

In Union We Stand

You aren't actually the only Solstice around... Is there anything you plan on doing about the matter?

"We shall commit foul and bloody murder upon these pretenders to the throne of shadows, but not until we have stolen their ale, deflowered their daughters and burnt their homes to the ground and made them eat the ashes - eye! But, if we ever change our name, it will be to Black Sabbath as there is only one other of them! At the end of the day I can't say that I'm too concerned as we all play in a vastly different style to each other - so if any problem arises it's due to the others! We were around before the Americans, and as the English prog rock Solstice contacted us a couple of years ago we told them that there was no way we were changing the band name, but we had no problem with them, and, they have no problem with us. Hurray!

Rich has speculated elsewhere that the bands having so many fans in Scandinavia may partly be a result of the Scandinavian, Germanic and British cultures being all intermingled... Personally I would say that the force of heavy metal is universal and it crosses all cultural barriers! It's all in the feeling... even lyrically.

"Yes, the power of true metal is universal but the point is that the scenes in England, Germany and Scandinavia have a very close musical affinity, disregarding the arrogance of certain factions - just remember which country 'invented' metal you fools!

"Firstly, I find I have much more in common with people from these scenes on a personal level, they tend to understand what we are about so to speak, they understand our often surreal sense of humour and appreciate to a greater extent the finer points of English literature and lifestyle than say the French. This in my eyes is not coincidence - it's just the way things are and always have been.

"I propose that the greatest musical program has been made from trading off ideas between bands from these countries, with each excelling in a particular genre - the English in doom, the Germans in thrash, the Scandinavians in black. The rest of the world looks on and follows suit. This is not to say that the rest of the world is inept musically, far from it. The Americans are perhaps the only country to create a consistent doom scene apart from England in my opinion, Sweden now treading down the weary path of '00s regression.

"The most mail I receive comes from Germany and Scandinavia, the closest friendships outside of this country are from there! Once again, it's not pure coincidence otherwise I'm sure that we would get letters more often from say Columbia. Our view of music is very, for want of a better description, 'northern Europe' (5). Now, were anyone to disagree with me or not from hereon - I simply rest my case!"

Hail and Kill!

Behold the mysteries of the Heavy Metal tradition and hear what Rich Walker, the Solstice bass, has to say about the following purveyors of true metal!

**Candlemass**: They are/were one of the greatest of all metal bands to stalk the planet. I am not too bothered with the comeback as long as Leaf Edition is at the helm and it does not sound wimpier like the last studio LP. They were a big inspiration to me with their combination of heavy riffing and epic lyrics. All fantastically executed. I hail **Candlemass**!

**Cloven Hoof**: They're still around but they're called Cradle Of Filth now... Ha ha! They suck!

**Manowar**: Into Glory Ride is a landmark recording. Their earlier albums rank with **Candlemass**.

**Bathory, Pentagram and Saint Vitus** in the metal halls of excellence. I admire, they have strayed somewhat from the path musically, but in their heyday you would find none more metal! Hail & kill!

**Metallica**: I really like the new album, call me a sad fool but it's fucking heavy, well played metal. Personally I like Ride the Lightning best but who cares anyway?

"The Scorpions '79-'80"
bravado in the statement of intent is, I will grant you, '80s. But the reason and attitude behind it is far removed.

"I must say that when people and magazines label us as retro they are pathetic - the same ones who encourage blind adulation of all these 'atmospheric' bands who sound nothing more than pale imitations of 1970s dinosaur rock, which in itself was played for the most part by fickle-minded hippy assholes too stoned to care what they were doing.

"Heavy means power, intensity and the feeling of impending doom and claustrophobia. When I hear some 'atmospheric' or 'psychedelic' riffing I just want to fall asleep or switch off. I am of the opinion that any person who wishes to follow in the footsteps of the drug-fuelled morons should be sterilised."

Metal Bloody Metal

That point about "your style of music" is most interesting - what style is that, precisely? I suppose you can't help but feel superior (and then again all the more frustrated for not having got the attention that you've so richly deserved) every now and then when looking around in the metal scene of today - you're heavier than the heaviest out there, you follow the finest traditions of heavy metal without being anywhere near the fearflul prefix "retro" and are capable of writing songs that will outlive each and every trend currently in sight.

"Well, first, I don't feel superior to anyone who also plays metal from the heart. Arrogance will get us nowhere fast, nor do I feel frustrated. If we were like some of the bands in existence, then we would, as surely they are only intent on making money. Since that is not our aim, we have no reason to be. Whatever the latest trends, there will always be bands such as us who put being true to ourselves and our music before fiscal gain - once again, we are going against the grain."

"Our style, well, it's whatever anyone labels us as it seems no matter how many times you may tell someone, they will persist in lumping it and classifying to their own tastes anyway. One exceptionally stupid journalist from Germany called us 'gothic metal'. Oh dear, I feel he may have been actually listening to the wrong CD but did not have the good manners to say so."

"Some words which appeal to me when thinking of descriptions of our music are epic, heavy, arcane, battle, doom, loud, dark, intense, drunk, hungover, well hung, hung drawn and quartered, etc. Perhaps the readers could each choose two of the above words and prefix them to "metal" thus in effect creating their own descriptions of our music. How about that? Fun for all the family?"

"When it comes to your contemporaries, are there any bands that you consider your kindred spirits? Who do you respect?"

"Of course, we have lots of bands who could be considered brethren (not as equal, if not larger, number to be considered below as) we tend as a whole to get on with any band who shares our personal ideologies and aims. In particular bands such as Thys: Defiled, Warning, Dow Of Winter, Mirror Of Deception, Twisted Tower Dire, Primordial and so on, I would consider kindred spirits, all have a love of metal and a vital spark of intelligence to them. There is of course many more, but to list them all would be time-consuming and boring."

"I respect anyone who respects me. It's mutually beneficial really. I have no time for usurpers, traitors and those who spread half truths. I cannot really name bands as that would be akin to here worship and blind adulation. Something which I am not usually partial to... but to keep the concept of this question alive, some people who I actually respect for their dedication to keeping their dream alive against the odds are, Steve Brannagan of Revelation, Mark Stojsavljevic of Scars Tear, Lee and Gary of Cathedral. I would say that from my point of view all of them have had to endure much tribulation throughout the years and keep on fighting back. Now that's what I call real dedication!"

Dark Age Revisited

The taster of Blackthorne on the new rehearsal tape sounds absolutely magnificent - your most epic piece so far, perchance? Is the tape in question indicative of your future material? Can you tell us more about the new album?

"Why of course! It is a recording of current material and is representative of our style. Although the vocal/percussion version of Blackthorne was to showcase Mo's vocals in a better light - the finished version will have us all playing at respective parts - worry not though as there will be some vocal only performances on the album."

"Some of the new songs apart from the aforementioned Blackthorne are Hammer of Damnation, The Sleeping Tyrant, Camerhin Codex and New Dark Age II. We may also record a cover of the Discharge classic 'Save New World' but that remains to be seen. Perhaps also we shall have it released on a limited box set of 12" vinyl records (too big to play, ha).

"Other than what I've stated, I can't really tell you anything further other than that it will be, of course, as the old saying goes, 'exceptionally fucking heavy!'"

"What about the important issue of 'Who's got the true power in metal music'? do you feel like you'd suffered from despotism courtesy of the media or labels?"

"To a certain extent, but from the underground music press, no way. The majority of zines and more competent metal mags have always been supportive to us and it's very much appreciated. But hand in hand, the bigger labels and magazines mould and manipulate the youth with weak distorted visions of what metal music is about. Magazines like Kerrang!, Metal Hammer (what an unfortunate name - there's more metal in Q magazine!) and the like are run by shorthaired sexually confused morons who are too busy taking backhanders from the labels to bother about the quality of the bands featured. Acts like Tura Satana, Ash, Priest and so on are 'rock's equivalent to country and western'. Shallow, bland and extremely tedious. How the fuck can any smaller band or label hope to compete with the greedy and corrupt bastards? It's a vicious circle, and one that I cannot see being broken just yet - sad but true. It's not a money thing to want to have the chance of a wider audience to hear your music, then again a lot of bands when they are exposed to a larger spectrum of listeners, have a tendency to soften their music. Fuck 'em all!"

I was wondering how you British metal fans can live there surrounded by all the nonsense and hype those fake Gallagher brothers? How come no one has stood up and started to demand appraisal for the true Gallagher bros, John and Mark, who

Next up we have the rough mix of the Icelandic Solstifir's promo demo '97. The first of the three tracks, Birch in Black, utilises the vocal talents of one Kollbjorn Anirsson and is far removed from what you'd expect to hear on a black metal demo. With those clean vocals and lyrics about a special lady ("Beauty like a grave of birds' eggs that glares like burning embers... Valdyr, where, birth black/Yearn to see you on your back/On all four 'neath the moon/Screaming, howling, howling, howling in my ears") could just be the greatest black metal love song ever. After that euphoria it's a shame to find out the permanent vocalist Haldor's style and voice is too extreme, or let us say Grisathedhlar, for the backing WAStching sound of black (near) serenity. Some lively drumming comes from G. O. Palmason a hint of glowing promise abound. This three-track affair places the ensemble firmly in the category 'bands to keep an eye on' that's relatively small in numbers.
invented speed metal for hell's sake? No matter how you look at it, they're far more important in the history of music than some pappy-with-badger-brows who just happened to be there when the middledagd music journalists realized that anything as spectacular as the Beatles isn't likely to happen in their lifetimes unless they do something about it.

I have to be honest and say that I don't like Raven that much and I tend to ignore Lorena and all other 'char' music. Of course Raven is more important than Viola though - all metal bands are. Motorhead invented speed metal when all was said and done and when it comes to the NWOBHM, Angel Witch were far superior. Along with Witchfinder General, Blitzkrieg, Trespass and Soldier they epitomised all that that quality music should be. And not to forget the mighty Iron Maiden either!

"More to the point, Raven are based in America now so I tend to see them as traitors to mighty Albion (ha ha). At least they had the good taste to get Joe Hassolution on drums though. Are there any Hirax fans left apart from me? Irrelevant question but what the hell?"

A friend of mine who lived in Manchester for a year couldn't believe it when I told him that Emperor had played the Astoria... cause he'd basically seen no metalheads at all while over there in England. So what do you say, is metal alive and well in Albion?

"Without a doubt. Your friend certainly wasn't looking in the right places, that's for sure."

That's precisely the point in Finland you don't especially have to look in any place, metal is everywhere. But anyway, this brings us to our final and very important topic, silence, and to the characteristics of English silence in particular. Is the English brand of silence, as I've heard, very doomy, like Tony Iommi in come? As opposed to Greek silence, which is a bit mesy, whilst German silence rhymes with 'violence', and so on. How much of an influence is it on your music?

"Silence! English silence is... golden! It is no influence on our music whatsoever. I do not feel myself to be in competition with the absence of sound - rather with other sounds themselves. It's a strange urge we have to be louder than everyone else. Perhaps this could be viewed as a primitive state, as the pleasure of making noise is surely very basic indeed."

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### Hell-kettles

It's easy to like a record like Never Known's Twilight's Last Gleaming (Eibon CD) if you want to be different. It's even easier to call it a soporific symphony of sough and distant rumble if you're human. But reviewing the darn thing is a different story altogether. What Never Known have put on the record is suggestive, but what they've left for the listener to supplement is vital. So ultimately all the substance you may or may not find in it stems from you.

Superficially the album isn't that far removed from the soundtrack of Luc Beconst's Atlantis. Although the film in question is a most stunning example of the simities of moving picture and sound, I must say Eric Serra's music has no life of its own and the same goes for Never Known as well. Not everyone is Nino Rota. (1)

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Parade Of Souls De Profundis CD (Eibon Records). These former Finnish death metal nobodies from the band Carnifex caught me off guard with this, their debut album. "An Eibon release with something resembling music on it, wow!" The Parade owns with Joy Division meets The Doors grouch. Sounds good but ultimately stirs no sky. Kill yourself and you'll reach the top. (a)

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I'm on the spot with Obtained Enslavement's second album Witchcraft (Wounded Love CD). There's a 3 cm crack on the CD which apparently is no problem at all for my CD-player. The problem is that I gave the disk a spin and I don't feel like reviewing it at all. In fact I've got a good mind snapping it in two pieces once for all. That's how awful it is. Sketchy black metal with grim vocals, dry sound and quasi-orchestral parts coming and going with no sense of purpose or destination.

The importance of releases like Witchcraft shouldn't be underestimated though. The black metal scene needs all the ungodly, gravelly, obtained enslavements and denial of gods to survive of this world to survive. They keep the quality low and that, if anything, lowers the threshold for everyone to start a black metal band of his own. For your information, the CD is still in one piece, it's raining outside and I just burned my toast. Yeah, have a nice day. (a)

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### Spill the Blood

"Come walk with me through endless time/See what has been and what the future sees/Share the wisdom of the old world that has past/Step in a life that's yet to be born."

This moment is as good as it's ever going to get for you. There's nothing on offer that would make a difference. There's nothing to see. Nothing to feel. Nothing to dream. Nothing to regret.

A spider's web of choices none of which makes sense. You get more entangled whenever move you make. Drifting further with every step. It should not be that way. It must not be that way.

The shadows are calling you. The fires beckoning. The silence seductive like never before.

"I'll show you sights that you would not believe/Experience pleasure thought unattained/At one with evil that has ruled before/Now stench the spell of immortality."

Just before Xmas 1989, James Vance and Ray Belknap shot themselves with a rag gun. There's no doubt in my mind that what they'd heard in Judas Priest's Dreamer Deceiver was absolute perpendiculum Satan. Hell had spoken. And what it had promised was infinite glory, the complete antithesis of the absurdity, derision, contradiction, and clenamness that is life. No fucking lies, no bullshit, no more.

When the deadly hail hit James' face, making it a righteous mess of blood - shards of flesh and splinters of bone everywhere, that was good.

The Bible says it's a sevenfold sin. A sevenheaded serpent, lethal poison in each of the heads. First, for the denial of God it manifests. Second, for the belief in Satan's scheme. Third, for the hypocrisy. Fourth, for the false pride. Fifth, for the lie. Sixth, for the sin in the body of Christ. Seventh, for the mockery of the Holy Ghost.

All the more reason, I say, all the more.

"Spill your blood let it run on to me/ Take my hand and let go of your life/ Close your eyes and see what is me/ Raise the chalice, embrace for everyone..."

Is there something to understand?

What do you get, what do you leave? Why should you care? What's caring ever done for you?

The difference that matters is the one between knowing instead of suspecting.

The difference between you and them.

Do it.

Citations from Spill the Blood/Hunterman 86"
This decade is strange. Pre-millennium restlessness pervades our minds and it gradually dawns on the dumbest of us that we’re all doomed.

But, if it’s heavy, intense and powerful music that you want in the meantime, brace yourself for some carnage in the cranium. Arch Enemy is about just that; symphonies of dark genius marinated in the finest slimes of godforsaken brutality. All rolled into one black earth.

"Arch Enemy consists of Mike Amott (the president), myself Johan Liiva (vice president) and Chris Amott - guitar, Martin Bengtsson - bass, and Peter Wildoer - drums (the three slaves... ha ha.)"

"Why can’t it always be this easy? The man I used to know as Johan Axelsson is in a remarkably good mood for a man as sombre as him. In 1994 when we last ran an interview with him, he called himself Mr Darkwimp. And Wicked Wizard. And Monsieur Morbido.

This is the man who Carnage ditched before Dark Recollections in favour of Matti Karki. It’s amazing how stupid people can sometimes be, no?

This is the man who left his own band Furbowl in 1994 after two albums that should’ve made shadow metal history. Maybe they did! I only know that Those Shredded Dreams and The Autumn Years will remain bona fide classics in my book.

This is the man with one of the greatest death throes ever.

This is Johan Liiva, vocalist for Arch Enemy. Together with Michael Amott, his old compatriot from the Carnage days, he’s out to alter our concepts of cruel and dark metal once more and, just maybe, make Swedish death metal murderously viable again. Johan and Michael claim that they felt straight away that the old magic was still there. Black Earth, the band’s debut album is all the verification that we need for those words.

Descanting the Incantations

"It’s simple I guess," Johan describes the Arch Enemy environment. "Mike and I write most of the music and all lyrics together, and when some of the others come up with a riff or something, it must get our approval before being part of an Arch tune... nah, that is a slight exaggeration, we’re no dictators. But mainly it’s me who makes lyrics of grief and address (Fields of Desolation) and comes up with what we call ‘Repulsion/Master riffs’ (hehe). Mike is the mastermind, he does the melodic and ‘groovy’ part of our music and the sick ‘twisted lyrics à la ‘Bury Me an Angel’ and so on. Also Chris comes up with all his solos and he’s also the man behind a song called Losing Faith that’s a bonus track on the
Japanese version of the CD... Compared to our earlier and present band situations, Arch Enemy is quite cool in a way that there is no form of stress most of the time, except from the time of recording which can be rather intense. Arch Enemy to us is a challenge, to write stuff that we are extremely into... heavy, intense and powerful music, sinister lyrics with twisted solos on top. There's a bit of everything from our previous bands in there I guess...Speaking of which... I know you've probably gone through this a number of times already, but since I've never read anything about it, could you please tell me what happened to Furbowl? You made two excellent albums and now Arch Enemy are being plugged as 'featuring members of Carnage, Carcas and Eucharist', and I'm like, Halilulllooo! What about Furbowl?

"What happened to Furbowl? Well, we had been around for a while when we played our last gig together in Halsled 1994, so I decided to go. I wasn't into it anymore and so we went our separate ways. The other guys continued for a time and then changed the name and line-up and got signed. Now that band is gone too and the only thing I know is that Max Thornell is tormenting the skin in another band in Stockholm, melodic hardcore-kind-stuff. "Yeah, the promotion's way out of line there not mentioning Furbowl but only Carcas etc. I mean, Furbowl was huge, hah... nah, seriously I do not know, perhaps the name is too fuckin' wicked!"

Reborn in Global Carnage

Arch Enemy are just the men to show that Swedish death metal didn't die with At The Gates. It can still be dangerous, no matter how corny that music sounds. Black Earth is hard as nails but also very melodic. The great guitar solos from the Amott brothers alone are all things to all metalloids with Eurka and Dark Insanity. I'm also kinda 'proud' of the last song Fields of Desolation which sticks out a bit from the other material on the album - it's totally depressive, dark and somewhat emotional as well... I love it!"

So do I! Here're the album, however, I detect a slight lack of punch that prompts the question, how much time was there between the initial idea of starting the band and entering the studio? I feel there's an immense amount of songwriting genius and potential in the band, so I believe (and most certainly hope) that Black Earth is but a taster of great things to come...?

"The idea of forming the band came up sometime during 1996. Niko and I met and began writing material at his place and then rehearsed with Daniel (drummer) Eriksson, of Eucharist fame four times and then we entered the studio in April and finished the recording of Black Earth. So I guess you could say it was made under some kinda 'stress', though it wasn't released until the fall 1996. The next album will be 100% improved now that we've got everything sorted out with the line-up and so on. Everyone in the band is 'unique' and supplies the band with oxygen when needed, so to speak."

After the album, I hear you've been in Japan and everything...?

"We went to Japan for three shows in April 1997 as we got the opportunity from our label there. They have great belief in this band and we've got extremely good relations with all of the people involved at Toy's Factory and H.L.P. (promotions). As for the tour, we played two shows in Tokyo and one in Osaka as support to Cathedral. It was truly wild and exciting, the crowd over there is totally dedicated to the music, we're not used to that when there's 1000 people in front just screaming so you're unable to hear your own thoughts! It was truly amazing, the best time ever... It was sickening to leave this place, all of us felt like shit for two months! Haha, can you believe that? Anyway, we're going there next spring and it looks like it will be more dates next time... we'll see."

I heard you're doing a version of Torn Apart on the second album. Don't you think that's a bit of a risky business?"

"That's right, we'll do a brand new version of the ultimate. I'm not sure if I agree on ' risky business', I see it as an opportunity to make the ultimate version of that song, it will be the heaviest Carnage tune ever, if not, we'll just have to dump it. It might be good - it might be shit, you never know."

What else can you tell us?

"About the next album? Hmm... it looks like we'll squeeze in about eight or nine songs, they're finished right now anyway. We've booked the studio for the whole October so nothing's for sure until it's done I guess... the music has matured since the debut, it's much more a result of us wanting to take another step further when it comes to this genre of music. We won't be satisfied with a sequel, a repeating of what's already been done. We're pushing ourselves to avoid that, to break Black Earth and release a milestone in brutal music. If we fail in our achievement we might just as well reconsider and start all over again or at least do something about it, re-arrange the songs or whatever... Some titles to be revealed are for example Sinister Mephisto, Dark of the Sun and the Bridge of Destiny."

Can't Leave the Dead Alone

Many bands find a great deal of difficulty combining their ever improving musicianship with the extremity that their sound and success is based on. Your fellow band mate Michael Amott talked about this in some interview while delving the "what exactly happened to Carcas" issue. I think a band like Emperor is roughly in the same situation these days: hungry to push the envelope further with each release but still recognizing the kernel of their grandeur: the chaos, the discord. Emperor, how difficult do you feel it is to retain that edge?"

"It's hard to maintain a mixture of melody and brutal, savage primitivity, it's like mixing water with oil sometimes. Some bands manage to get the pieces together and some don't. I think that we have succeeded to at least have the power and brutality as a base that we decorate (literally) with melodies both happy and angry and an organ of solos, hahaha... The progression of each and every band differs depending on the personalities in the unit, for example Carcas went from the ultimate in death and grind to the softness where they almost reached a peak of humiliation, the aggression was totally gone on their Swansong and then they split up. Entombed used to be extremely brilliant, pioneers of death metal and all that, and now they play, as I see it, even more primitive and not at all as genius as before... the latest album is OK, but in my opinion there's something missing, just don't know what. As for myself, I've almost been in nothing but middling projects since I began playing music and now in 1997, I'm in, as I see it, quite a professional band with a lot of potential. Arch Enemy is the ultimate band for me and when we decide to step off, I consider myself done when it comes to music."

Bold words, for we've seen that it's considerably easier said than done. I recently read Michel "Away" Langevin of Voivod saying that he'd more or less made up his mind about letting the Voivod rest for good when he heard Dave Grohl praise their early work and bands like The Ramones and Sepultura dedicating songs to Voivod on their Montreal shows. He then ate his words and came up with a decent album (Negatron) which is no mean feat without Snake in the band. But can there still be demons left...
within him to exercise if he lets mundane things like those mentioned above affect him to that extent? Can you identify with a situation like that?

"Well, I'm not acquainted with Monsieur Langevin, but of course, you wonder if the magic remains after a statement of that caliber. I guess it's typical for the '90s re-unions, comebacks and a wave of trends you never expected. Look at us, I never dreamed of playing with Mike again after all these years, and now when I look at it, it feels natural in a way, as if we never really finished what we once started. Now we're different than before and have gone through a lot of stuff since the old days, a lot has happened through the years. This decade is strange, really... it's like we're in a state of panic with this millennium and all, I do not know... But to answer your question instead of having you all drowned in philosophical bull, yes, I think I can identify with a situation like that... yeah?"

**Burn Baby Burn**

So what do you think of Michael joining the ranks of the reformed **Candlemass**? Drummer Ian Haugland (ex-Europe) and **Epicus Doomicus Metallicus** vocalist Johan Langquist were also rumoured to be involved at some point, so at least Mike will now be able to say "What do you mean Arch Enemy is a weak-ass all-star project, this is a weak-ass all-star project!"? Right? I'm looking forward to seeing you reform **Furbowl** with some of today's Swedish black metal bands in 2005 or something, ha!

"I think it's cool, we've always been huge fans of Candlemass, and as Leaf Manual is a good friend of Mike's I guess it was without hesitation that Mike accepted his offer. My stance is that as long as it doesn't interfere with Arch Enemy it's cool with me, but I consider that to be a minor problem. Mike's main priority is with no doubt Arch Enemy. Candlemass? That's a good one! Haha..."

The three slaves that Johan mentioned in the beginning of this interview, Chris Alton and his mates, Messrs. Bengman and Wildoer, are also in a band called **Armageddon** who have recently put out their debut album **Crossing the Rubicon** through **War Music** (formerly known as **Wrong Again Records**). With **In This Dreams** vocalist Jonas Nyrén completing the line-up, Armageddon combine the bite and melodic sensitivity of **Carcass** at their best and the technical wizardry of **Obey** by **Atheist**, creating an interesting opus for metal enthusiasts and musos alike (not that these two would necessarily be two separate groups of people...). A new empire rising!

"Johan, do you feel like you have some responsibility of keeping the madness and mayhem in metal now that the whole genre is in a state of turmoil? For example, I think most outsiders - at least are a little confused at black metal as it is: this is the most intense and extreme music that there is, why are so many people just standing monolithically?"

"Yeah, you've got a point there. But I'm not sure about 'responsibility'. We just play the music we adore and enjoy without any second thoughts whatsoever. As for black metal gigs I don't know as I've never been to any, maybe it's 'wimpy' to move some hips during a black metal show? It may even be prohibited to move at all, it is better to hang around and just look cool, dressed in black and not get too exhausted. Strangely enough, at our gigs it's just the same, at least here in Europe there's usually two or three drunk headbangers up front and behind there's 97 people just relaxing and listening to the music, giving you plenty of self-confidence so that you really feel it's time for two or even three encore... It's great!"

**The Darkest of Fields**

I think the lyrics on *Black Earth* are very impressive. They're all credited to the entire band, but is it still mostly you? Can you tell us a little about the concepts behind about the world as it looks to us, there's not much that's moving in the light, everything is about pain, suffering, grief and darkness. Most of your life is filled with negative energy, but sometimes the opposite tries to equalize it to an even level. I mean, it can't be denied - the world of today is in a fuckin' state of shit. There's a lot of things that you enjoy doing, people you love and all that, but the bitter truth is always there. I'm not saying 'Oh well, I hate life, fuck the world...'

or anything, but the thing is that the bad things always beat the good, there's a majority of negative clouds in the sky so to speak. So to sum it all up, the concepts of the lyrics generally deal with the above mentioned words of bright hope."

It seems as though Michael is the main spokesman for Arch Enemy - is that just the way you like it or what?..."

"Mike is a real 'windbag', ha ha... Well, the thing is that he wants to take care of as much of the official business as possible simply because he likes it a lot. I've got too much to think about and can't keep up with all the necessary things concerning the band - it's better if he answers most interviews and so on, I prefer to stay behind in the dark (of course), that's cool with me."
We Are But Slaves to the One Who Howls

Let me state first of all that I was blown away by Ancient Skin on Mayhem's comeback single (let's not count them tribute tracks on them samplers 'er, ok?). Buechdieswürde, Deutschland - wish we'd all been daft.

Erymunous used to bedmosh Hellhammer for the drummer's habit of hanging out with glam rockers. That it's easy for any fool to say that Hellhammer ain't a convincing leader for a black metal group. Too easy. Since when have Mayhem been a black metal band?

But I see what you guys mean about post-Erymunous Mayhem lacking character, or more specifically, a character capable of making the larger-than-life band they oughta be. I hear Maniac has an Einsteurzende Neubauten tattoo which he is at great pains to hide all the time. If that's true, I think it says it all. In the classic Deathtouch days he saw no reason to be ashamed of his Cryptic Slaughter t-shirt.

The man's vocals are pretty goofy on Wolf's Lair Abyss MCD (Misanthropy). Despite the music being so thoroughly uninhabitable, it's only Mr Maniac who sounds like he's overdoing it, trying a bit too hard. Making it sound like no one had ever bothered to write any lyrics.

Ancient Skin, as I said, works wonders. In the headphones darkness its bestiality and horror burst the chest. Add to more minutes or so, and the Mayhem legend struggles. And yet, Wolf's Lair Abyss contains no cliche. The untitled introduction may not stand a chance against Silvester Anfäng, but its trumpets of judgement quite aptly preface the bloodbath of brutal death metal that follows.

I Am Thy Labyrinth will possibly be remembered for the Gregorian backing vocals, but in fact it's Hellhammer's tour de force. Of late, friends of glasswashers note everywhere - crashing, chinking, clinking, thrashing away. On Symbols of Bloodwords new boy Blasphemr wields some cold, cold guitar, proving quite amply that he is indeed a worthy successor to the late great communist son of Satan...

The accompanying biography boasts that the inclusion of Count Grishnakch on bass added a whole new dimension to the Mayhem sound. That was in 1989 I guess, but I'd say August 20, 1991 is the specific date... I don't think anyone is foolish enough to think that Erymunous could ever be successfully replaced when it comes to Mayhem songwriting.

Dragonlord's Blood

I don't know, maybe I ought to be a little more concerned about the proliferation of all these dark ambient nonsense ensembles within metal circles. Let's take the Austrian Purgador for example. According to Dark Matter Records their second CD Awaken the Dragon will break the boundaries of the metal and dark wave scene although its only existing connection with metal music is the producer Martin Shtrcic of Pungent Stench infamy. Okay, a dragon is still a dragon but apart from these two aspects I neither hear nor see anything even remotely metallic.

Were I reviewing this from a real headbanger's point of view I'd utter the exact same words Butthole said about Arba - "This is children's music." Come to think of it, that's what this really is more than anything else, but before you rush drawing a conclusion that's both wrong and insulting to the kids, let me put one thing straight - Purgador are not shit, quite the opposite in fact. It's just that a fantasy tale about a dragon hardly moves a grown up person with a healthy emotional life (unless you're a Bruce Lee fan, that is) but for a 7 year-old Awaken the Dragon could be an unforgettable experience. Thus it's an essential investment for all of us who have kids of your own as well as for all the teenagers who try to earn some extra cash for more black metal records by babysitting all the brats in the neighbourhood. It's never too early to start brainwashing babies with grim imagery.

Boys with Wooden Toys

Orinio, the new In the Woods... album (Misanthropy CD)? Let's see. A bit like Decapitated ditching the synth fellow and making a good record. Or like Anathema gone Norwegian pagan prog. Or like Kari Ruoslatainen era The 3rd And The Mortal without Kari Ruoslatainen and The 3rd And The Mortal.

Ahem. It's indefinable. Some would add "...but only in a boring way." I wrote in Dark Lord about the band's debut album Heart of the Ages that while listening to the album, I keep searching for something to polarise the whole experience, to lift it onto another plane. This period of time and this album, too. However, something that instantly strikes a chord with me about In the Woods... music is the fact that it is apparent that it means a great deal to the band. Orinio is a strange beast, colossal yet intimate, rousing yet uplifting.

Mystical Frost is a one-man project from Huntington Beach, California. This Ray Edwards follow has a demo out entitled Redemption of Tears (r?) that vaguely resembles Black Cessation's Demo I as far as the sound goes. It's atmospheric death metal inspired mostly by the Greek side of things and the title track utilises bells in a way that's not entirely unlike Emperor's Ascension of Banks. Other than that we get some choirs and pipe organs and all. It's okay as a whole.
No Sex with Swan(s)

More rocknoise from those Turku weirdos known as Mothers Against Sex Association comes in the form of Shut Up and Look Stupid MCD (Crawfish Recordings). I liked their earlier A Vanishing Kalaades, reviewed in Made In Hell as it was sharp and to the point. This time it's the track Annalee Lee, written and partially performed by Otra (Psychoplasma, Mana Mana, Enter) that clears the table. When the band members jokingly refer to it as their 'Scorpions ballad', I actually feel sorry for the song! It is a true gem of acoemelancholic wishfulness, only outshined by the stories of the band's vocalist Ville trying to that up Joker backstage at the Swans farewell gig in London and getting manhandled by Giita. The rest of the disc is distorted soggy let down by the bad sound. :(

"So Impure That It Hurts"

Johan Lilja of Arch Enemy's favourite demo tapes of all time

We thought it's only right to let the man behind some of our favourite metallic recordings, both on record and on tape (The Day Man Lost forever), list his favourite demos...

1) Devastation A Creation of Ripping Death
Because of the outstanding Troy Dohler on vocals and the extreme riffing.

2) Nihilist Only Shred Remain
The pioneers of Swedish death metal, the ultimate in power and wickedness.

3) Morbid Angel Thy Kingdom Come
Need I say anything? Their best recording ever, so impure that it hurts.

4) Repulsion Genocide Stench of Burning Death
"Blastfest at its best, the ultimate experience in speed and megriffings."

5) Nocturnal Science of Horror
"The scariest demo ever made!"

In Excruciating Pain

It's embarrassing living in a house with seven other people and having to assure them you are only reviewing shit like Agony's Artes Magicae Tactares demo (1997), not listening to it for pleasure. Such is the curse of the conscientious reviewer: a long and very boring demo beginning with a 9-minute intro that is a typical example of how now that keyboards are trendy in the UK people think they can get away with anything. Nothing, however, will prepare the listener for Roland Kill me and save the music scene! Mayr's appallingly pathetic synth-pace sub-bengard vocals. When he's not ripping off the poetry of Maser Tolkken (and they have the gall to write 'Lyrikka... by Agony' on the jacket) Mayr is busy putting linguaphiles worldwide off Austrian German on feeble attempts at songs like Verflucht... and someone should definitely sue them for the stolen picture of the nine riders. Seaton wept.

Bearing in mind that some of the greatest demos ever (The Day Man Lost and Only Shred Remain to mention just two) last around 30 minutes, a 9-minute intro is utter blasphemy! While Agony, like the lethargic mammoth that is, drags onwards to its grave, we move swiftly on...

The chore of this reviewing business. It makes me cringe to see that The Bloody Earth from Yugoslavia advertise their Required Of Weeping Souls demo '96 with the slogan '8 songs of melancholic depressiveness from people who know what sorrow means.' It shouldn't, I know, but it does.

Desperate metal calls for desperate measures. A Dutch-style 'fun with a football team' type of a band well, only 7 members in all, The Bloody Earth deal in doom like there was no net yesterday. A deviant rendition of Dethroned Emperor is included, while the band's own stuff is primarily a little more delicate but no less painful. It gets tedious towards the end of the 8-track tape, but said phenomenon is neither unheard-of nor surprising. My Dying Bride, The 3rd And The Mortal... a list of peers that you can complete on your own, having heard the demo or not. If I'll add (as a small but meaningful detail) that vocalist Vesna Milesevic and Ivana Brankovic take turns in mourning over a Beautiful Dying Flower, I cannot possibly be held responsible for any misconceptions about the band's style.
Lesser Hells

First of all, Midwinter's *At the Sight of the Apocalypse Dragon* (Black Diamond/Invasion Records CD) is no lethal six six shooter nor a six-pack Satan for that matter. Admittedly it's well played and produced but still the final product has "buy, play, throw away" written all over it. Do yourself a favour and forget that you've even heard of this sad little project of disposable Swedish wannabe black metal heroes. And just for the record, despite misleading advance promotion Jon (Dissection) and Alf (Dysphagic, ex-At the Gates and ex-Groteague) have absolutely nothing to do with this waste... (0)

**+++**

*De Infernali Symphonia* (*De Infernali CD (Nuclear Blast)*). A trendy piece of disco shit. There'd be no need for records like this if the black metal fans of today had the balls to go and buy true disco records. (0)

**+++**

This week's shock statement comes from our old favourite Adolf Hitler, who has this to say about *Burana's Balder's Død CD* (*Misanthropy*):

"If anything is contrary to the spirit of the people it is... juggling with ancient Germanic expressions... The characteristic of most of these natures is that they abound in old Germanic heroes, that they revel in the dim past... axes, spears and shields, but that in their own essence they are the greatest imaginable cowards. For the same persons who wave about toy swords, carefully manufactured in imitation of old Germanic style... always preach for the present time only a spiritual battle and quickly run away... I got to know these people too well not to feel disgust at this miserable comedy. They make a ridiculous impression on the broad masses... Despite all proofs of their total inability these people pretend to understand everything better than anybody else... Especially in regard to the so-called religious reformers of the ancient Germanic type." (0)

**+++**

*Algaion*, evidently a true black metal band from Sweden, have found themselves a new trend to follow. They've added several spurious of German power metal into their Greek black metal, without forgetting *Sentenced* and *Entombed* either. The result is *General Ennui* CD (*Wounded Love*) and now both the band and the label dream of great crossover success among the fans of both extreme metal and melodic power metal. Won't happen, dear. *Algaion* song material isn't catchy, striking or even dynamic. Somehow they manage to spoil all the good ideas that they've come across and in addition they're in a bad need of a charismatic singer. Power metal and Mårten Björkman's dimensionless wheezein don't mix. (0)

**+++**

*Unlord* *Schwarzward CD* (*Displeased Records*). A black metal band probably consisting solely of *Displeased* personnel. I'd suggest they keep their group therapy.

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*Emperor* (Hushh! my name is Bonds, Acclamation of Bonds)

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*Songs of Hate and Devotion*

Our view is a privileged one: a cathedral for the churchless, silhouetted against black fire and surrounded by veils of moss-green storm. What *Emperor's Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk* (*Candlelight CD*) has in common with all the other best records in the world is the feeling you get while under its influence: it's not the best record in the world, it's the only record in the world.

Gaze into the eye of beauty borne of mayhem - it may be the last time you will. Feel the bonding, revel in it. Time may march on, but art is timeless. *Emperor*’s hymns to the nightly breathe raw, pulsating evil. Raw, pulsating *life*. No element could be removed without compromising the perfection of the exquisite and vehement picture.

I refuse to listen to people commenting on *Alvastra* (The Orb! being too pompous or Hushh's vocals being buried in the mix. Live, it's a genius for a sound man to draw out the most of the phenomenal trinity of Tveitan, Haugen and the keyboardist Charmand Grimlech, but on the record it's all irreproachable brilliance. (0)
Kampfar sound like no one else because they use electric and acoustic guitars, BM vocals and ‘Viking chants’... hmmm, yes, I can't possibly think of any band that does that. Reminds me of the bassist who when asked why there were three upside-down cromes in his band's logo, replied "... it's to show we're original and different". Jeez.

Kampfar's bio, having said they sound like no one else, then compares them to Ulver (perhaps a little, vocal-wise on first song *Kampfar* (sic), Satyricon (Kampfar are not as good) and Enslaved (Kampfar are better). Be that as it may, this MCD comprises about 30 minutes of well-produced and very Norwegian black metal. But Kampfar's songs are not good enough to merit being so long. Their album is out this winter and may well be better. Let's just hope there'll be no more bulbous-nosed viking drawls in its laisy. (a)

It might seem that a lot has happened in the Aeon camp since their *The Dreaming Moment* demo was reviewed in *Dark Lord*, new vocalist, new name and a recording contract. Listening to *Daeonia's Morbid Lands* MCD (Candlelight) made me realize that the changes haven't been that drastic after all. The band is still working on their *Fields Of The Nephilim* inspired gothic with a more metallic edge to it and the vocals are still somewhat flat although Michel occasionally shimmers with Vincent Cavanagh of *Anathema*-style lament. It just sounds as if he was holding back a bit which is probably rather understandable considering the fact that he joined the band only four weeks before the recordings. Otherwise *Daeonia* sound better than fine and I'm sure we haven't heard the final sound from them yet. (a)

After their *I Bear The Burden Of Time* debut, *Embracing* from the north of Sweden got rid of their vocalist since they found out that their drummer was a better man for the job. Despite the regret that could've well decorated one of the fabulous *Ebony* releases in the mid-'90s, *Dreams Left Behind* (Invasion CD) introduces a matured *Embracing*. Matured chiefly in the good sense of the word but also in the bad sense to a certain degree. I'm not exactly delighted about the screeching metal leadins that I'm hearing because I want to taste metal in my mouth whenever I'm listening to heavy fucking metal - sod sugar and all the other sweeteners. Still, *Embracing* are easily the best band on Invasion. (a)

*Kampfar* at MCD *Season Of Mist*. What a strange bio came with this one - one of the sales incentives is that this MCD is about 30 minutes long. Elsewhere we are told that
Two Witches are one of those bands that seem like they were always there - half the time you just weren't paying much attention. For whatever reason. Them being based in your hometown, for one.

A quick look at their biography reveals that they haven't been around even as long as I've been living here.

Chuckles from Beyond the Grave

It all began in 1982 when Jyrki Virtanen met Anja Nurmia. You know, the usual story: girl meets boy, boy becomes a rock star. Under the original monicker Noldat the couple experimented with mixing industrial noise and poetry, but soon enough settled on the English translation of their name (the added numeral) and singing in English, becoming increasingly more gothic as years went by. And then goffer and goffer still. So much so that at some point they turned into a caricature of goth rock in people's minds (you've got to remember that the consciously does Jyrki live up to the exaggerated model of a goffer?"

"Okay, every music style is full of clichés," he admits. "And gothic rock and metal aren't the most innocent ones. But hey, check our punk and rockabilly too. We take our band and our music seriously, but it is true that sometimes we get the best laughs from our own scene. Anyway, we're still living the goth lifestyle as hours a day and we are quite satisfied with it."

That 'we' refers to the six members of Two Witches anno 1997. A tight unit these days, one would believe, since the band went through purgatory a few years back when Jyrki and Anja got divorced and she flew to Switzerland and joined Lacrimosa.

Says Jyrki: "After Anja's departure Nauku replaced her as a keyboardist. She first joined Two Witches in 1990 as our second backing vocalist. She's Toby's girlfriend and one member of our so-called Two Witches Family (like Iris, Toby and me)."

Two Witches

Toby, Toby, Nadia, Pave, Iris, Vera and Jyrki

Finnish gloom scene hasn't been overwhelmingly hot since bands like Musta paratiisi, Syyxuus and Silmat came and went in the early '90s.

After a series of pilot seven inches, the long-awaited debut CD Agony of the Undead Vampire, Pave's provided a goth hit parade never heard before in Finland; so degrees north: Two Witches became a house orgy, and even those who found it too tempting not to snigger at Jyrkki's obsession with vampires and all things funereal secretly admired the man for his undying conviction.

Much like heavy metal, goth seems stupid and childish to outsiders who were never let in on the secret. And to make things even more complicated, there's always the concept of internal humour involved as well. Exactly how "Toby, the guitarist" he adds, "is my partner in crime in Two Witches. Most of our ideas are made by Toby (music) and me (lyrics). He came in early 1990 and besides Two Witches he has showed his guitar talents in many punk bands and one of the biggest goth names - Love Like Blood from Germany."

Iris (keyboardist) is the youngest member in the band. I met her in the spring of 1999 and asked her to join the group. On the Bites Tour 1998 she sold our merchandise and helped us in many ways. She took the part as a second keyboardist of Two Witches in June 1999."
As for their Andy McCoy lookalike drummer Pavo, Jyrki says: “He’s maybe the most ‘rock’n’roll’ one of our members. A big fan of martial arts. He’s been our drum machine since 1997.”

The band’s one and only blond, Tino “Vana” Vaananen plays the bass. “Tino has been an extra member of Two Witches since 1997, helping us whenever we needed him. His main project besides Two Witches is still his industrial band called Steel Factory. He took his place as a real Two Witches musician in 1996 and nowadays he’s also another one of our main composers. He’s very good with computers too.”

Then they have this guy on lead vocals who has once said that with an ego like his, there’s no way he could ever be anything else but the lead vocalist or maybe the lead guitarist. Live, despite the two enchantresses in the band voluptuously swaying to the mesmerizing rhythms, dressed in black - lace ‘n garters ‘n all, it’s still Jyrki with his deathlike charisma who remains the focal point. No mean feat.

“Hihmmmm, what could I tell about myself? My role in this band is the absolute dictator, leader and manager of Two Witches. This band is my life, not just my lifestyle. And I’m more pery than you could ever believe.”

With the line-up?

“At least it is nearly the ultimate formation. I just hope we don’t need to change the line-up anymore, but we will if we must and continue with other musicians.”

Right beside the band, there’s always been an entity called Darklands, originally a mail order company, then a shop selling recording shoes and black clothes from 1988 to 2001 and a record label. Jyrki quite aptly calls himself and/or Darklands the multifunctional machine of goth rock. Apart from his own group, he’s so far put out records by the likes of Advanced Art, Russian Love, Sad Parade and My Sweet Sorrows, among others. Not to mention things like organizing gigs and tours for bands from Finland and elsewhere, as well as generally doing his darnedest to further the cause of goth. 

Don’t Fear the Winter

How’s 1997 been so far for Two Witches, apart from festive?

“The year 1997 has been quite successful for Two Witches. First of all the whole year is our 10-year anniversary and we are celebrating it in many ways. We started the year playing two concerts in São Paulo, Brazil and we were opening MTV newsmash there at the same time. In February-March we toured in Finland with Midnight Configuration from the UK and on that same Wings of Winter Tour’ was our hundredth concert which was a great success at Yo-Talo in Tampere. Then we played a few gigs in Finland and recorded the Talvena/MCM tour logbook of a few weeks and at the moment we are booking dates for our next European tour with Seputement Menis (playing in Germany, The Netherlands, and Spain. This year will end touring again in South America, this time in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.”

How much of a shock was it to go from the complete media silence in Finland to taking rockstradam in Brazil?

“It was too big a surprise to even try to explain,” utters Jyrki, probably still suffering from the aftertaste of encounters with hordes of fans at the airport and surviving all those megalomaniac autograph sessions.

Have there been any particular moments in the history of Two Witches when you felt something just clicked, when things started to make sense and you maybe looked at each other and thought, ‘Wow, this is magic’?

There have been plenty of those; when the first CD came out in 1992, the first European tour in 1993, the recording deals with the foreign labels, when we heard we get to play at London’s legendary Heaven as a headlining band, and especially the trip to Brazil.

I believe finishing the track Talvena (the title track of their ‘97 MCD) could be one of those special moments. It is easily up there to rival the greatest Two Witches tracks ever, The Queen and Dead Dog’s Howl – an elegiac piece about a winter worse.

Don’t Fear the Winter
Two Witches: Iris (keyboards), the bride of the count.

Orki's Yrland (metal, he played in Prestige for example), Juhu (punk), etc. etc. and my own musical background before the band was everything from David Bowie to goths.

Now that you mentioned Orki, it must be said that he's a true blackmetaller now in the ranks of Ancient Rites and is also planning to start a project of some sort with Mika Luttinen we hear. And he used to be the guy in Prestige who didn't even like thrash metal, I never thought living in Amsterdam for 6 years could have that effect on people.

Things happen, people change...

Isn't it a serious concern for you that in someone's books Two Witches could already be classified as a black metal band, what with your Finnish lyrics about ravä and kuol and such things the music is irrelevant - cf. Martinis, Dark Funeral, Oonslaught - all of them considered black metal by stupid people etc.

I really don't know what to say. For us Two Witches is always a goth band. If people listen to us they'll notice it too.

But I don't have anything against blackmetal people and I'm very proud if the black metal fans find something in our music. That's what I meant with being more perceptive. We're writing our own language sometimes for giving more atmosphere and more original elements to our songs. If those sound good in our music, I don't care if there are people who don't understand the lyrics. Everything depends on what kind of a song we are composing and what kind of lyrics it needs.

Laestradissa and Hal Of Terror maintain that they want to dissociate themselves from black metal in all ways. How about you?

I don't care about Tilo's or Anne's opinions on this subject. They are friends of mine but sometimes I think they are only interested in money. I'm running a club in my hometown, playing goth but also metal and industrial. To me these go side by side enough, so if I want to play Thy Serpent or Cradle Of Filth when I'm a DJ, I don't care if the customers are mainly goths and it's the same with gothic rock and metalheads.

People should open their eyes and notice that there's good music outside of their own scene too.

Endtime Passion Play

Talvenaika is credited to Toby musically - as we learnt earlier on, his musical roots are basically in punk. Whereas Vaina is familiar to all of you avid listen readers as the figurehead of local dada mettlers Flander. This diversity in musical backgrounds is obviously an asset for the band.

Toby's musical roots come from his earlier bands like: ESF/Fucking Finland, Marionetti, Tuomittujen juhla, Kudellet kuka,... which all were punk bands. And it's also true Timo Virtanen played metal earlier (but also industrial with his main project Shade Factory and many other types of music). But these two are not everyone, there has always been musicians with different musical backgrounds in Two Witches; Nautku (punk), Timo Törmä (metal), Ari (punk/goth/etc), Jan

in death. For a small eternity, it just synthas and hi-hat and Jyrki (and Nautku on backing vocals) whispering, over and over again, "Why can't we fly away?". And then, at last, a barrage of metallic guitars crashes in and Jyrki starts roaring and screaming, sub-black metal style and in Finnish, about birds freezing to death mid-flight, girls expecting babies for their brothers, cattle drowning in the snow, you know standard Finnish wintertime tales...

It's a classic, pure and simple. Did the song come together quickly and easily or was it a rocky road?

"It's really funny that so many people think the same," Jyrki sneers. "We did everything in the studio in seven plus three hours only. The first day we put up everything in the studio, then soundchecks, then all instruments and vocals, etc. (and a lot of time went trying to find the right violin parts) and it didn't take more than those seven hours (mainly because we didn't have more money to do it better). One week later we mixed everything in three hours. Besides the ones you mentioned, my own favourites are: Bats And Bloody Kisses, Requiem, Naughty, Vampire Empire and My Own."

Do you feel an affiliation to Finnish tango singers like Tilo, the interpretation, the pathos, the emotion is obviously just as crucial. Where does it spring from in your case - seeing as you sing not only your own lyrics?

"Unfortunately I haven't listened to Finnish tango artists enough to make any kind of comparisons. But in my case it's a question of creating the right atmosphere with the vocals too."

Note: This page may not admit anything but the evidence is mounting: the greatest Finnish tango composer of all time, a tragic figure called Unto Manonnen (who died himself in the '60s after years of nerve depression and all-round misery) wrote in his Satama masterpiece about a
Gothic rock is, by definition, a very formulated form of music. Wouldn't it be refreshing to be able to write music with no restrictions and formulas whatsoever? Or would that be a health hazard? Actually we are writing the type of music we want to. If you listen to the new MCD for example, the opening song is pure goth metal with rough guitar, death metal type vocals and so on, but the second one is a simple darker style song even including a trip-hop C part and everything done on computers. We haven't ever been done everything with the same matrix.

I feel you had a problem in the past with not leaving enough room for the songs to breathe (and no, I don't mean that you should go for meaningless solos or anything like that) and building up the atmosphere. In some cases you have resorted to meaningless repetition as a Messiah and what may well work live often does not on record. But I guess it's like a witch adjusting her spell checker.

'Recording the new MCD was the first time we were in a studio where I could sing using my whole singing capacity. When we recorded Talvenulit I sang the same way that I sing on stage. Our main problem has always been too limited studio budgets. Oh, we did everything in seven hours this time too but using a better studio. The best situation for me would be doing live recordings only but no one buys live CDs nowadays.'

'At the moment, we already have all the material we need for our next release, but we still need time to collect money for studios, etc. At the moment my personal favourite of those new songs is the one called 'I Don't Need your Holy Land.'

Not that this necessarily has a whole lot to do with you, but old metalheads like this immediately dismiss a thing like Nephilim's Zoor as a second-rate Slayer ripoff (which is something the metal scene has in heaps in its own backyard), but other than that, the gothic metal crossover, despite growing rapidly these days, is still predominantly one-sided. Mostly it's metal bands who are incorporating gothic influences rather than the other way round, right?

'At least it seems to be like that at the moment. Maybe metalheads are still a little bit more openminded in taking new influences, but I'm sure goth bands will find metal sooner or later. Check out our latest releases for example. And there are many other examples too, like Sepulcre Menti from Germany. I like some of the songs on Nephilim's debut CD but to be honest, it's still far away from the heyday of Fields Of The Nephilim. They were original and great, Nephilim only have some good songs and that's a big difference.'

'Where exactly do your metal influences come from?

'Besides gothic stuff I listen to many metal acts nowadays, for example Thr Serpent, Paradise Lost, Type O Negative, My Dying Bride, Anathema, Moonspell, and Sirius. But also a lot of other faves of mine, Death, Black Sabbath, Japan, Mortiis, Deine Lakaien, etc.'

'Um, what I meant was basically that does everybody in the band agree with these metallic leanings or is it just you telling Toby and Timo V. to come up with something with a few pinch of metal?...'

'Yes, of course everyone stands behind our material. We really are not composing or writing lyrics thinking beforehand what kind of songs we might need. Everybody is taking influences from many different places and even those new metal influenced songs are still very much Two Witches-style ones.

'Isn't your aim being (or becoming) too metal for the goths and too goth for the metalheads?'

'Two Witches (Nauku, Jyrki, Toby): live vampire evil

'We have always been too hard for the goths, maybe because we are so far away from the Sisters Of Mercy, so I really don't care. We are playing the material we want to and if someone doesn't like then there's nothing I can do to solve the situation. It'd be too hard for any band just trying to create material everyone likes, and if you are doing songs for everyone you can be sure no one will like your stuff.'

'Latter-Day Leeches of the Bastard Son

'If the goth metal trend is the best thing that's happened to goth in recent years (as you've said), doesn't that mean that goth is already well beyond recovery and all hope is lost?'

'I really didn't mean those words to be understood that way. I like goth on its own too, but after those goth metal bands came to business, suddenly many metalheads became more interested in goth bands too. And that gave us bigger audiences and for the metal bands as well, because now people are mixing more together. It also gave a lot of new, fresh blood to both scenes.'

'Yah right. Goth metal was fine as long as the bands doing it were still relatively few and truly inspired (e.g. Celtic Frost, Stiillborn), also Paradise Lost's Gothic, but the latter was a second wave of goth-influenced metal and not soulless shadovearing shells like Moonspell and pale penguins like Cradle Of Filth and the like. It could be said, a little provocatively perhaps, that goth is a sanguinary vampire sucking at the carotid artery of metal, stripping metal of metal. So yes, we know what it's doing this side of the fence, but what about goth?'
Oh, it’s true there’s a lot of goths who couldn’t even think about any kind of changes, but let’s leave them listening again and again and again to The Sisters Of Mercy records. Otherwise, these two music styles are going nearer to each other day by day. Maybe we should check this question again after a few years from now. And one thing I must add, this vampire side of gothic is just a tiny part of the whole scene and at least half of the goths are not interested in vampires at all but hate bands like Nosferatu or Two Witches and think that our kind of bands ruin this scene.

But still, if goth turns to metal in its parasitic search for a saviour, isn’t it “bye bye baby goodbye” time? Metal is the bastard son of rock’n’roll after all...

“Wow, when did you last check your calendar? Are you sure you are not coming with some kind of a time warp from the ‘90s?”

Actually, now that you mention it...

“Moon, metal is one of the biggest mainstream things at the moment.”

It is.

“Just walk for half an hour a day in a city and count all those metal band t-shirts and count all other kind of t-shirts at same time. Metal is big business like dance music. Just watch any Top 40 shows in Finland, and count how many metal (mostly black but others too) bands you’ll find.

“Metal is the bastard son of rock’n’roll” sounds like a great slogan (and maybe it was a little bit like that in the beginning), but the truth is it’s mainly a thing for 12-year-old kids to shock their parents with, whether those kids like that music or not. And please remember, I didn’t say metal is crap. Metal is just a harmless music nowadays as most of the other styles too, otherwise it couldn’t get so much television time and radio airplays and millions of magazines (not just fanzines but all glossy, full-colour mags too), etc.”

Deuteronomy 12:3;

The thing that bugs us is the point that Thomas Pascal brought up in Metal Maniacs in September 1989, that goth has always been more about fashion than music, which is not the case with metal. While metal guys right now may be in search of a refuge a trio with Dracula’s daughters or what not, isn’t it a pretty safe bet that this isn’t going to last? And therefore, don’t you find it suspicious for a band with a history like yours to try and capitalise on the current situation (which some people most probably think you’re doing)?

“Isn’t it the same with metalheads? Think about it again. Isn’t it true that metal people have some kind of black leather, band t-shirt, long hair uniform also. At least I can recognise metalheads immediately. Oh, many goth bands do the goth’way (whatever it is) but again it’s a question of being what you want and don’t count it as fashion. For me fashion is something which comes and goes, and most of the goths that I know have been inside this thing for many years already without changing with every fashion. And if it’s a fashion for someone, it’s his or her way. For me the whole gothic thing is a lifestyle, has been so already since 1980. To understand our situation, you must always remember that most of our fans are not goths, because we are so far away from The Sisters Of Mercy, but all kinds of people.”

Two Witches Jyrki: Goff
Moulines Extraordinaire

Many of whom like Type O Negative... We think Peter T. Steele should’ve been a man and do as he claimed after the excellent two Carnivore albums and quit the music biz for good and join the NYD...

What exactly is it about Type O Negative that strikes a nerve with you? What’s the attraction?

“Bloody Kisses is a great album and there’s some good songs on October Rust. The only thing which gets on my nerves is that because they became such a huge name, now everyone is making comparisons between them and other goth/metal acts. That’s the same reason why I can’t stand The Sisters Of Mercy anymore, because all the media (and too many young goths think they created the whole style of music and everyone should play like they do or otherwise they are not the real thing)”

So what about that obsession of yours with vampires and that whole hamsesexual imagery?

“When I was very young and saw a vampire film for the first time, I fell in love immediately. Those creatures are so attractive, so beautiful and mystic that I wanted to know more about it. For me, they are not to be feared and nowadays I’m much deeper inside the whole thing. I’m nowadays concentrating more on the mystical aspects, life without end, the power of seduction and all that sexual fetishism (the colour red, bloody kisses, blood itself, bites...). And of course I want to live forever.”

If Jyrki got the chance to do a movie, it would be...

“A vampire vampire story! Not a historical one, but from the current gothic scene, including a lot of great music and beautiful girls in PVC/leather clothes! And of course there’d be Bites and Bloody Kisses”

But let’s imagine a movie called

“Quitting Life”...

“Let’s not. I’m not interested in quitting my life. That’s why i like vampires so much. I’m more interested in reverting life.”

I was just asking to ask you what you would’ve included on the soundtrack, but apparently that wouldn’t be anything by Two Witches on it. So I take it that your music isn’t suicidal in any way?

“No, Two Witches plays pure shameless gothic music with a big touch of sex for the people who want to party.”

Ok then, party on.

Thanks to Cristina of Fetish Dream fanzine (Brazil)...

The Two Witches story so far is perfectly documented in Finnish in Kure #25 (a Finnish magazine for record collectors), written by Aku Mattila (no relation). Contact Two Witches/Darklands for more information.

Jeff Wagner, assistant editor of Metal Maniacs on Type O Negative:

I think Peter T. Steele went through a period of detachment from music post-Carnivore, but I think it’s hard to deny that Type O Negative band, not the Horrorfied band and early Type O Negative (Slow, Deep And Dark) is truly inspired and should be of interest to any Carnivore fan. I even like Bloody Kisses, because it’s what we expect interest to any Carnivore fan. Even I think of Type O Negative band. Type O Negative doesn’t bother Peter T. Steele, rumbling low end, and self-deprecation. Type O Negative doesn’t bother Pete at all, it’s the trends that only figure that Bloody Kisses is their debut who have aided me at all. It’s the trends that only figure that Bloody Kisses is their debut who have aided the whole goth scene. Pete, don’t get the band in danger of going through the motions, now that their record label would rather have them tour, until they’re completely buried out rather than let Pete have time off to keep writing. They’re slowly falling into a rut. Overkill drains a band, and they’re on the way. I respect Pete highly, and consider them far outside the grouping of “goth metal.”
We played Muriel the creme la creme of the more gothic-inspired music that’s emerged from the metal scene during the last decade.

Celtic Frost - Mesmerizer (from In the Pandemonium 1997)

Jyrki: "Those rough guitars were great, but I didn’t like the vocals so much."

Isn’t it obvious, though, that they stole the lamented vocals from the first Christian Death album (playing e.g. Figurative Theatre and Frost's The Inevitable Factor or something back to back makes it kind of clear?"

"After you mentioned this, I played both songs and I still don’t like those Celtic Frost vocals. The vocalist tries to be like Richey Williams but Mr. Williams made it more to my taste."

Beyond Dawn - As the Evening Falters, the Dogs Howl (from Pity Love 1995)

Jyrki: "The atmosphere and the sounds suit well together. And there were enough hooks to keep the song interesting from the first seconds until the end."

The Equinox of the Gods - The Lord of the Crossroads (from Images of Forgotten Memories 1990)

Jyrki: "Heh, like mixing together Eternal Afflict, Forthcoming Fire and the latest Laibach records. Good but not very original."

What do you think of originality anyway, isn’t it overrated? I mean, style is by far the most important thing, right?

Hah-hah, this is great! First you ask a question about The Nefilim, saying it’s a second class Slayer copy and now you are telling me that originality is overrated. Or is it so, that if someone makes the same kind of music that your idols made first it’s a question of copying, but if your favourites start playing the same way as someone else did earlier then originality is overrated?

A-ha, so you are awake after all... What can I say, "I contradict, therefore I am?"

Hang the DJ!

Stillborn - Flesh for Jesus (from Necrospirituals 1980)

Jyrki: "Not my cup of tea at all."

Monumentum - Nepthali (from In Absentia Christi 1993)

Jyrki: "This whole record was one of my favourites last year. I like Francesco Nicolò's voice more but this song is great anyway (like the whole CD). I think I don’t need to say more."

Francesco Nicolò is great, yeah, but Ataraxia's cover of Kate Bush's Wuthering Heights sucks ducks...

I'm not a big Ataraxia fan anyway. I like Francesco Nicolò's voice and some of their songs, but they should quit using machines and start playing with real instruments which suit better to their music. At least they should get rid of that silly drum machine.

Exactly. What do you think of The Dead Relatives then - Nepthali being their song and all?

The Dead Relatives is a good Christian Death-style band and the original version of Nepthali is a good one too. By the way, their CD is a nightmare if you should be a DJ in a club and someone asks for example Nepthali from that record..."
Shit Hits No Fan

Adorion’s Melissa Hastings is from the Sabina Classen school of female vocalists with gruesome voices. The music on the English group’s Beyond the Distant Blue demo ‘06 is cradle-of-filthy metal with a crap production. Apparently already signed by Head Not Found for something like seven records. To numerologists the number 7 symbolizes the union of man and transcendence. Do you ever think about that?

Hard riff, pedestrian rhythm. What I hear on the Release promo tape ‘06 of Greece’s Gaudebec is honest music that comes from the bottom of four metal hearts but still it isn’t much more than a flashback from the days when Finnish speed metal bands were taking their first steps some ten years ago. Gaudebec remind me of all those bands whose names I’ve already forgotten and who only had two fans who took turns in climbing on stage and diving head first straight to the ground. Strange things bad metal made people do.

Bad metal or good metal, ‘tis all the same. It really makes people do strange things. Like that local metal rider who back in 88 travelled all the way to Helsinki to see Metallica and missed his transportation back home. Hitchhiking is always a good option – but it may take a lot of time if you get thrown out of the car after a 50-meter ride. The friendly driver obviously wasn’t delighted about the little mishap that our metal tour had in his pants.

I wonder what are the bands that make teenagers shit their pants in the late nineties?

I know Swedish Mornaland isn’t one of them, although their guitarist and vocalist Henrik chooses to believe otherwise. In their bio the man explains “At the moment we are recording eight songs for a split CD in a professional studio. These songs will be the best release that has ever come from a Swedish black metal band...” After listening to the split-CD in question I can only nod. It really could be the best Swedish black metal release ever, had someone dropped an H-bomb or two in Göteborg ten years ago.

The other band on this split-CD entitled Prelude to World Funeral... (Path To Enlightenment Records) is the Australian Abominator. Instead of new material they serve us their ‘93 demo War Worship and I have no complaints. Abominator sound like the little brother of Sadistik Exekution but I prefer them to Mornaland any day which is kinda surprising. I mean, which one from Down Under ever came up with anything important to say? Those silly people living on that upendingly large island of theirs, spending their time boxing with those huge rabbits and throwing that stupid thing that always returns to the thrower. I threw the split-CD in the air but it still hasn’t returned. Must be the Swedes on it.

The Mysteries of AV023

As Divine Grace Lumo CD (Avangarde Music). Lingering in a mire of 4AD metal melancholia, this Finnish band comprises members of Morphicus and Lava (rest in peace, both of you) and This Empty Flow. Those of you who hate this kind of thing could maybe call it watered-down metal or diluted goth, but for anyone who can appreciate the value of grey, Lumo will be illuminating, like a touch of an Angel of Light, the Devil, and the Redeemer. However, when they allow their music to blend out, as in The Bloomsearcher, it’s like they’re compressing the hoardes of pent-up emotions into the musical equivalent of the psycho-babble in women’s magazines. So Lumo won’t become an enduring classic, but holds enough substance to take As Divine Grace to the top of the atmospheric doom class. Hanna Kalske’s vocals alone will please many a nocturnal soul. (6)

Omnad christin soldiers.
Armageddon needs you!

Look, fucker. You think you can just sit on your ass all goddamned day and wait for the end of the world to come ring your doorbell and grab you by the neck, hurrying you and all your nongood buddies into a blazing inferno! Doesn’t work like that, you little piece of shit. Does the code name ‘Tormentor’ say anything to you? No, of course you haven’t managed to read Maedchen word for word. You were too busy picking your nose and skimming your Conan comics. Listen, you can’t justify on someone else to do your dirty work for you. To make Armageddon the success it’s meant to be, we all have to do our share.

Operation Tormentor, results so far: one lousy tape! What the hell is wrong with you?

‘Misanthropy is for weaklings, the true elite shall find the shortest route to destruction,’ state Demonstration from Helsinki, whose Tormentor packs enough Swedish death flourish and Autopsy nerve to make Finland the leading country in eternal devastation. Riffs that radiate mutilation and carnage, a vocalist that vomits surplus all over the kitchen floor and... why should we tell you anything more about it? Catch up, suckers!

Having Come from the Light

Now that I’ve been out of touch with American death metal for so long there’s something in it that I find strangely comforting. Maryland’s Garden Of Shadows are a rypse who actually produce some richly melodic and fairly well thought-out material (cf. their ‘92 demo Heart of the Coroner), but also take enormous pride in staying true to death metal. Funny then that the things in their music that justify for the using of that very term are also their prime sins sticking to the horribly standard zombie Cornice vocals (by growler Chad, persistently) and incorporating blinding speed (the rest of the group, only occasionally). Some very nice work come from the duo of Brian R and Mary - the latter’s throaty vocals only surface on Apollonic Realm.

After that explosion of music and light, let us explore new territories. Tarot is the new brainchild of former Ablaze Locutus man Maysayll. It’s a difficult situation for me: there’s only one Tarot as far as I’m concerned, and that’s the great Finnish heavy metal band whose Spell of Iron debut of 1988 remains a cornerstone in Suomi metal. The Italian Tarot’s The Kin & Mysterious Sorety demo ’96 will never be a cornerstone in anything, that much I can safely say. If it wasn’t for the same situation, I would call Maysayl’s out of tune vocals his biggest problem. It sounds awful. The placed acoustic guitars and synths offer relief and the sniggers of mystery floating around it all like a small drop of wine mingled in much wine - seeming wholly lost, but when flooded with the light of the sun is transformed into the very brightness of light, so that it seems not only illuminant, but like the light itself - either, or not. Hell, I don’t know. Give me visions, the roadway, and war.

Another one for the funny biz anthologies as we are told with great pride that Oberon’s 1994 demo “was received with great amusement... in the European underground scene” (not that I remember it). The music itself (on their ’94 MCD, released by Prophecy Productions) is not that easy to describe: a pre-sounding attempt at melancholia created with powerful keyboards, all the usual instruments, and a pop beat in the background. The vocals are slight except that the mangled English sometimes grates (it always gets on my nerves to hear Germanic foreigners singing about them warming my naked ‘bardy’ as if warming someone’s naked ‘bardy’ was the last and end-all of all things romantic, melancholy and depressed... but then along comes Love is the Light of the World and Oberon devolves further into the kind of hirpy shit that was probably rejected even from the original Woodstock album (and St. Arlo knows there’s some fucking awful stuff on those three records already, in among the jewels... but I digress).

Doombringer Unbled CD (Twilight Records). ‘Katatonia with blastbeats’ is certainly one of the most dissonant marketing slogans of our times. Fortunately, this American group’s debut full-length is more patchy than pathetic. Personally, I’d like to hear bands going for more depth and substance as far as both sound and songwriting are concerned, but Unbled more than adequately combines Goteborg, some US metal flavours (obviously, is it not?) and true metal spirit (not least of all in Untold, an Omens cover). I swear I even spotted an inkling of old Xyena in some of their material (Waterbitch in particular). Promising.

Yers! Absolutely brilliant! Eye Sea’s beLIEve demo ’96? These Bremen city musicians pound out pure, honest imageless and sincere death metal in the vein of old Entombed, Morbid Angel, etc, only much better and heavier, managing to sound both nostalgic and fresh at the same time. It’s as black and attitude metal had never happened. All you have to do is to write to them and order their brilliant beLIEve demo. The inlay may look like a piece of shit but the music is what counts and you’ll get more than your money’s worth! Me, I’d absolutely kill to see this band live in a small friendly venue. Once more, brilliant.

To literally paraphrase a classic Groucho Marx saying, I don’t think I liked Shadows Of The Sunset’s Fires of the Soon Dead Sun demo ’97, but then the conditions were unfavourable - the HiFi was on. According to Volle, our local gig pusher, we have seen the band live at one of his metal feasts sometime in ’96. I think. I suppose it’s fair to say that the demo is as memorable as their live set. Aggressive and melancholic death with lightning-peed drumming and heavy guitars - that I read in the blog. Yeah, the music probably is pretty versatile but that’s just like patterns in the wallpaper of a room you have no intention of entering. But then, it could be just me. They apparently have a MCD out now on Full Moon Productions. Investigate if interested.

Sandra Guggenberger
French eccentric Sup fuse inner combustion, lethal 21st century technology and autism. Not to mention immense songwriting talent.

Supperation was born in the big bang of death metal around the turn of the decade but already their debut MCD *Solitary Obsession* showed some exceptional maturity at the time. A 7" entitled *The Creeping Unknown* followed, as well as a few tapes that were later put on their self-financed *0002 CD*. The first full length album *The Cure* was unleashed in '93 when death metal was already hyperventilating.

After that the band signed with Pias France and I'm afraid I'm not the only one who lost the track of their doings by that point. In fact I thought the band was already buried by time and dust until a little over a year ago a promo tape reached me presenting three upcoming French groups *ForEver Emotion*, *Magical* and Sup.

Yeah, Sup, that's what the band has been called since '93. While listening to the three Sup tracks on the tape over and over again I couldn't help feeling angry at all those people who had bothered me with worthless BM gossip during the last couple of years. Yes, it was most important to know that a Gorgoroth member had been spotted taping up strawberry ice-cream with a spoon at Ems Street wearing spikes and corpse paint. It was even more important to know who was a Nazi, this week and who wasn't. How come no one ever bothered to tell me about the great recordings Sup had made? Please, don't answer. I'm not listening, Sup are too good for you anyway. They're signed with Holy Records now but unfortunately the forthcoming third album *Room 7* wasn't available for listening when this interview took place.

D-AN's mix

*Transfer* is the first Sup release available at the moment of this writing, a MCD consisting of remixes and acoustic versions of songs from their outstanding second album *Anomaly*. It's also Sup's last recording for Pias France. Ludovic Loez (guitar/vocals) explains the nature of this release:

"We did the remix CD only to break the contract with Pias. However, I think the final result is quite honest even if some songs could have been better."

Actually some of the remixes do sound a little pointless but for example the D-AN mix of *Ocean of Tears* puts the original in shade and the acoustic versions reveal that Sup could well do without amplifiers. Unlike many bands whose existence is entirely based on sound and atmosphere. But who could blame those bands? It's a whole lot easier to make a nice album out of atmospheres than out of good songs.

Although some alarming examples of remixes have been served for pop fans on silvery discs during the last few years Ludovic isn't all that concerned about remixes finding their way into metal music. I think that some remixes are good and others are bad. I mean one or two remixes are enough, sometimes even one is enough. The better known a band becomes the more numerous the remixes are, he says.

The remix CD isn't the only extraordinary project that Sup have put through. The band also made music for a film called *Jacques le Fataliste* but that didn't go all that smoothly.

"We were asked to record an original soundtrack for a French movie so we did it but the film wasn't good enough for distribution. It hasn't even been put out by the distribution company! It was a really good experience for us but it took a lot of time... I won't do it in the future. It's too hard! Of course I may reconsider if we get good conditions and more time for it."

What kind of a film would you be interested in doing music for then?

"A historical film you know, like *JFK* for instance. Or a thriller-like *Usual Suspects* or stuff like that. But at the moment I'm not into doing original soundtracks at all and we'll never get to record music for an interesting film so..."

We'll leave the subject but as a great friend of the French cinema I can't help asking what the French film industry seems like in your eyes at the moment? The '90s brought us Besson and the new masters of neo-realism: Beziachs and Carax. Are there any new talented directors coming in the limelight next to Jeanet & Caro and Kasowitz? Can you recommend any great new films?

"Assainis is the latest film by Kasowitz. It's quite a cold and cold film, really good. Besson released *Le Jumeau* last year but I haven't seen it!"

Shame on you. This Besson dude is one of the few directors of our time who really knows what he's doing. He has stated that ten films are enough to make one immortal and *The Fifth Element* is his seventh film so far. That's the spirit. Also impressive is the way he dabbled in the arts and in an interview with Melody Maker (June 14, '97) he said, "Kids will watch a magician take a rabbit out of a hat and say, 'Wow, how does he do that?' but ace critics, they will say, 'That's a classic.'"

"Tchêché. How on earth can Sup make classics without anyone noticing? Is that magic or what?"

Extreme Aggression

No one can deny that Sup have released their greatest works so far on Pias: The earlier mentioned *Anomaly* and *Transfer* plus a MCD entitled *Still In Sphere* in '91. Especially the concept album *Anomaly* with a futuristic story about over-population and a world of killing machines like D-AN, XYY, T-ON should have caught
The attention of each and everyone who has ever even pretended that she likes Voivod. But, the records are nowhere to be found. I was wondering what actually went wrong with Plast. Was it the same old story — a label who do a good job on the domestic market but the promotion and distribution elsewhere is more along the lines of 'God's with you?'

"It's one of the reasons why we broke up with Plast. They were not interested in Sup anymore and they were not good for us concerning distribution in the foreign countries."

Another thing that caught my eye was that they advertised Anomali as a combination of Type O Negative, Paradise Lost and Carnage. To me those comparisons sound rather strange...

"They didn't know what we were doing. They wrote stupid things about us because they were not into metal music. That's another reason why we changed for a label that may be smaller, but who know us and our style of music."

Agrepos of nothing, what exactly were the reasons that made you shorten the name of the band from Supuration to Sup?

"When we put out our second album Anomali we decided to change the name of the band into Sup because we thought that Supuration was a bit too death metal for an album like Anomali. Supuration was a good name for our first CD 'The Cage', but now that the music has changed, I think Sup is better. Anyway, everybody in our country or in some part of Europe where the band is quite known still call us Supuration. It's really not a problem for us at all - 'Sup' is the same band as Supuration."

So in a way it was an attempt to take distance from the death metal tag without denying the connection, right?

"Yes, we're still close to the death metal scene. When we play songs taken from Anomali on stage the result is quite aggressive. It's not the studio version. In fact it depends on the concert. If it's a real death metal show or a more alternative show. Anyway, on stage the music of Sup is always more aggressive than on CD." Le dernier combat

I'm curious to know what is it like to be a French band singing in English over there in France? Your government has practically declared a war against American culture and the increasing use of English language.

"Yes, you're right but we don't care about the fight against the American culture. The English language is better for us. We know it for sure. However, the lyrics of Room 7 will be printed in seven languages in the booklet; French, English, Dutch, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese."

I suppose this means we won't be seeing two different versions of Sup's albums. As we can remember, back in the '80s some French metal bands put out two different versions of their albums — one sung in English and another one sung in French. Have the things got any better since that, is it possible for a French band to break through in France if they're singing in English?

"There are some rock bands like Noir Dear and stuff like that but it's certain that a French band who is singing in English have no chance to be successful over here."

So, is there anything specifically French in Sup's music?

"No, absolutely nothing!"

"Huh, I knew that but I had to hear it from you. Sometimes I'm amazed how French artists insist on being very French no matter what they do. Let's take the aforementioned Luc Benson for example. He claims that The Fifth Element is a very French movie. Granted, not many Hollywood directors would put an opera performance in the middle of the most intense action scene of the film but it really takes a Frenchman to call The Fifth Element a characteristically French film. It's a science fiction film starring Bruce Willis for hell's sake!"

French as not, with a song like Pain Injection (the opening track of Anomali) Sup should've got a lot more attention and recognition throughout the world but few are the people who have ever heard about them. Had some US band penned a song like that, the world would be on its knees in front of them. But but, France hasn't ever actually been the place to look for and interesting things in the areas of rock'n'roll or heavy metal. Does Ludovic ever feel people have overlooked Sup only because they're French?

"I don't know. The only thing I know is that it's quite hard to be a French metal band. Sometimes I think that things can change but it's more like a dream you know..."

What has kept Sup alive for all these years, what's your fire and fuel?

"Friendship and the love for music!"

Ah, quite obvious, friendship I mean. Since the beginning Sup's line up has been stable. The band started out as a trio consisting of Ludovic, his brother Fabrice Locat (guitar/vocal) and Thierry Berger (drums). Laurent Bessault (bass) joined the ranks after Suicide Obsession MCD in '96.

Now get up and enter the Room 7. Don't be afraid, Sup are waiting for you in there with 12 new songs about autism. Knock on the door and step inside...

Le six cent soixante-sixième element

La Masquerade Infernale, the new Arcurus album sounded totally unlistenable at first. Sickeningly theatrical vocals, jumbled compositions incorporating everything from weird-for-wierd sake prog to trip hop... It's like one of those notorious rock operas from the '70s. You know those productions that tried to include everything allegedly popular in order to gain as large an audience as possible without forgetting to be arty to be taken seriously as an opera. A hopeless venture. But, my uncondional admiration of the underlying heroism of La Masquerade Infernale made me play the record again and again... and soon I found myself sucked into a black hole. All the things that made me like Arcurus in the past were there. Sometimes inadmissible, more often buried under everything and more.

Where Aspera Hizmas Symfonia lulled us all into symphonic metal ecstasy (see review in Dark Lord, La Masquerade Infernale is a stalwart reminder of the olden days when the best of the rest were evil - Arcurus were morbid. Morbid, unique and beautiful.

Not many bands can afford to do what Arcurus have done here. La Masquerade Infernale is a paean to insanity and a monument of social democrat singing and producing. Something this far-out just begs for extreme reactions, which is exactly what mastermind Sverd (keys) and his friends are after, I'm sure.

Therefore it wasn't entirely surprising (but very funny nonetheless) to hear that I wasn't the only one who had trouble swallowing the album after the first listen. Also Tiatana confessed that before totally falling in love with the album she had thrashed things at the Misanthrope office screaming, "This shit cost to 00000 pounds! What crap!" It's true, it's a bitch. There are no second chances when it comes to making first impressions and that may cost Arcurus many prospective supporters but I suppose that has as much meaning to the band as life has to its listeners.

To round this up, I can't help but quote the legendary Finnish ice hockey coach Jani "Tomi" Tamminen and his world-famous Kiss-method. Keep It Simple, Stupid (9)
Freshly Exhumed

Sea of Eternal Silence is the title of Greek Exhumation's debut album (Emanation Productions CD). After a calm prelude, the titeltrack shoots forth like a vicious mammal. In closer inspection, it proves to be a civilised goliath of a song, wickedly heavy and monumentally melodic. Dan Swano's additional guest vocals are an added (but ultimately non-essential) bonus - the album's recorded at his Unisound Studios in November 1998. The way the album starts to drag on almost instantly after that is scary. Being unpretentious is a great thing, but cracking the mighty death metal whip for 46 minutes is a mighty hard endeavour even for musicians as skilled as Exhumation. While most of the songs lack trump cards, Monuments closes the record out in the best fashion possible - tuneful but without remorse, it's the most gorgeous death metal instrumental I've ever heard. (x)

when two faulty thoughts collide, a beautiful diabolus in musica may ensue.

Trancecidence's Eternal Stream (Geta Disc CD) is soft and mellow almost-metal akin to that of newer Tiamat and the like. Only occasionally (Ageless, mainly) they "let it rip" with gruff vocals, fast pace, heavier riffs - which only emphasizes the need of broader, fuller, better production. Now and then Sehrina Ljupi's vocals help the record transcend its shortcomings, the most moody piece Pawns of Prophecy in particular - but even then, it's catchy in the wrong way. Much of the rest is tarnished by preposterous amounts of synth and warmachines. In a memento, art house is somewhere else, Eternal Stream is made for television (and shelved, hopefully). (x)

The word "plecida" in metallic violet on a black cover. Black booklet, solid black on the back, too. Not a word of information, except for the seven track titles on the CD. Plescida (Aja Offensive CD) is kind of antiseptical. Understatement is a beautiful thing. The music's luscious too dreamlike humming melancholy not a million miles from the phenomenal This Empty Flow. As an admirer of Slowdive and Cranes, I'm a sucker for these calm, quietly raging emotions. Katatonia's Day could be a more metallic point of reference. Dim light with searching clarity to illuminate entire kingdoms and penetrate transparent bodies. It's as if it was made of clay of the most delicate kind, begging you to give it life by slipping a piece of paper between its lips with the name of either God or the Devil written on it. At least half of it is you. (x)

Spain's Blasphemy are back with a new MCD Falseness (Abstract Emotion). The cover art of cartoon black metal warriors is so crueltly funny that it's not even surprising to find out that the artist, Blasphemy Of The Dark Crystal, is listed as a member of the band along with Meisters. Volkhaar, Erdick, Frost Demon and Mordak. After that, however, serious scrutiny is asking way too much. But fear not, I can provide a brief list of adjectives that you may need to be able to piece together the puzzle: fast, thin, dry, unexceptional. (x)

Combinationis lineatris ad nauseam

Austria's Golden Dawn are still haunted by unnecessary keyboards and militaristic drumming as Koka pointed out in his review of the Australian Black Metal Syndicate sampler in Dark Lord. But Stefan Traummüller a.k.a. Dreamlords debut album The Art of Dreaming (Dark Matter Records CD) is an effort of vast fortitude and affluence. It's also perhaps the most disjointed affair that I've ever come across in the black metal genre. Amazing melodies, busts of speed and bombastic meditatively arrangements incorporating flutes, kettledrums, bagpipes, strings and a range of incomprehensibly, Sub Specie Aeternitatis is total synthmetal pop XTIC! As if that wasn't enough, I also have a hard time dealing with the fact that Martin Schierene of bloody Pungent bloody Stench is involved (producer, DMR: A&R person). Dreamlords many great ideas are tarnished by an overload of bad ones and an all encompassing "I'll revolutionize all music here and now mentality. Ambition is good, absolutely, but for example, to what extent do we have to thank Karl-Ulrich Walterbach for Into the Pandemonium being what it is? Do you ever think about that?

Well, yes, things happen, people die. But nothing we can create in a secluded spot away from everything else. How has Stefan Traummüller of Golden Dawn taken into account the voices in my head. What space has he left for the wind outside? Or the dog next door? None! And yet, the impervious connections are what the universe, by itself, is made of. The secret formulae of things, thoughts, elements intermingling and feeding off each other...

When you simultaneously read T. Burnet's Tellusis: Theory of Space (1964) and Charlotte Binghams Coronet Among the Weeds (1965), strange things are bound to happen. Any piece of information becomes important through its connection with other pieces of information. The connection changes the perspective. (Combine Ilyon's Fire Have Plenty of Fun and Hutter's Mein Kampf. Use Chairman Mao's Little Red Book for recipes when cooking. Replace Kafkava with Kama Sutra. And vice versa. And so on and so forth!)

Yes, read Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's De occulta philosophia and Umberto Eco's Foucault's Pendulum (Il pendolo di Foucault) to learn all about how combining is the music of thoughts. Despite my hermetic scepticism and liturgical cynicism, I, much like Eco's protagonist加之, love the polyphony of thoughts. When two faulty thoughts collide, a beautiful diabolus in musica may ensue. Alchemists are the thoughts upon which people are prepared to build their lives, but two or three thoughts of this kind might make a good song. (x)
Conditioned Critically

It's been a while since I last heard a Sunlight production. Apart from the predictably disappointing DCLXVIETC by Entombed, that is. The Everdawn Poem Burn the Past (Invasion Records CD) is still no trip into Golden Days of Death nostalgia, it just happens to be a decent workout of the Gothenburg stuff (At The Gates, Dark Tranquillity) with Stockholm sounds (in spite of the fact that the album was recorded up north at Lucidchrist/Turpetual Studios). "Neces" is the nicest word I can use for it, because these Invasion bands are to the current scene what bands like Armored, Abhor and Embalmed were to the death metal scene of late '80s/early 90s, which means that I think it's a shame that they're making records. A reasonably good demo is always a nice item in a way, but once the stuff is on a CD, any goodwill is gone.

If Invasion Records is trying to be the 80s black/death scene's answer to Masoecum Records (as the rate at which they're putting out new products strongly suggests), they're failing miserably. Whereas the folks at Masoecum were totally Pavlovian when it came to moustaches and striped trousers (Dark Wizards' Reign of Evil a suitably frightening example), the Invasion equivalent is Swedish nationalism: "Uncle? Luleå? Oh please sign this!". But where's their Warlock? Or their Brainfever at least? Even their jank is class C jank at best.

When the time has come to review the Invasion release number so, better known as Non Serviam's Between Light and Darkness CD, I'm in a deep lethargic sleep. Interminably I'm aware of the Gorecky repeating that engaging the surroundings, but I'm too tired to speculate whether the band will change their name to Triarchy Of The Lost Lovers anytime soon. Servum, servum, servum, servum, servum and the sleep goes on.

My goodness, Professor

It's always easier to say what you don't want than what you do. Thy Primordial's Where Only the Seasons Mark the Path of Time (Pulverized Records) doesn't drive me nuts, but also fails to drive me wild - as is Swedish black metal's wont. Were I a constructive critic, this is where I'd lose my head arguing what the band might want to do next. I could hesitantly suggest getting rid of the shrieking vocalist and, well, the melodic yet aggressive songs. Not that they sound bad, but because I think I could do without them.

Thy Primordial sound a great deal more like their name; just like the moniker is not monstrously ingenious, the most striking thing about their music is that it's not excellent. But sure thing, the frenzied burning of the likes of Svarog Gryning and Hail Unto Thee... Who Travels Over the Heavens will fill the heart of many a less discerning black metal lover. As frantic as the fweetsome's strain generally is, flamboyantly red melody always spurs out in gobs from its wounds.

On Bishop Of Heen's Archives of an Enchanted Philosophy (Hammerheart Productions CD) the atmosphere is dead. The Israeli group comprises four fellows, two of them highly pale fellows, plus one in full corpse paint and one regular type of guy who curiously enough wants to be called Prof. Van Helsing. The music is atmospheric black metal, apparently. At least the record's dubbed as "one of the most morosely dramatic musical performances of the year" by the label. Well, dead atmosphere is an atmosphere too, I guess. The fourpiece keep loading piles of emotion onto us and what do they get in return? Various degrees of indifference, or loathing if they're really lucky.

What's more, the band's work is all based on an "ancient and legendary concept" which is - make no mistake here - created by the band themselves. Very archaic it is, then. Older than time itself.

The drumming is a joke, the vocalist wants to be Daniel Filth, the songs aren't much good.

Bryan Adams Family

With Kyprian Nurmi and his Kyprian's Circle the situation is quite apparent: he doesn't have a band any more than he has a solid artistic vision. His mates from Henna help him out whenever he feels like doing a tape of some kind, like The Nightwind Times demo '97, of which he says that he doesn't want to play in a specific style, but rather do different things with different releases, still remaining true to the dark music genus. Dancing with Trees is like playing Marcellus with synths, but the tape does sport a few good ideas. Then again, it's not quite out of the question that even Bryan Adams could pen aensible black metal track should such bizarre whim overcome his eternally 18-year-old spirit some day. Stranger things have happened. The next Kyprian's Circle demo is promised to be the most Norwegian sounding so far, i.e. more speed and Nordic atmosphere.
Twin Sister
Created from ink, diseased dreams, pulverised talismans, Ain Suph Aur, lollipops, the root of all and nothing, assorted fabrics, and the sperm of metals by Mikko Mattila, Janne Sarna, Kola Krauze and damhair in 1997.

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These words whisper hell.
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The pleasures of the damned.

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Bethel, Canaan, The Great Kat,
Metalucifer, Rotting Christ,
Solstice, Sup, Tales Of The
Macabre, Two Witches...

*Twin Sister* is part two in
the *headwind* trilogy.