

## LotFP Weekly #4 November 13, 2001

It'll be history by the time you read this, but still, some notes about VANDEN PLAS dropping out of ProgPower USA. The band's official statement: "For many weeks now, the members of VANDEN PLAS have been looking forward to participating in and performing at the Progpower USA Festival in Atlanta. This was something that we were very eagerly anticipating, particularly since this would have been our first trip to the US. This fact combined with the killer line-up of this Progressive Festival promised to make this one of the most outstanding concerts and experiences of our career. After the terrible acts of terror on September 11th, inevitably some of the members of the band started to have doubts about the security of such a trip to America. Nevertheless we decided to fly. Unfortunately, after the recent and serious statements in the press made by the US government, which warned that more acts of terror were to be expected within the next week, the doubts came up again. After many long and difficult discussions among the band members we have come to the conclusion that it would not be possible to put these fears completely to rest. Therefore we have regretfully decided to cancel our performance. We can understand the possible disappointment of the fans and we are fully aware of the difficult situation that this has created for (ProgPower promoter) Glenn Harveston, who did everything to make our stay as secure and comfortable as possible. We are very saddened by the fact that we now find ourselves living in a time when the freedom and opinions of people can be altered by cruel acts of terror. We want to point out that we do not see this as a victory for terrorism, instead we look at this sad decision much more as an acceptance of responsibility to remain safe for the sake of our families and loved ones. Words cannot express how sorry we are for having to make this decision. Sometime in the near future, we truly hope to receive an opportunity to make it up to our fans and to fulfill the expectations that people have set for us. Very Sincerely, Stephan & Andreas Lill, Andy Kuntz, Torsten Reichert, and Gunter Werno Vanden Plas" OK. I guess I should clarify a couple of things before I do my little rant here. LotFP is involved financially, sort of, with ProgPower. LotFP forked over the necessary cash, in the four figures, to get NIGHTINGALE to appear. That money is gone and is not to be paid back whether the festival sells out or two people show up. So my 'financial involvement' has zero potential for return except for the joy of seeing Dan Swano and NIGHTINGALE perform, and the possibility of a few more subscriptions from having the LotFP exposed a bit more. I'd also like to clarify that Gunter Werno is (I'm writing this a week before the festival but most of you won't see it until after so forgive my wavering tense here...) making the trip to perform his duties with KAMELOT for the fest. So this rant is not directed at him. But now, an open letter from LotFP to VANDEN PLAS (and everyone reading this better believe that I am sending this thing to them, their record label offices, and anyone else I can find with official ties to the band), full of piss and vinegar, so skip to the next story if you don't want to hear it: "You cowardly, stupid bastards. Your explanation does not explain why BALANCE OF POWER, NIGHTINGALE, ANGEL DUST, Jorn Lande and Mats Olausson of ARK, SUPERIOR, SPIRAL ARCHITECT, EVERGREY, and KAMELOT's Roy Khan and Gunter Werno (your bandmate!!) are all flying in from Europe to perform at this festival and VANDEN PLAS can not. The events of September 11 have been, to put it mildly, a pain in the ass, but how many days passed between September 11 and October 31, when you made your little decision? Fifty! In these fifty days, the US government has made continuous statements about how the US would strike back, made continuous warnings about the possibility that we would be targeted again. We've gone through media hysteria, and the current anthrax scare. But none of these are anything close to being new developments. If VANDEN PLAS had decided on September 12, or when

the US began attacking Afghanistan, to pull out of the festival, there could be some understanding, and an opportunity for ProgPower to properly advertise the lineup change. But your pansy asses canceled NINE DAYS before the festival, using an excuse that's been out there for you for FIFTY days. All that promotion, all that excitement for your US fans had about seeing you, you milked it, then killed it. Again, I can't understand why a couple of dozen Europeans can fly in to perform at this festival, and you can't. I can't understand why many hundreds of fans will be flying and driving in from all over the country to be here, and you can't. I can't understand why the President of the US can make an appearance at an open air stadium in front of tens of thousands of people in New York City under current conditions but a group of musicians can't fly from Germany to Atlanta. Do you really think you are even at more risk flying in under current conditions than any fan driving hundreds of miles on the highway to see you would be in complete peacetime? And let's talk about what you're missing out on because of your fear. ProgPower is going to get major coverage in all of the relevant magazines of the genre. I don't know, and at this point don't care, how well you do in Europe but VANDEN PLAS isn't a name known in the general US metal scene. You're a niche band. Here was your opportunity to change that by playing in front of your faithful and making the impression that would increase your reputation, and therefore your sales, and therefore your further touring opportunities. I'm not pretending you were going to get rich or anything from the US market, but we could have been one hell of a shot in the arm for you. But the American market is so damned tough to crack, especially for a 'prog metal' band, and you have to be willing to work it. Your last minute decision shows you're just not willing to do that. Most bands have to fight for years in this country to have the opportunity ProgPower just handed to you. You should be willing to swim across the goddamn Atlantic with your gear on your backs for the opportunity Glenn Harveston gave to you. I sure as hell would never have wasted a prime slot on you. I hope your business partners in the US take a hard look at the work they've done for you in this country, and the money they've risked, and see how much you turned out to be willing to help them help you. I hope your US distribution gets dropped in this country. I really hope you never get another chance in the US again. Your current fans can still buy imports of your next albums, and for probably for the same price as a domestic release would cost because import distribution here has become wonderful in the past few years. So your fans wouldn't be hurt by your US label dropping your cowardly asses. Only you would be hurt by this, because you'd pick up precious few new fans here without anyone directly promoting you in the US. You royally fucked up. I wish you nothing but health and success in your personal lives, gentlemen, and nothing but catastrophic failure from this point forward in your musical careers. Good day.- Jim Raggi/LotFP"

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*GAMMA RAY is a very special band. Founder Kai Hansen is one of the creators of the style we know as 'power metal' today. With No World Order, the band is now seven albums into its career, making sometimes good, sometimes great albums. In the early to mid 90s, when this style was almost an oddity, GAMMA RAY was a complete shining star in metal. Now, with their style of music being practiced by literally hundreds of bands that probably shouldn't be releasing albums, it's difficult to get the uninitiated to do much else than sneer at the idea of checking out yet another of 'those bands.' But intense listening to No World Order does reveal two irrefutable truths: GAMMA RAY still has much to offer in terms of songwriting and No World Order does deserve to be heard. Truth two... there are some hard questions to answer as well. That task fell upon bassist Dirk Schlachter while he was recovering in the hospital from a torn up knee...*

**The first thing we should talk a bit about is the new album. If you could say a few words on it, and give**

**people who for whatever reason haven't heard GAMMA RAY a reason to enrich their lives.**

The new GAMMA RAY album called *No World Order* is a little bit a step back to the basic Eurometal thing, whatever you call it. Very powerful. Not that much speed songs on it. It's more beefy. It's always hard for me to describe music! Do you agree?

**I definitely agree. I've liked the band for awhile now. And you've been with the band a long, long time. But when someone says GAMMA RAY, think Kai Hansen. When I set up the interview, I assumed it would be with Kai. When I was told it would be with you, no problem, if you can't answer the questions there would be something very wrong! How is it...**

... being the second man? I got used to it. With all this promo stuff, everybody wants to talk to Kai. I don't complain! I'm more the worker in the background, taking care of all the sounds, things in the studio, and all that. All this with the record company and the press and promo things, it's OK. Of course I don't like it so much. I don't mind being the number one guy. Besides that, Kai and me through all these years have been like, productionwise we've grown together into such a good team. When I think back to six years ago, the *Insanity and Genius* production, we discussed every little thing over and over! Now we're quick with the sound and we can concentrate on what to play. I'm quite happy with it. And live, I'm the only one who... Kai is stuck to the microphone, and so I can jump around a little more. Well not now at the moment! This happened with my knee at our last show in Spain, it was Rock Machina festival. The last final song, Kai and me jumped from the drum riser, and I had a landing which was not planned like that! It was the bad, but it was the last song so it was OK.

**You said the album was a back to basics Eurometal thing. Every GAMMA RAY album had its own flavor, but albums like *Somewhere Out in Space, Insanity and Genius*, and especially *Sigh No More* had this independent identity away from the entire scene. This album and *Powerplant* fit right into the scene. How do you exercise your musical inspiration versus what a cynic might say is what the market wants right now?**

Mainly Kai brought it in this direction. When he brought the first songs, they were mainly easy and not that complicated arrangements. Very simple melodies for the chorus lines. When we started recording, we did half the songs. Daniel [Zimmermann], our drummer, has another band called FREEDOM CALL. He went on tour with his band with HAMMERFALL and VIRGIN STEELE. When came back recorded the rest. But for the first six songs we had the direction set. It was like this! It was not really planned. In every GAMMA RAY production, we never know what it really sounds like until the production is done.

**I'm not thinking, with all of your histories, that you're sitting there on autopilot, but every review I see of GAMMA RAY is that you know what you get. For me personally, the album has some great songs. But I'm uncomfortable as a critic with a band being no more and no less than what you expect going in.**

So you expected new stuff?

**I don't know that it's necessarily new stuff, but like the last album had it's a Sin that was just out of left field, and Heavy Metal Universe wasn't a typical GAMMA RAY style song.**

That's true. All the songs that Kai wrote defined this *No World Order* sound. Maybe the ones that sound a bit different, that sound more like GAMMA RAY, are written by the others. The first song, Dethrone Tyranny, was written by Daniel. For me it's a very modern thrash sounding GAMMA RAY speed song. You'd expect it was another GAMMA RAY song written by Mr. Hansen maybe? Kai was just a little bit sick of everybody copying this melodic metal stuff.

**My favorite GAMMA RAY album is *Land of the Free*, and my reasons for that are not the songs where you're doing the weird things, but from the basic GAMMA RAY songs on there! I'm not expecting or wanting GAMMA RAY to just take off completely into some weird direction full time...**

What can I say about this? Of course we were not looking for the direction. The next GAMMA RAY album will be produced when there's enough songs for it. We talk about time schedules and things, but when we have the songs we talk to the record company about it. Then we find out what the album will be like. We never talk 'Oh this next album will be like this or be like that. It just happens during production. In ten years, maybe people will say that this *No World Order* album was the step in the right direction, it was a good album. You know what I mean? In the end, the most important thing is it being a good album. But for me, from the old days of GAMMA RAY, *Insanity and Genius* was for me, besides the new album, the most exciting thing for guitar arranging. Everybody has their favorite.

**The only GAMMA RAY album I can't get into is *Sigh No More*. I don't know what it is. I've tried. I just can't get it.**

The band was put together for the first tour, half a year after the release of *Heading for Tomorrow*. It was all different styles and we were looking for a style. The album is very diverse. Then also it was in the background of the Gulf War, so everybody was not in a good mood about the future. It was diverse, but had some great songs on it like One with the World.

**How was it coming into a band that already had a name and was doing things?**

It was a little different. When I met Kai, it was 89 at a music school in Hamburg that was doing a crash course in pop music during the holidays. I was there as a bass player, and Kai was there as a singer. He had all these songs for the *Heading to Tomorrow* album, and he already had a band for the studio. Just for the studio. He wanted to have me as a bass player for the tour. During the production of the *Heading for Tomorrow* album, the drummer quit playing drums. The bass player wanted to stay in the band which is why I first played guitar in GAMMA RAY. I played on the *Heading for Tomorrow* album, playing bass on one song to get my name on the album so nobody would say "Who is this?" on the tour. I was there for the production. We even had to find a name first! During the production of the *Heading for Tomorrow* album, it was still the Hansen and [Ralf] Scheepers project! Finally we went out to this rock disco in Hannover, and they played this old song from BIRTH CONTROL called Gamma Ray. And we were like "What about GAMMA RAY?"

**In heavy metal, the guitar is the celebrated instrument, and the bass guitar not so much. You have heavy songwriting credits, but just as a fan, someone going from guitar to bass looks like a demotion in the band.**

Andre Matos from ANGRA told me when I was on tour with them, "Nobody ever did this before!" For me, it was a strange feeling playing guitars and keyboards on stage, and always complaining about Jan's [Rubach] playing. It's always heavy to throw things in on the bass instead of the main notes, the eights and sixteenths.

**For *Somewhere Out in Space* you opened up the entire album!**

There are a lot of freaky things on that album for a metal bass. There's little things like the slapping, and there's a little salsa part on the bass. You won't recognize it unless I show you where it is! Listen to it again and you'll hear <does a salsa bass run, I guess...>. That comes from my variety in music! But it was not that possible on the new album because it was too basic, you know? Very raw. It was fun to show that Daniel and me were together as a rhythm section. The songs have a really beefy sound.

***Somewhere Out in Space* is the most out there album of yours. From beginning to end, when I think about how a complete album should be, *Somewhere Out in Space* is an album I point out to people.**

Oh yeah, I agree! Except the cover. The cover is bullshit! That was really bad. This Finnish guy [Kristian Huitula] made the cover for the *Valley of the Kings* EP, this is great! I love this cover! So we said he could do the album cover as well. This turned out to be not so good. There was no time to check it, so when we saw it, wow, not really good. *Somewhere Out in Space*, when I'm looking

back from the *No World Order* status, I prefer that album to *Powerplant*. It's the freshness of a new band, it's there.

**The whole European hype machine is something that interests me. You guys got lots of attention in the press for the last album, and I think a lot of it was just because you'd painted yourselves blue!**

That's it! We had a lot of cover pages and everything. Now we don't have them. I don't think the press here, they can hype a band if they want to, but only very short. That's a little different than in other music. Metal fans are really different. I always have discussions with the record company, Sanctuary Berlin, I'm always arguing with them! "This press thing is not really important!" They tell me "Yes, it is very important!" Well of course it is for them, it's their job! I don't think it's too important. We could talk for hours about that, but I think having lots of cover pages and reviews and then not a good album, nothing will happen, you know? If people have to know there's a new album out, they have to make a good ad in all the magazine, they have to know when they can get in the shops so they can have a listen. That's the most important thing. We wrote studio reports, and all this news, but it's hard to describe music. People who listen to it will tell a friend, and that's how it works. Not if only the magazines like it. Nobody really believes the magazines. All these concert critics, album critics. If you read a concert review, and you were there yourself and you read it and it was completely different, then that's bullshit! Metal Hammer is doing better now, but I can't read the whole Rock Hard magazine! I get really sick! But those photos were just a really funny idea. And they printed it everywhere! But I really don't so much care about that.

**How's it been being part of Sanctuary, instead of the Noise label?**

It wasn't our decision. Sanctuary just bought Modern Music and told us GAMMA RAY is going on Metal-Is. We're not complaining because it's a bigger label. I talked to Kai about this, the only problem I see is with communication. Before it was only Hamburg and Berlin and everything in German, now it's Hamburg and Berlin, and London! But everything went quite fine besides the booklet and the graphics work. That was a little bit confusing, but it was too late to do something that everyone was happy with so it's just going to be a clear tray jewel case. Kai's not very happy about that. I finally said "There's a CD in there, Kai." Those are things that don't bother me so much. I can be very upset if I do a sound engineer job for another band, if I do the mixing and they go to a mastering studio and the mastering engineer does a shit job.

**For the artwork on the new album, I wanted to know whose idea the dollar sign spaceships were?**

<laughs> That could be Kai's idea. In the original version there were not these dollar sign spaceships. It was either Kai or Henjo's [Richter] idea. The cover painter was painted by a French guy named Herve Monjeaud. He'd also done some work for the IRON MAIDEN fan club. This guy's really good, he's not doing this on the computer, he's really painting in oils. It makes it different if you want to do some changes!

**The past couple albums, the lyrics have been more pessimistic than in the past.**

That's true. The lyrics are not pessimistic! If you look around in the world, the only thing you can get is pessimistic! Be honest! There's shit happening everywhere! I have lots of time in the hospital so I watch TV, and see the news. It's horrible! There's war everywhere, the world is polluted everywhere. There's enough reasons to get pessimistic if you want to. But there's always this hope thing in there. The only pessimistic feeling was really the *Sigh No More* album. "If we're going to die, we don't care." There's always this great hope, in the music and in the lyrics as well. But maybe more in the music. We get letters from fans all over the world about this so I know I'm right with what I say! It might be pessimistic, but you don't have to just say something's bad 2000 times because people have heard it already. But if you point something out and maybe figure out a way out of it, it's a good feeling.

**It's weird having songs like *Armageddon* and the *No World Order* theme from a band that opened up their career with *Lust for Life* and *Heaven Can Wait*!**

<laughs> Yeah, you're right! The hope is still in there. We try to display a lot of positive energy and hope.

**I haven't been able to see the lyrics for the new album yet, it's just what I've been able to pick out by ear so we'll see about this one...**

What do you think about Kai's pronunciation?

**That's not a problem. The thing with Kai, he gets the vocals down great on record, but I have a few bootlegs with Kai where he just hits a note and goes all over the damn place.**

Yeah. That's right. You're just right. We noticed on the last two tours that this is always a problem. When we did the *Land of the Free* album, we had Charlie Bauerfeind working on the album. He produced the vocals. He said "OK Kai, this is the first time you want to sing, so we are going to take all the time we need. But they have to be good." He did a hell of a job! He gave Kai hell! It took about three days just for the vocals for every song. Really. Charlie Bauerfeind is very experienced, he knows what he can do with a vocalist. He knows when to stop for a day and do guitars or something. Of course, live conditions of Kai's voice was not the same. In the studio you can sing every sentence 100 times. We know about that, but before the tour we made a plan with only four shows in a row maximum, then a day off. If he takes care of it, not too much partying, not too much drinking, not too much smoking, it will be OK this time. He's been working on his technique. The last two shows we did were really good. But I know exactly what you're saying about some live shows and the bootlegs.

**I think it's a total credit to GAMMA RAY's songwriting that he follows up his work with Michael Kiske and Ralf Scheepers and then does his own vocals and the band still stands on its own two feet. But I guess to finish this up, if you could go through each GAMMA RAY album and tell me your favorite song off of it and why.**

OK. Starting with the *Heading for Tomorrow* album, my favorite song on this is still Money, because it's the first song I played for GAMMA RAY. And I played bass so it was really right! *Sigh No More*, Dream Healer, because the spirit of the song is so wow, so moody! That's why I like it! *Insanity and Genius*, Heal Me. It's a song that says a lot about my life in that song at that time. The next one was *Land of the Free*. Hmm. My favorite song off the *Land of the Free* album? Rebellion in Dreamland. All you can say about the *Land of the Free* album, sum it up in one song, that song is Rebellion in Dreamland. Then we go to *Somewhere Out in Space*. My favorite in that is my song Shine On! It's just a great song! *Powerplant*, *Powerplant* is difficult. I'd say *Armageddon*, because I've always liked these operatic things. There's a little art in the music, and I like that! And from the new album, ask me next year please! But for now I really like songs like Eagle and Heart of the Unicorn.

**New World Order is the one grabbing me the most. Have you heard of EDENBRIDGE?**

I've heard some things but I don't think I've heard it.

**It's a female fronted band from Austria and it's almost like they made an entire style out of the song Shine On.**

Ah! Yes! Kai played me some of this! Yeah yeah yeah yeah! I heard this! If they want to do it... if they sold 100,000 copies of that I would say "Well, can I have some money please?" But they will not. And it's a very poor version.

**I guess that's all the questions I have here. I want to thank you very much for taking some time out while you're in the hospital there.**

All I have here is time!

**Any final words you want to say to the American reading audience?**

Listen to the album and don't read so much about it! <laughs> I hope we can come in the next year to the States to play there. I hope so! We'll see!

**Discography**

*Heading for Tomorrow* (1990 Noise)

*Sigh No More* (1991 Noise)



There's a lot of details in it. But on the *Roots of Eternity* cover there were lots of details too, but they are harder to see. Even harder than the new one. This one has some computer layers over it that helps the eye see these things when you get close.

**How did you come up with your vocal style? It's the one very unique thing about the band. There's nobody that sounds like that!**

I'm not a natural singer. That's why I sound so strange! If you hear Jorn Lande from ARK, and Beyond TWILIGHT, and all these other guys, the guy from AT VANCE, and Russell Allen, you can hear that these guys are natural singers, and are born to sing. I was born to think I think! It just turned out when I was 16 or something like that, I was in this youth club, and my friends were playing guitar and drums. They were playing Born to Be Wild, and I just grabbed the mic and pretended I could sing! I really couldn't sing. They wanted me as lead singer so it was fun, so I tried to develop it. I tried taking some singing lessons, but after three years they kicked me out of the band. I was better at singing but not good enough at all! The only thing I had on my mind were "Those fucking assholes, those motherfuckers! I'm going show those guys who's the best musician here!" So I found another band, my previous band FEAR ITSELF, and thought we'd make it with this band. So I took some more lessons and started learning how to sing. Before *Roots of Eternity* I started singing properly. I fought my way into singing instead of just being able to sing from the beginning. That's the explanation of this very unique style.

**Do you do all the lyrics?**

No. It's me and Kristian and Mads [Volf], we share it between us. Normally Kristian writes his lyrics that we use, of course I use my own, but with Mads' I have to make small alterations before using them. When he's writing he's writing very fast, it just pops out of his head! He'll write a song in five minutes! Then he doesn't care about the grammatics and all that shit so I have to correct it afterwards. It turns out pretty good sometimes. Which songs did he write, he wrote Shadows with Tales to Tell, and I did some parts of it.

**Who's responsible for the line 'dreaming neon white'?**

Me! He had been writing 'dreaming black and white' and I just thought it would be even cooler to do the 'dreaming neon white' thing. We're all fans of NEVERMORE, aren't we? It's a little tribute to NEVERMORE, just to make it special.

**Who was the Dynasty of Fear song?**

That one was all of us. Kristian came up with the general idea, then I wrote something for it, and I thought it would be cool if we all wrote something for it, so I asked Mads to write one verse. It was a good cooperation between us three. It's hard because we are writing a concept album for the next one. It's about a book called Hyperion by Dan Simmons. I don't know if you've read that, you should, it's incredible. I've written four songs now, just the lyrics. The other guys haven't come up with anything yet. They're really trying, but they're not so good at reading books and getting inspiration from the books without stealing too many words. So they have a hard time of it. So it could be I might be writing the whole album next time. They better shape up, or I'm going to kick their asses!

**What do you think is different about your lyrics and your inspirations and how you approach them that makes your band different from the other fantasy metal bands out there?**

We have this dark mood in our songs. Very sinister. Whereas a lot of the other big bands in the genre are just singing about kings and dragons and fairytales and kiss my ass we're all happy. But the world is not like that! The world is a lot darker than that, so we try to get this dark mood into all of our songs, also the lyrics. We are inspired by HP Lovecraft. We are inspired to write a lot about him, his novels, his short stories. For example, The Chance of Dying in a Dream. How come dreams where you fall off a tall building, or you're driving 200 miles an hour and the cars goes off the road, you always wake up just before you die? You never die in a dream. Well mix this shit with the Cthulhu mythology, and you will die in

a dream. That's the way it turns out. The only other band that I think has this same dark thing is EVERGREY. They have the same dark sinister mood that we have on our records.

**Why do you think more power and traditional styled metal bands don't go for the really freaked out things?**

It's a buyer's market. The people don't want it. When you see the German magazines, or the Italian magazines, the Greek magazines, they want traditional power metal like HELLOWEEN and GAMMA RAY. *Avantasia*, I like it a lot, but it went into the charts everywhere because it's happy with singalong songs. If he had written this opera about in the 1920s in New England searching for the truth about Cthulhu, it wouldn't sell! It wouldn't have gone into the charts! That's what drives a lot of them I think. Whenever you get into this style, you're there and can't get out of it. I hear all these power metal bands coming out today, and I think it's too easy to get signed today if you can just play bass drums.

**This power metal revival has now gone on four full years, with more and more bands and labels and bands and bands. How long can it freakin' last?**

I don't know. I hope it will last for my own sake! But not in the way it does now. It is so oversaturated with power metal bands. The whole market is pissing me off! I'm not supposed to say this but I will anyway. Small crap bands that can't even play properly get to release some shit that five years ago would never have been released. Every damn record company needs to have at least one band in every genre, and all these labels are popping up everywhere. I guess that's the explanation for it. I'm reviewing some records for the Intromental webzine myself. I get to review all the power metal stuff. Lucky me!

**Why did you feel the need to extend the Saga of the Exiles for two more parts?**

That was actually the whole idea of it in the beginning. We did the first song, Nowhereland, I'd read the saga, and it's four books. I thought well, it is going to be four songs. The problem was that we didn't have time to do all the songs before the release of the first album. I just thought, hey, then that's a good way of promoting the first record when the second one is coming out. If people didn't buy the first album and they bought the second, they would know there was a first album where they could hear the two other songs. That's a good way of selling records. Not that I care if Black Lotus sells anymore, I don't want them to make any more money on me! Fucking assholes.

**Well people are going to hunt down that first album and get the best reggae tracks out there!**

<laughs> Now you're being mean!

**Well you can claim to be the inspiration for Yngwie's reggae song.**

I don't want anything to do with reggae. It's so fucking boring! I don't get it.

**What kinds of things have been running around in your stereo lately that you've liked?**

Have you heard the VOLCANO CD? Japanese power metal. It's so fucking great! The new BEYOND TWILIGHT, the new WUTHERING HEIGHTS album. SYMPHONY X has been in my player a lot lately. We listen to so much shit here! We get like 10 CDs a week that has to be reviewed here. Lots of CDs of bands that wants to get into the management. We have like 3200 CDs here in the apartment. I can't say there's one CD we listen to more than the others. Except the WUTHERING HEIGHTS.

**The stuff I've heard from Denmark hasn't had the great errors in English that one would see in bands from Greece, Italy, or Germany.**

English is our second language. We learn it when we're like 10 at school. We start having serious English teaching. We have English movies and MTV and all that shit so the kids know how to speak English already when they are six or seven years old. Not perfect English, but basic English. They don't learn that in Greece or Germany. Whenever you see German television, a show like Beverly Hills 90210, they're speaking German in it. The German people don't get to hear the English language so much like we do constantly.

**On some of the songs on the album, like the one I'm looking at now, The Puzzle, you don't have any writing credits. How is it bringing a song to life when it's not something you wrote?**

The Puzzle is a very old song. I think it's from 95. When we first did it, Kristian brought the lyrics for me and said "OK, you're going to sing this over these riffs", everything. I just put my own way of singing into it. That's all I've put into it. I don't care if I didn't write it. If the other guys did a whole song, and told me exactly how to sing, I would try to do it that way, but then again get my won stuff into it. But it would be cool with me. That's the funny thing about our band. When you see another band, for example WUTHERING HEIGHTS, their guitarist Erik [Ravn] is doing all the stuff. He's composing all the stuff and telling the other guys exactly how he wants it. And a lot of other bands have the natural band leader do all the stuff. When we are rehearsing, we mostly want everybody in the band to be there. We rehearse three times a week, all of us. We write our stuff together, which is a very different process than presenting a whole song that you've done.

**With the new material coming along quite nicely, I guess there's going to be no touring off this album.**

We are working on something with ROYAL HUNT, the band we share a rehearsal room with. They are going on tour this October or November. We have been talking to the manager to see if we can get on as a support act and they seem interested so I guess something is happening. I really want to tour on this album, we've never toured before. In order to double the sales of the album, we have to go out on the road. We will not sell any more CDs without touring, without showing what we are capable of live.

**What do you think would be necessary to get MANTICORA to be seen as one of the premier power metal bands by the normal fans?**

Extensive touring and heavy promotion from a big label. I'm sad to say we are on a label with limited resources. These guys try to do a good job. Whenever we say 'We need 20 more CDs' or 'We need some T-shirts', they're like 'OK!' But they just don't have the money to put full page adverts into the big magazines. Another thing is the normal maturing of the band. You're going to hear a lot of maturing from our first miniCD to *Roots of Eternity*. There's such a big difference. And between *Roots* and *Darkness* there's more maturing. When we do this third album, the sound will be huge compared to the other records. It has a fantastic, great concept that needs to be presented with huge sound. The last thing that will be on this next album is 'To be continued...' because we're going to do a number two which is going to be called The Fall of Hyperion, and it's based on the second book in the series.

**It's weird that you're calling across the ocean and we're talking because your album is so good, but we have to keep talking like you're an underdog.**

Yeah. I feel that way actually. We're not selling 70, 80000 records in Europe like ICED EARTH. We must be the underdogs. That's how I consider our band!

**Well let me just say I think Darkness with Tales to Tell just kicks the shit out of Horror Show!**

Thank you. I'm glad you say that! That's actually a real positive for me, I just bought *Horror Show* and I think it's fucking amazing. So I guess our band must be fucking amazing!

**If there's one song between the two albums that you just wish everybody in the world could hear, which would it be?**

The Chance of Dying in a Dream. It's got it all, it's got amazing bass drums and drum work, it's got very hard riffing, very good guitar solo, good keyboard solo that's cool, and I think I'm doing a very good job on that song particularly. It's so damn powerful! I won't say it's my favorite song on the albums, but I think it's the song that would represent us the best if we would putting a song on some samplers.

**And if there's one song you can just flush down the toilet and make disappear, which one would it be?**

None.

**That's a cop-out answer, man.**

I love all of our material. I'm not disliking anything. There's one song on the mini I'd have kicked off.

**How come the introduction on both albums is called From Far Beyond?**

To be different from other bands. For the first one, it was this Cthulhu thing, so we wanted to present our music as if it came from beyond. And then on this number two, Kristian came up with the idea. Why don't we make the intro the same, with a slight alteration to the sound, and let's call it the same! Fans would get the impression that all our music came from beyond! I don't think anybody has done that before so we are a little original.

**That's all I got. Any final words?**

Not regarding the band...

**Discography**

*Dead End Solution* (1997 Independent)  
*Roots of Eternity* (1999 Black Lotus)  
*Darkness with Tales to Tell* (2001 Scarlet)

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**Out This Week**

**BENEDICTION** *Organized Chaos*  
12- 53:38 Nuclear Blast

It takes a lot of balls to release an album this incredibly dull and boring in this day an age. Six albums in, and between the lot of them, they have maybe one decent, not good but decent, album's worth. BENEDICTION is supposedly death metal, but whether death metal is the proper label to give to music that's not especially fast, brutal, or intense is debatable. And for the record, I absolutely refuse to believe that a single member of this band actually thought they were releasing something to be proud of after listening to the final playback. It's a slow-to-midpaced, clodding collection of moshriiffs thrown together for reasons unknown and set loose in the world for the purpose of banging heads and, well, I don't know. I can't hate the album, really, because I feel sorry for it. Check out the attempted intensity and speed in This Graveyard Earth, how out of synch the drums and guitars seem to be during the thrashy Charon. Weak. To their credit though, it's not entirely dull. I mean, the third-rate vocal riffs from GOREFEST's Freedom that are found on the Diary of a Killer song leaving me rolling on the floor, it's so laughable. And even the real GOREFEST

singer was crap and a half, so just imagine. The vocals just suck in general, really. Dave Hunt should be pelted with rotten tomatoes for this limp, unenergetic performance. He doesn't growl so much as loudly groan. Dude, if you can't be extreme, be good, if you can't be good, be interesting, and if you can't be interesting, be gone! The production, while adequate, is quite frankly the weakest thing Andy Sneap's ever had to his name because at the minimum, I'd have hoped to have a guitar tone that threatens to rip my face off. What, was this recorded in an hour or something? Is BENEDICTION on some sort of Nuclear Blast welfare case for bands from its earliest days? Shun. -tion. SHUN! Cool Wahlin cover though.

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**GAMMA RAY** *No World Order*

11- 51:58 Noise/Metal-Is

Kai and company come back with a new GAMMA RAY album which is, well, a GAMMA RAY album. GAMMA RAY's stock in trade has always been what is now known as 'normal' power metal, and the best songs off of every album have indeed been that type (aside from the massive and different Heal Me). Check out *Blast From the Past*, and all the songs there follow that melodic speed pattern. Yet the great thing about GAMMA RAY has been the trimmings. The weird songs. Off the wall things, whether it's the seemingly spontaneous outbreak of Oh Susanna in the middle of Lost in the Future, the bizarre Money song, Heavy Metal Universe... there were songs that made you stand up and take notice, and separated them from the world. Caused controversy. Were frequently called 'turds' of the album by the dullards who didn't realize such experimentation and fun cemented the status of the straight material. *No World Order* has no such moments of wackiness and replaces it with a strong JUDAS PRIEST vibe (from the glory years), which means a couple things. They are dangerously close to the pack in an oversaturated market, which should scare the living hell out of them considering the founder of the band is also one of the principal creators of this whole power metal thing to begin with! All that said, the meat and potatoes of GAMMA RAY haven't spoiled and don't taste funny. Straight up German power metal with strong songwriting skills showcased. The best run is in the middle of the album with New World Order (despite the chorus being a ringer for IRON SAVIOR's Solar Wings... it was the right decision for Kai to not be involved there anymore), Damn the Machine, and Solid being a great 1-2-3 punch that's good enough for the knockout. Such a KO is only made possible by effective flurries as Heart of the Unicorn and Lake of Tears. It's a good, tidy little album which is far better than *Sigh No More*, more consistent than *Heading for Tomorrow or Insanity and Genius*, but falls short of masterpieces *Land of the Free* and *Somewhere Out in Space*. It hangs pretty close to *Powerplant*, which is my criticism: *No World Order* is a good album, but not the absolute event that a *Gamma Ray* album should be! [www.gamma-ray.com](http://www.gamma-ray.com)

**HEAVENLY** *Sign of the Winner*

10- 54:09 Noise

Their first album sucked. Fifth rate HELLOWEEN clonage (made extra embarrassing by the fact that Kai Hansen and Piet Sielck contributed) that was just unnecessary. But as Noise notes, "Even though the press didn't care much for the album, it turned out to be Noise's bestselling debut in ages." All I can conclude from that is that 1- Noise wants us writers to shut up and just say good things about the album, and 2- HELLOWEEN fans have lots of extra money. But anyways, whereas you could actually identify the *Keepers* riffs on *Coming from the Sky*, here it merely sounds like generic power metal. The singer sounds like Kiske all right, the rest of the band is more galloping melodic speed with tons of double bass, keyboard enhancement, etc. If you know power metal, you know what this sounds like already. If you don't, starting here would be a bad idea. This album not only tells me nothing new, it doesn't even sound that excited about telling it to me. Another album for people with more money than taste. And just be glad this isn't a big hit on MTV Mexico, where they'd be playing the video for *Sign of the Weiner* 20 times a day. <http://heavenly.free.fr/>

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**IN THY DREAMS** *Highest Beauty*

10- 31:59 Century Media/WAR

It's the Swedish problem all over again. Razor sharp, effective death metal of a type that we've heard over, and over, and over, and over, and over again, and still the bands keep coming and still the labels keep shitting out the albums. At least this is on the harder side of things, keeping that AT THE GATES vibe, instead of the sweet flowing melodies of En Fuego. There's got to be more to metal than this though. Listening to the vocals here reminds me of the Blues Brothers. No, they don't play country AND western, but they use both types of faceless, generic extreme vocals. High AND low! Woohoo! I'm bored, people. Excite me! Now! Do it! Shit. Yeah, it's perky, but in the end it's like junk food. You'll likely enjoy it if you're taking it in, but your life's much better off if you just leave the shit alone.

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**NAGLFAR** *Ex Inferis*

5- 27:33 Century Media/WAR

Three years since this last album and two new original songs are all they have? Lazy! So anyway, this filler until their next album (supposedly out in the spring) contains the aforementioned two new songs, a MASSACRE cover (Dawn of Eternity, worth it even if just because the production of the original sucked ass, and you can actually hear this one), and the two songs off of the 1998 *When Autumn Storms Come 7*". This isn't to say this is a worthless band, but come on, fans of the band deserve a bit more, and newcomers deserve a bit better value. So that's what this release isn't. What it is, is NAGLFAR, a top name in the black/death meld, and actually effective at it. A leader. Similarities to DISSECTION and *Nemesis Divina-era SATYRICON* pop up and the intense, is intense. When they let off the gas pedal, I think they're a bit better as things get to breathe more of course, and the clearly audible bass is always a plus. The thing I don't understand about this band is that Jens Ryden did DEAD SILENT SLUMBER, and I mean all of the instruments, yet here he's just the vocalist, and this is his main band. That confuses me maybe just because I like the music of his side project more than this, because constant extremity does tend to get me numb to it all. Opener Of Gorgons Spawned Through Witchcraft is definitely the best song here, with the other original newbie Emerging Through Her Weepings coming next which is a good sign for their next album, and the dynamic shifts of the songs makes the blastblast easier to swallow, although maybe I don't understand the real point within the context of a full throttle extreme metal song, to just put the brakes on and have this synth interlude. But that's NAGLFAR and I can't argue too much with what's going on other to say it doesn't force me to listen... I'm still uneasy about the idea of releasing an mCD with no album yet considering how long the band's taken since the last album, but then I realize I've slammed the idea of this CD when it's the exact same thing AGALLOCH just did. Never mind me. <http://come.to/naglfar>

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**THERION** *Secret of the Runes*

11- 47:10 Nuclear Blast

Such an improvement over *Deggial*, a brilliant THERION album, and I'm a satisfied fan. A choir. A string ensemble. Woodwinds. Brass. A metal band! Anyone familiar with THERION certainly knows the great variety of sounds that they deliver, and anyone not familiar needs to wake up. THERION's reputation was gained through death metal, but for anyone who's hesitated because of that needs to know they've had ZERO death metal elements or influence for some years now, and from *Vovin* on you can avoid that. (Those wanting this kick WITH the extreme elements can check out *Theli* and *Lepaca Kliffoth*, which are reckless enough to have an energy that causes me to name those two as their best albums.) What you get these days is a band which composes its music as a whole. I mean, they don't write their metal song then add classical music over it, and they don't write classical music and just slide a guitar in. It's a surprising whole. Where on *Deggial* I think they went a bit overboard on the chamber music snooze, they've

woken me up and the depth of the textures wins the day. Heavier guitars, a decent amount of double bass, great guitar soloing, and a flowing, calm nature where the music doesn't seem rushed, hackneyed, or awkward. It's a complete, moving whole. I do apologize a bit, as only being familiar with half of THERION's sound, I can't exactly describe classical influences. That six hour Wagner piece Johnsson recommended to me in last week's interview was \$169.99 in my local store, so it's safe to say I won't exactly be checking it out anytime soon. So bear with me. This time out, the concept is based on Odin's travel through the nine worlds, and anyone versed in metal or mythology is going to recognize just way too name of the names mentioned here. THERION's got no real vocalist as is normal, as all vocals are handled by choir (and the occasional soloist) so it really is a total musical experience more than normally listening to a band. And their choices come way out of left field. The acoustic guitar in Ljusalfheim is a perfect example, as at least for me, such an instrument seems almost too basic a choice when you've got a dozen musicians with 'exotic' instruments like oboes and English horns at your disposal, but the simple base for the song gives tremendous room for expansion and growth over it. Hints of Beauty in Black on the open of Schwarzalbenheim bring back some good memories, and how it kicks into the heaviest riffing of the album makes sure this song's a keeper as it doesn't relent on the momentum. Definitely my favorite song. But anyway, regardless of my pitiful attempt at describing this band coherently, the fact is, they are good, and they've stayed unique when half the metal world are bringing in strings and classical influences and they make their songs all sound different from each other. Easily THERION's best since *Theli*. [www.megatherion.com](http://www.megatherion.com)

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**TO/DIE/FOR Epilogue**

10- 74:02 Nuclear Blast/Spinefarm

Goth rock-metal isn't my cup of hot cocoa, but there are a couple of things to point out when talking about this Finnish troupe. The first is the amazing production, including the HUGE drums. The second is that they write a catchy song. Stuck halfway between some, uh, I don't know, upbeat DEPECHE MODE/CURE songs (I'll hardly call myself an expert there but heard enough radio examples...) with metal trapping (including some very metal drumming and guitar solos every so often), I can see where TO/DIE/FOR's popularity comes from, and if the idea is to craft poppy songs with this sound, then mission well accomplished. Sounds a bit too formulated for me to take too seriously though. I would like to complain about one thing that makes me think these guys are complete morons from the utter depths of IQ hell. The final 30 minutes, yes THIRTY MINUTES, are nothing but a riff and beat looped over and over and over FOREVER! They might as well put a sticker on the thing saying "This album is marred by some stupid ass shit that ruins repeated playing opportunities." I really don't know what would be worse, this crap we have (and this riff is the heaviest thing on the album so the part I hate just makes the rest sound weaker... once again, what a great fuckin' idea you guys came up with there), or 29:50 of silence and then hearing the riff once at the end. Ahhh, you've got some decent songs, but come see me again when you're not taking a big old slimy shit on your own album. [www.todieforlove.com](http://www.todieforlove.com)

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**Already Available**

EDGUY *Mandrake*

11- 64:31 AFM

Albums like this are difficult to talk about. On one hand, it's a completely competent HELLOWEEN-inspired power metal album from a band gaining more and more fans. On the other hand, it's a HELLOWEEN-inspired album from a band that for their fifth album can be summed up as 'HELLOWEEN-inspired' by the book power metal without missing any important details. Yeah, Tears of a Mandrake is catchy (the lyrics must be quite interesting, as mandrake is a friggin plant, as depicted on the cover), Nailed to the Wheel is a bonafide barnstormer, The Pharaoh is cool, and then we have goofy shit like All

the Clowns. All the Clowns? What the hell is this? So I was on the fence on what to think here... until... one absolutely inarguable point. Great albums might have average, uninspired moments. Great albums might actually have mistakes. They might even have a serious misstep, a really bad idea. Experimentation gone awry. But great albums never have truly boneheaded, blatantly ignorant moments. The looney tunes cartoon voice that declares 'Resistance is Futile' in Save Us Now is such a massively stupid moment that I am no longer on the fence of declaring this 'A very well produced and executed example of the same old, same old', and instead I'll go ahead and declare *Mandrake* a 'complete exercise in unnecessary trendwork' and I should also mention that while pure power metal fans seem to be liking this, there really is nothing that sets them apart from everyone else, and as one quite disastrous moment shows, this is not a great album. [www.edguy.nu](http://www.edguy.nu)

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**LOST HORIZON *Awakening the Word***

10- 43:30 Koch/Music for Nations

I never thought I'd give such a good album such a shitty grade. This is power metal, and good power metal at that. Songs full of hooks, great vocals, clever guitar tricks. But all of that is made irrelevant by the fact that the band is portrayed as superheroes on the cover and in the booklet, and it's just too silly. The band has a slogan 'No Fate. Only the Power of Will.' Yet they express this in lyrics such as 'Hey man! What is this?! Sounds like wail of a wimp. Did you let loser side take command?!' I sometimes think MANOWAR has a goofy image, but I can believe Joey DeMaio goes home and says things like 'Oh, mama, do you have to listen to Perry Como? Can't you listen to DEEP PURPLE or something?' I can't believe LOST HORIZON as anything but comic book goofiness. I guess LOST HORIZON needed some sort of strong image because for a huge label like Music For Nations (with whom the band signed a 'Covenant' with, which I guess means they have a 'licensed covenant' through Koch) to jump on power metal at this late stage is silly and they didn't want a dead-on-arrival metaltrend release like their attempt at black metal with DARK MOON. While this CD could be life-changing, and maybe even world-changing, if it got into the ears of every adolescent on the planet, the fact is it's going to be going into the same ears as people who have been into GAMMA RAY, HAMMERFALL, BLIND GUARDIAN, etc for years. Thumbs way the fuck down but hoping for them to get real by next album... Oh who am I kidding? I listen to this frequently and the combination of Manowar and Tony Robbins lyrics are hilarious and hit too close to home all at the same time. [www.oncelosthorizon.com](http://www.oncelosthorizon.com)

**SAVATAGE *Poets & Madmen***

12- 66:28 Nuclear Blast

You'll be glad to know that SAVATAGE has gotten some bite back. There are even moments that remind you that this is indeed the same band that did *Hall of the Mountain King*. You might even be glad to know that they certainly haven't abandoned the style they pursued in the 90s (highlighted by the incredibly massive *Dead Winter Dead*). What you won't be glad to know is that as a concept album, this thing is worse than *Sons of Thunder*, God damn it. Full story is printed, there's a photograph of a woman stuck in the booklet for some unknown reason, and that part of it is just pathetic. Jon Oliva is back on vocals here, but from ALL indications, this new guy they got for the tour really brings out the best of the band. I enjoy this album. I really enjoy this album. But Paul O'Neill is hardly a good lyricist and it's the kind of thing you want to hide from people when they come. Overall, the album is good, meaning the music is great. Still waiting for it to just chop my head off though... [www.savatage.com](http://www.savatage.com)

**SHADOW *Shadow***

9- 42:02 Spikefarm/Century Media

So why are you supposed to care about yet another album that sounds like it was pieced together from outtakes in the archives of Studio Fredman? Because they come from Japan and not Sweden? Or because there's a woman barking it out? Here's a clue to some people who need it.

Metal is a worldwide phenomena. This isn't an age of tough distribution and slow information. Every fucking city and country doesn't need their own version of a popular band anymore. So what's the lure here? Why should you or I care? Is it the fact that a woman is screaming like a man? Am I supposed to care beyond the voice? I wouldn't know that this was a woman if I wasn't told. Is the fact that she has tits supposed to turn me on because brutal frontwomen in metal are rare? Most well stocked magazine outlets have porn specifically featuring Asian women and it's all over the net too so I don't care about that. So it's the songs then. Problem is, this album doesn't have 'songs', it has a sound. And you know what? I've heard this, and I've heard it better. Not only is this a clone, but it sounds timid and not confident, which differentiates it from say, ENFORSAKEN. I have *Storm of the Lights Bane*, I have *Jester Race*, I have *Slaughter of the Soul*, I have *The Gallery*. I give it credit for not being an abortion in execution, but I will personally egg the house of anyone who buys this because that's just sending the message to more bands and more labels that the horse just ain't quite dead enough yet.

**SKYFIRE *Timeless Departure***

9- 41:53 Hammerheart

Described by some as IN FLAMES meets RHAPSODY, and described by me as a CHILDREN OF BODOM clone. I guess people compare to RHAPSODY instead of Yngwie because the keyboards are more prominent. See me pointing at the metal people who are confused by keyboards and laughing at them. Ha ha ha. Aside from the vocalist being a talentless, monotonous hack of a Gothenburg-style screamer, the band isn't really bad at all. Some slower, dare I say 'proggy' touches here and there help break things up and I hope for great things in the future. But this isn't it. <http://listen.to/skyfire>

**SONATA ARCTICA *Silence***

13- 62:02 Century Media/Spinefarm

The debut album *Ecliptica* was hailed as a powerful Eurometal release, and it was, even if all it did was answer the 'what would STRATOVARIUS sound like if they were a really, really hungry band?' question. *Silence* sure isn't the sound of a band still on the rise. They've already settled in, camped out on the couch, and made themselves a sandwich on the sound of their debut, which was the sound of another band. Disappointing in a global sense of metal yet fans of the style should be satisfied. So maybe it's still STRATOVARIUS worship, and they just condensed the 'good to boring' evolution down to just their first two albums? But it's great when even a 100% melodic metal band like this throws in a death growl (just one word), just on principle, you know? That the lyrics are here-and-now and not dragons and wizards (as far as I can understand them anyway) should excite nobody because the album could use them, as there's no magic here. [www.sonataarctica.com](http://www.sonataarctica.com)

**THUNDERSTORM *Sad Symphony***

9- 50:43 Northwind

It's an Italian trio doing their darndest CANDLEMASS impersonation. Yup. Absolutely. Not really much more to say. Of course they're not as good as CANDLEMASS. Or SOLITUDE AETURNUS. Or much of anything with Mike Wead's name on it. So maybe this review should just be a bookmark for later reference more than any sort of thing to convince you to spend money? Still, fans of the style (and that's fucking all of you, RIGHT?) don't have too terribly many choices to get their heavy metal doom fix and you could certainly do a lot worse than Thunderstorm. Although I expect much more come album number two. The only real complaint about the actual album on its own is that Northwind puts this album in a digipak, pulls out all the stops, and all of the interior (and back cover) illustrations are these fifth grade skeletons-in-the-dungeon drawings, pretty much making a mockery of the real-deal cover art that's 300 years old. [www.geocities.com/thunderstormlair](http://www.geocities.com/thunderstormlair)

**TRISTANIA *World of Glass***

10- 60:37 Napalm

The previous album *Beyond the Veil* was an excellent milestone in this beauty and the beast gothic metal genre.

This one isn't. Before getting into what this album is, let's discuss why. The album began recording in February of this year. Writing credits were given to Anders Hoyvik Hidle and Einar Moen. Morten Veland, who had writing credits on 70% of *Beyond the Veil*, was announced in May as having left the band months before. Right before going into the studio? While in the studio? Was this album written on the fly? It sounds like it. And maybe by that standard it isn't a bad album. It's not like I've wanted to just turn the damn thing off. But it's dull! It Reminds me really of an unsophisticated version of modern THERION, but without classical instruments (well, a violin pops in every now and then) and having three lead vocal styles (growl, clean moany gothic male, and great female vocals). It doesn't have the little nuances THERION does that makes their latest interesting, it doesn't have the pure bombast that made *Beyond the Veil* so striking. The tiny electronica influence is annoying as well. While this certainly isn't anything I'll be coming back to very much, if at all, I'll give them the benefit of the doubt and chalk it up to the wrong member leaving at the wrong time, and see if this lineup can do great things if given proper time to write an album. [www.tristania.com](http://www.tristania.com)

WINDS Of Entity and Mind

5- 22:22 Avantgarde

ARCTURUS is the word that keeps coming to me over and over again. I want to come up with some hip phraseology, 'spacey, wandering progressive metal' or some such, but this sounds a lot like ARCTURUS when they shuffle along to a beat with the piano and scant guitar backing them up. That the bands share a drummer and guitar player (who is an amazing lead player) doesn't help the comparison. It's different in that it doesn't have that theatric feel to it (which I guess is pretty significant a difference) and singer Lars Eric Si is pretty boring, which will account for the low rating in comparison to the 'ARCTURUS' vibe, which I'd usually shit my shorts about. Not bad, but he brings no excitement to the songs at all, and the five musicians around him are so clearly better at their instruments than he is with his voice. Kind of smushes any emotions that pull away from that voice in your head saying 'This makes me want to listen to *La Masquerade Infernale*.' I'd definitely want to hear where this goes from here, as aside from the vocals there's not one single thing to complain about on this EP.

WITHIN TEMPTATION *Mother Earth*

10- 53:54 DSFA

After four years, this band has finally followed up *Enter*. Gone are any and all male vocals/growls (not counting choirs of course), which were really the only elements making the band 'metal' to begin with. So then what we're really left with is symphonic hard rock with Sharon Den Adel's vocals taking front and center. Very much a unique entity, the songs are fabulously layered, with the heavy guitars not taking the backseat to keyboards in every situation (just the majority!). It's no surprise that I'd consider Dark Wings the best song here as it's the heaviest by far. But the playing and songwriting throughout are strong so that even the seven to eight minute songs like *The Promise* or *Deceiver of Fools* don't drag. Den Adel's voice is simply awesome as well as she does the soprano bit, but not to an annoying extreme as her voice has a good earthy tone to it as well. Depending on my mood, I want to declare this as 'a triumph', or merely 'a good album', so the reality is likely somewhere in the middle. But the extravagant themes and creative flair throughout should be good enough for anybody to at the very least justify the purchase, if not be ecstatic about it... But the biggest lame-o move is that the really skimped on the packaging (no lyrics!) so they put all of those extras on the website and the CDROM. The internet is a fantastic way to communicate, it is a fantastic way to get information, but I will go to my damned grave not liking being tied to a computer to actually have the complete package or to listen to music in the first place. [www.within-temptation.com](http://www.within-temptation.com)

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Sorry I couldn't get in touch with Mikael this past week, I'll try to get more details from him before he leaves on tour with KATATONIA and NOVEMBRE... Listenable Records is promoting the new PALE FOREST album *Exit Mould* as the

first listenable album on the label. So does that make the rest unlistenable? Think before using those cute marketing slogans, guys... The End has gotten a new distributor and new SCHOLOMANCE (wait til you see the interview that will run the week of this album's release) and GREEN CARNATION will be out January 8, and VIRGIN BLACK's *Sombre Romantic* will be getting a Stateside release February 12... AGALLOCH is expected to be finished recording their new album next month. In 1999, when they said no second album until 2002, we never thought we'd make it, did we?... From the Amateur Puublicity Department, we got a hellishly funny press release concerning an Ann Boleyn (Hellion) tour going on as planned overseas despite current events. "When asked if the group feared a terrorist attack, bassist Eric Bacica replied, "It's not the terrorists that everybody needs to worry about--- it's our rhythm section!" "Yeah, that's fuckin' marvelous and shows that fifth brain cell isn't quite working yet. This press release was received October 28, where we were informed "Los Angeles area music fans will get a chance to see the act one night only at Paladino's on Saturday, Nov. 3rd when they are set to make a surprise appearance." "Surprises" are not announced days ahead in a press release, people. A simple list of tour dates would have retained an illusion of sentiment thought being possible from that camp... ANDROMEDA is writing for their next album to be released next year. Supposedly not a negative word has been written about the band, so I suppose I have to throw my two cents in about how it fucking sucks that they recorded a new vocalist for *Extension of the Wish* and re-released it in Europe because apparently they were unhappy with Lawrence Mackory. I had an interview scheduled with this band over the summer and missed the call, which is too bad because all I was going to do was praise Mackory to high heaven for giving the world of prog metal something different for a vocal approach. I haven't heard this new guy David Fremburg, but I have this sinking feeling he's a faceless progmetal glop of poo. I hope they prove me wrong but a band put in a situation where the damned vocalist was a last minute substitution on a debut album seems either a victim of circumstance, or prophets of their own goddamn doom. The new album better move mountains and burn fire... ENTWINE will record a new album in January... KALMAH is in the studio this month recording their second album... MARDUK is trying to get over here in January to tour, and have a box set in the works which will include, among other things, a video of their first concert. That takes some balls... NAGLFAR are currently recording their third album *Sheol*... ROYAL HUNT is already writing their followup *The Mission*, reportedly to be called *The Watchers*. A load of Japanese people are happy I'm sure, as are the five prog metal fans who will declare this next one as having 'tasty melodies and crunchy guitars', thereby tricking a few thousand people into buying it on the promise it won't put their asses to sleep. It won't keep that promise if history is a guide... NIGHTMARE release their next album on Napalm... DARKWELL are in the studio to record an mCD... TRAIL OF TEARS signed to Napalm for three albums and go into the studio in February to record their next album... VINTERSORG's DVD *The Contrast Excursion* (the *what?*) will include rehearsals and interviews. Let's not rush too much garbage to market because the guy's getting popular, OK, please?... SUMMONING's new one, *Let Mortal Heroes Sing Your Fame*, is out in February, and if Napalm has money and any balls, they should market it with MIDDLE EARTH in big red letters on the store shelf. It might actually sell a couple copies. Maybe make the cover art some topless hobbits... SIEBENBERGEN's fourth album, *Plagued Be Thy Angel*, is out in February too. Apparently 'demons' 'haunted' the recording. If the past tells the future, then the only horror worse than recording the album will be listening to it... MYRIAD's second album *Introspection* is in the can... SIEGFRIED, featuring LotFP's final covergirl Sandra Schleret, releases *Drachenherz* in January. I'll bet you big bucks that this one time I desperately want a particular pair of tits on the cover of a Napalm Records release, they aren't going to do it. I'm highly looking forward to this one though and anyone that heard Sandra's work with DREAMS OF SANITY knows why... MACTATUS will commit suicide in January. And there was much rejoicing! Oh, wait, actually, they will record *Suicide* in January. My bad... David DeFeis on the upcoming VIRGIN STEELE reissues: "Dear Friends, VIRGIN STEELE Fans & Ever Faithful, Eternal Metal Listeners, as regards the comments made by a certain Jack Starr, here is the true account of things. Yes in 1982, I did get together with Jack, to form the early version of the band. Yes we did record two albums and an EP. However, that... was a very long time ago, and in the intervening years, I made 9 (nine) other recordings with Edward Pursino on guitar, toured

Europe extensively, achieved greater success both artistically and commercially, and in general became much more well known than the early lineup ever was. Jack seems to have forgotten that he was only in the band for about 2 years. Edward has been with me for 18 glorious years! So... as far as the ultimate presentation of how those early works were to be revealed... I will reserve that right! I have been the guy who has been in the trenches the longest and who has made the name mean something to people all over the world with my music, not Jack. He wants to now ride down the road that I paved with my serious efforts and hard work! In truth, most of the VIRGIN STEELE Fans today have little or no knowledge of the sound of the early band. For many our *Noble Savage* album is thought to be the first album. I encounter this fact every time we tour. Therefore, I did not want to confuse any of our Fans by putting out something that I felt would not be a true representation of who and what we are now/have achieved. So my plan was to reissue those works in an updated light. As I do own/possess all of the original master recordings, I began to re-master, and in some cases re-mix some of the first album. All was turning out quite well. I had informed Jack on many occasions of my plans, but for some reason, as I was nearing the completion of the first album's rebirth, he began making very unreasonable demands. He wanted me to basically take the old vinyl records and burn a CD master from them! He cares nothing for the quality of the sound reproduction, he just wanted to take the budget I was to have for the re-mastering, and pocket that. So in essence he is quite foolish, as I would have put out a quality release that the early members all could have been proud of and... could have received earnings from. Jack's unprofessional attitude and outlandish demands and his insulting remarks made me say forget it. It was not truly worth the aggravation. I have a superior band now and decided to re-record those songs that I liked the best from that period. We have done a killer job of re-recording tracks like *Don't Say Goodbye* (Tonight), *A Cry In The Night*, *Guardians Of The Flame*, etc. I have every right to do this, as I am the composer! Yes, some songs were composed with Jack and yes if he wishes, he could re-recorded them too. I don't care. So in conclusion, *The Book Of Burning* is a collection of 8 early songs re-recorded, and 8 new songs. This work is 77 minutes long! It is not a rip off, it's a well recorded, well performed collection of cool songs that I have composed. Some of the new songs are composed by me and Edward and some are songs that were written by Jack and myself in 1997. Those 1997 songs have been newly re-written by me this year, and are vastly different than the demos I made with Jack. I certainly have every right to us those songs, as my name is on the copyrights because I wrote them! So there is no deception here. I am telling you exactly what I intend, a rarities album made by the True members of VIRGIN STEELE, those members who have been in the group for a very long time and have done serious roadwork with me. The old band never toured the world the way we do now! Those members were not really interested in keeping things together for the long duration or the long haul. So once again to clarify in everyone's mind, *The Book Of Burning* is a new creation, not a re-kindling of the past, but an exploration of older songs that I have composed, seen through new eyes/ears & technology today. The other album, *Hymns To Victory*, is the "best of". As you see Jack is seriously out of the loop! *Hymns To Victory*, contains tracks which date from *Noble Savage* to today, and does included some re-mixes of classic songs, plus re-masters and bonus tracks. All is stated very clearly for the fans who are interested in knowing about these recordings. As far as Jack revealing the whole VIRGIN STEELE STORY..... Well...Jack has no knowledge of the whole VIRGIN STEELE story, because he was not around for it! He was only in the band for 2 years!!! I was there at the beginning, am still here now, and I always will be. Edward, has been around for 18 years. And...We here in VIRGIN STEELE today, have created a beautiful family like situation. The chemistry between Edward and myself is legendary. The contributions of Frank Gilchrist are enormous & multifaceted. Our new member Joshua Block is a real talent and our sometimes drummer Frank Zummo is fabulous as well. We all get along well and respect each other tremendously. It has been no secret all these years that I have been carrying the VIRGIN STEELE Banner these many long years with help from the extraordinary family I just mentioned. Why has Jack not been able to sustain his career, or keep a band together, or land a record deal? We, VIRGIN STEELE, maintain our career, because of the honesty, integrity and quality we inject into every release, tour, interview, etc....!!! The Fans know the score, the facts, the truth and acknowledge this. We Thank you Sincerely, The

Fans, The Friends, The Ever Faithful Eternal Metal Listeners, for your never ending support, faith, honour and belief. Stay well and remain Forever... Invictus!!! By The Hammer & The Nine Let Victory Be Thine! By The Gods & Goddesses, David Defeis, VIRGIN STEELE October 30th, 2001" Yeah, that's laying it on a little thick but we get the point... Dark Symphonies is re-released WITHOUT FACE's *Deep Inside* on December 10 with new artwork. They might want to keep it secret that it was originally out on Hammer Productions and then got a perfect score in Metal Hammer Hungary, which is the same company... NOVEMBERS DOOM is recording their new album *To Welcome to the Fade*, and is keeping a journal up at [www.novembersdoom.com](http://www.novembersdoom.com)...

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Underground music magazine Worm Gear had released seven issues before LotFP had ever released its first issue. LotFP released seven free newspaper issues, by the example that Worm Gear and Sloth had set, before transforming into its current format, and now Worm Gear has released its tenth issue. It's a survivor. I have those very early issues, photocopied and sidestapled, selling for \$5. I've seen it grow. I've seen editor Marty Rytkonen's start with Metal Maniacs, his features, reviews, zine column (his much-too-kind review of LotFP zine #1 in Metal Maniacs pretty much set me on my way and convinced me to keep going after the initial unexpected labors of a zine), his demo reviews. The man's got all the credentials and Worm Gear is one of the top zines for the dark and the extreme. But I don't think anyone's ever really dug in deep and really attempted to answer perhaps the one important question: If you haven't a clue about the scene it covers, exactly how useful is the magazine? How does it stand up as a publication if you take it out of its element? People who enjoy zinedom tend to forget that they are not there for you to read about your favorite bands and cheer on the clever questions posed to your idols. The whole point is to expose bands to a potential audience that don't get the coverage anywhere else. Realistically, it's going to be a combination of both because no person who puts the time and effort into a magazine is ever going to pass up an opportunity to feature their favorites no matter how well known they are... So let's get to it. First, the facts. Worm Gear #10 is 72 pages, all newspaper, with two sides to the coverage (and two editors actually, but Marty's the metal guy so who else would I focus on?): metal, and 'experimental.' No page numbers, no table of contents, but you really should read the whole thing to get anything out of it anyway. Text is real small, pictures at a minimum (although the design is far from barren), so this thing's just packed. After reading the interviews, it's pretty obvious that they are pretty much all either emailed interviews, or edited in such a way to make it a down-to-business affair. It's a valid approach, I suppose, there's several things that can make the mag breathe a little more. The interviews are too down to business. No tangents, no off the wall questions, no attempts to 'trap' some of these people who'd have you believe they are trying to cause social downfall through their music, and not even any real enthusiastic expressions of fandom for the music. It's all business. In theory, that's cool, and in practice, it is great for sniffing out the poseurs. Email interviews where the band ends responses with a slogan ("The war must be fought on all fronts!") do bring a laugh, and just once I'd like somebody to say over a phone "Might hails! Hail Satan!" Written interviews give too much opportunity for some of these musicians to get caught up in their own bullshit instead of answering questions like human beings. OK, I can see doing an email interview with CLANDESTINE BLAZE from Finland, but KRIEG is from New Jersey, KULT OF AZAZEL from Florida. Would it have hurt to pick up a phone and give us some human beings talking, instead of for example Lord Imperial giving us unanswered rants about how black metal is about depopulation and how "Muslims, Jews, people who worship the tree in your backyard, they all need to fucking go!" That Worm Gear doesn't try to hide such things is pretty admirable, and shows a willingness to get at the truth as the artist sees it, but I'd really appreciate it if Worm Gear would actually declare its editorial stance on the subject. Do such subjects pop up because members of the staff share such beliefs? Is it just an unpleasant byproduct of negatively emotionally charged music and the ideology covered impartially because it's the music that matters? Clarify, please! But back on topic, interviews with THE BLACK LEAGUE, BENUMB, and a 1995 BATHORY interview (where's the promised MANILLA ROAD transcript?) are actual conversations and the interviews seem to be kept under a more realistic umbrella... except for Quorthon of course who could get hit by a car and would respond to you asking if he's alright by shouting "Borje is not my father!" His excuses

through the years on this matter are crap. Quorthon is darkhaired and 6'4", so obviously how can he be the son of someone who's blonde and 6'1"? What color is the sky in your world, man? A pleasant surprise in the form of a knowledgeable interview with the folkloric HAGALAZ RUNEDANCE rounds out the good stuff as far as interviews. This next comment doesn't have anything to do with Worm Gear but a NUCLEAR DEATH reissue is advertised in the magazine and until seeing yet another looks-like-a-1<sup>st</sup>-grader-drew-it example of cover 'art', I'd forgotten just how pitiful that band really was. It's astounding to think anyone's actually going to pay for that. So then, the reviews. Since lately Worm Gear's been coming out once a year, they absolutely pack the reviews in to a sick degree. 33 pages of reviews is just insane! The writing on the reviews is certainly hit or miss as they cover demos, vinyl, and label releases. Lots of stuff nobody's ever heard of, which helps to analyze the reviewing style and leave out the 'I can't believe he said that about that album! I love that album! Factor. Worm Gear has a staff of near a dozen people doing reviews, almost all taking the 'I am Lord of Good Taste in Music' which is definitely good in that real judgements are made, but bad in that with half a dozen strong personalities coming at you review after review, it gets a bit like shellshock before too long. There are three main reviewers that handle the bulk of everything in this section. Scott Candey handles 'experimental' and I can't say anything good or bad there because I've no clue. Loren Ballanti takes aim at some of the more creative extreme albums, and he's good at figuring out the essence of each release, but he's got some serious flaws that take his credible approach and flush it down the toilet. Note: The intelligent reviewer doesn't describe music as "gay." Ever. Marty himself is the rock solid reviewer, describing and judging from a solid foundation of knowledge and communicates it all clearly, effectively, and without talking down to the reader. Hell, I can't even do that. Fix Ballanti's more arrogant downfalls, and you have the triad that should handle every damned thing here. Just reading the opening sentences of these three guys versus the peanut gallery shows who knows what they're doing and why, and who is a published writer only for the fact the main three guys can't do everything. There's some real bottom of the barrel writing here as Matt Skrzypezak, Jeff Savage, Matt Fry, and especially Raul Navarro just stand out as just not having the writing class as the main three and the fact that their reviews are right next to Marty, Loren, and Scott's makes it way too obvious. The writing crew has got to tighten up because I think it undermines the serious work being done. Guys like Don Anderson, Carl Schultz, Brain Woodworth, and Jason Walton get the job done, in an unspectacular fashion (well, Anderson's rant against DEW OF NOTHING's last album and telling brutal death metal to go away is pretty spirited, even if it doesn't tell very much about the album being reviewed at all). The only universal problem with the review section is the treatment of power metal. As a major underground magazine, albums of that style are going to get in these guys' hands and it can be downright dangerous! Not that I disagree on the final judgement of many of the reviews (check out how I slice n dice some power metal here, and claimed to absolutely adore the genre until getting buried by way too much second rate shit), but it's how they talk about the genre to begin with, like by nature it's got wall-eye and a bad odor and all these goofballs screaming their lungs out for Satan have some inherent credibility over them. I don't think a single reader would complain, or maybe even notice, if all such coverage disappeared from the pages of Worm Gear, since you're obviously not happy dealing with it. In the end, for the subject matter, Worm Gear is excellent. More reviews than you can ever remember you read certainly makes one knowledgeable in itself just by being able to rattle off bands and styles. Interviews that position the artists where they think they should be (which isn't necessarily even close to reality), and all the principle writers can be considered real authority. Definitely some minor holes that need to be addressed for Worm Gear to be the perfect zine, but no gaping wounds I don't think. Reigning in reviewers from reviewing styles they can't bring themselves to appreciate, making a 'no-gay' verbage rule, and taking some effort and picking up the phone in all the interviews would be my suggestions. But nobody looking at this can deny the pile of work it is and the value it lends to the violent sectors of the underground. To order a copy of Worm Gear #10, send \$2(US)/\$3 foreign, to PO Box 426, Mayfield MI 49666 [korgull@chartermi.net](mailto:korgull@chartermi.net) <http://crionicmind.org/wormgear/>