

these days with bands who have *begun* with a threatening sound only to later "move on" to other spheres... good luck with that. (YA)

DEIPHAGO - FILIPINO ANTICHRIST

Hells Headbangers, 2009

There is no contest: the most chaotic and extreme recording featured in this issue of *Convivial Hermit* is Deiphago's "Filipino Antichrist," a band from (wait for it...) the Philippines. The band are touted in some places as black metal or "war metal" (which to me is something like black metal's retarded cousin), but I think the most accurate term to describe Deiphago would be Noise, fucking noise, plain and simple. This is like what Massonna or C.C.C.C. might sound like with the addition of sloppy gravity blasts, except that the Japanese noise bands mentioned above invest their sound with dynamics and some degree of intelligence, whereas Deiphago's music is both as intellectually and viscerally void as watching paint dry. At the risk of alienating myself even further from their fans - or fan - I cannot help but wonder whether this was recorded spontaneously or as some kind of joke. But then one must keep in mind that the band has been around since 1989. After no less than twenty years of experience in the field, any such joke would have worn thin by now, or would it not? Being as I am a victim of the West and its teachings, with a limited understanding of the Asian-Pacific culture, even one as open and heterogeneous as the Philippines, perhaps I am not in the best position to criticize. There is a long running joke in the metal underground about recordings sounding so bad, or magazines printed so poorly, that they could only have come from the Philippines. Not to feed into this stereotype any further, which I am sure is in the main false and stupid, Deiphago transcend the "bad" and elevate themselves to some new level, sounding like some ordinary thrash or grind metal group passed violently through a human-size blender, every element of their sound feeling sore and bloody like a 29 minute sustained car accident. It's a true cacophony from start to finish, even during the Sarcophago cover song, which I imagine had some structure to it in its original incarnation! But I am being too facetious. Perhaps what bothers me most about Deiphago is not their noise but that they are being sold as a metal band, when they aren't, and that they are being carried by an actual label, which has invested actual money in their work and existence, complete with a nice painting by a person who conceivably knew in advance of where his work would end up. Aside from the cliché song titles and themes, the artwork, the logo and the photos - in short, everything, except the sound - this has more to do with extreme noise than anything else, and unfortunately: it's not even *good* noise. (YA)

DENIAL - CATACOMBS OF THE GROTESQUE

Asphyxiate Recordings, 2009

I like the idea of recapturing the magic of the early 90s European death metal underground, since, let's face it, releases from bands like Demigod and Demilich - bands that to some sizeable extent this release is patterned after - are still of great importance to this day; but the fact is that it takes much more than "sound" to make any mark in the underground circa 2009. Not when the underground is as neck-deep in crap as it is now. Denial, from Mexico City, can be likened to a cross between Carnage, Demigod's "Slumber of Sullen Eyes" and some early Monstrosity circa "Imperial Doom", replete with extremely harsh, scraping vocals that sound like gravel rising from the earth, guitar distortion as heavy as your mother-in-law and tremolo parts that sound like a horde of evil insects acting on instructions from the Prince of Darkness. In a few words, the sound is great, and that it was mastered by Dan Swano does not make matters any worse, a true veteran of death metal (even if he dislikes death metal himself, or so I have heard). But the problem is like this... when you listen closely in on the songs, only a few of the riffs transcend noise in any way, the rest seeming like filler, pieces of fluff scattered about to keep things heavy and "brutal". Aominable Undead, as an example of one of the better tracks, has a nasty, snapping riff about one-minute in, but it does not last for long. Before one knows it another generic array of haphazard notes slaps into the ears at full force, and then things just go downhill fast. It is a situation where I'd imagine that, if I was somehow capable of stripping away the noise, I'd be left with just a bunch of half-baked ideas; the sound, literally, *makes* this album. Without

the production and the obfuscating distortion: no more Denial. This, I think, is what keeps Denial from really going all the way - to the glory years, that is. It would also explain why, strangely enough, half-listening to "Catacombs..." proved to be more engaging and interesting than listening to it with full-attention. Taking it in partly unconscious lets the imagination fill in the senseless passages that litter the release, complete with senseless solos. What does that say of this album? But on the plus side: the sound is monstrous, some of the heaviest I have heard in a long time outside of brain-damaged "slam" death metal, and when they do accidentally hit the nail on the head, they fucking hit it hard, evoking a morbid, gruesome feeling on par with the classics. My only wish is that it would happen more often, but for that we always have the originals... (YA)

DESIDERII MARGINIS - SEVEN SORROWS - Seven Sorrows

Cold Meat Industry, 2007

I will be perfectly honest: my truthful fascination for superior, well-performed dark ambient music, especially of the Cold Meat brand, has always been undermined by a propensity on my part to grow bored of this music after the tenth minute or so. So far, only a precious few of those living-room projects - viz. Raison d'Être and Atrium Carceri - have succeeded in combining the required dark, minimalist aesthetics with an elusive yet musical quality in such a way that getting involved into their world for the duration of an album comes as a natural thing rather than half-hearted submission to long mapped-out patterns. Since their debut, I've found Sweden-based Desiderii Marginis rather good at what they were doing, namely the Raison d'Être-aping thing, but not so as to spark further interest. That much has changed with the release of *Seven Sorrows*, as the band added on some tracks an implement that endows them with a valuable trademark, as much as it blends wonderfully into their sound: the acoustic guitar. Granted, it will not go beyond the occasional flat, woeful chord, strummed stubbornly, neo-folk style, for the entire span of a track ("Constant Like the Northern Star", "I Tell the Ancient Tale"...). But somehow, weighed up against the intrinsic bareness of the compositions, the crystalline presence of the guitar is enough to nurture a flowing, rippling dynamic that cements the ambient discourse together like a spinal column. It also serves the purpose of suggesting a nostalgic, fin de siècle atmosphere. Accordingly, the album in its entirety reaps the fruits of the decidedly elegiac profile bestowed on its most memorable tracks. Enhanced with some very expressive spoken words and the appreciable breadth of its sound base, *Seven Sorrows* partakes of a coherent, smoothly executed and fairly refreshing vision of how to stand true to the principles of the genre while escaping the atavistic tediousness of too many modern-day ambientists. (BG)

DEVOURMENT - UNLEASH THE CARNIVORE

Brutal Bands, 2009

A band considered legendary by many, probably in some way highly influential on the latter, 21st century wave of powerful albeit soulless, robotic death metal bands, Devourment has never played on my stereo up to this album as I kept confusing them with another band, probably some other kind of name related to consumption that I cannot locate right now. Death metal used to be, for a very short period of my life, my first love in metal, but now it's come to a point where I only acquire three or four new death metal albums a year, and of those I usually end up trading or selling three. Let me just put it this way: death metal is not an active interest in my life. It hasn't been for years, and it really isn't now. Well, with Devourment the tide had turned the moment I heard their *Fed To The Pigs* song on a magazine sampler. Amazingly heavy yet in some way almost cinematic in its atmosphere, I was honestly moved by what I heard. The drumming especially captured an immense sense of drama, almost epic, really, if you can imagine "brutal death metal" in any sense epic. So I correspondingly took a chance against my better instincts (band members have names like Captain Piss, wear t-shirts picturing dogs having sex with women, while holding beer bottles in photographs) and ordered this album. The verdict is pretty much ambivalent, never mind the requisite asinine lyrics and subject matter. At first I was impressed by the rumbling, stomach-pounding heaviness carried through by the "chugga-chugga" riffs and the ground-level vocal earthquakes - just fucking nasty - but beyond the sheer heaviness I did find other things

to enjoy or "learn from". The vocal style and the general approach reminds me of a stripped-down Broken Hope back in their heyday (the classic Bowels of Repugnance), although Broken Hope's music was just *so much better*. Unleash The Carnivore is recorded extraordinarily well, I must admit, capturing a sound neither digitally hollow and compressed nor thick and muddled. Every instrument comes through clearly, leaving the music to shine on its own merits. But that is where the line is drawn. *Fed To The Pigs*, if I am not incorrect, a re-recording of an older track, remains my favorite, but hardly constitutes enough to justify hearing the full 34 minutes of this sonic earthquake. The pounding, heaving riffs are, I guess, the trademark of this band, what made them famous, though ultimately I don't find it enough to return for more. I've heard heavier, like Disgorge, for example, both Mexican and the USA band. Besides, there is some music that is best heard live, and I think Devourment is such a band - their "slam" riffs especially tailored for moshing and headbanging. Really little else to comment on... except that the lyrics are super-dumb, and here it is the utter doldrums, full of mindless misogyny and stupid violence without a drop of creativity or intelligence - though I did feel a bit sick to my stomach (a positive sign for death metal!) after reading the lyrics of *Field of the Impaled*, the sign of something working. Nevertheless, if this band is the sign to go by, the days of imaginative brutality and evilness, a la Bowels of Repugnance era Broken Hope, are a thing of the past - post-1990s, just as much as the days of intelligent, "old-school" (as contrasted to progressive-masturbatory) death metal in general, it seems to me. (YA)

DODSFERD - SUICIDE AND THE REST OF YOUR KIND WILL FOLLOW

Moribund, 2009

Disregarding the album title, which makes no sense at all to me - not that it needs to - and the format, two long tracks of about 36 minutes of material, Dodsferd has changed little since I've last heard them back on their brilliantly titled *Fucking Your Creation*, also on *Moribund*, in 2007. Since that time, Wrath, the main man behind this "fucking creation," has released no less than three full length albums and a split. He appears to show no shortage of creative energy, but is that energy determined by ideas and a power of converting emotions into sound, or is it just... energy, plain and simple, and the corresponding enthusiasm, ambition, *will* to create and produce new output? I would argue the latter, and what's more, the results of this energy are not of any value at all. To put it in a few words: this is dull, droning stuff bereft of any independent ideas, and totally derivative... But not to completely cut Wrath down and his mission of proudly waving the flag of generic black metal: although I haven't heard all of his recordings, I imagine that "Suicide" could just be his best work, or, more to the core, the album that I think best works for me. This is due to several factors including the omission of the rock n' roll groove, which are the norm for a lot of today's trendy black metal, and a concentration on atmosphere over flash. Both of the tracks are very repetitive and show few breaks out of the usual, but the ideas that do exist are somewhat effective in what I think they are at least *trying* to do, as evinced in the monotonous notes of the title track, for example, augmented by a very good lead. It is less impressive on the second "piece", "His Veins Colored The Room", which is not as interesting. Clean guitar parts are used in passages, but the tracks are mostly comprised of common distorted guitar and simple percussion, very standard material. One might be less critical of this album if not for the serious lack of originality (have I said that already?); but it's not only that, Wrath, the Greek solo musician behind this band, arouses certain bile in his transparent arrogance that bleeds not just from his music but from the song titles, lyrics and photos. He really thinks much of himself, it seems. In this connection, my "forgiveness index" fall, and I become even more fastidious and grumpy than normal. Imaginably, if I had known nothing about this band in advance my opinion would not change, either. Bands like this are to blame for all of the clutter in the underground these days - shortsighted, dumb and totally forgettable, and I really have no desire to play a role here in my magazine in supporting it, so... I won't. (YA)

DRENGSKAPUR - VON NEBEL UMSCHLUNGEN

Self-produced, 2009

That this album is a deed to reckon with, you will have surmised from my interview with the good-natured duo from

Berlin, Germany. Though I fell for it in a flash due to its exquisitely anti-modern and unmistakably heathen nature, Von Nebel unschlungen (literally: shrouded in mist) proved sovereign against the test of repeated spins. First off, if you're fed up hearing bass guitar in your black metal, this will be right up your alley! The emphasis here is set on the elementary force of man-made musical strokes and how they mingle together to, like in one of Rembrandt's stormy landscape studies, raise a great, marble-like tide of quickening entities, haunted with purpose and dizzying contrasts. The guitar work is remarkably sharp and many-layered, yet at any given time sprinkled with the grey dust of ages as befits a black metal band rooted in ancient lore and sounding the death knell of artificial human prosperities. Even though Drengskapur's style is rather unadorned and tolerates zero eccentricity, I had to stretch my mind backwards a dozen years, namely to early Himinbjörg and Ancalagon, in order to feed the comparison matrix. That's where I first heard (and never really in that same fashion afterwards) this brand of post-Eld alternative made of galloping drums that seem to have forever as their horizon, and fast, intertwined guitar lines forging beautiful dialogues against a veil of raw, continual buzz. This style - some would more or less properly call it Viking metal - is one of my main guilty pleasures, I'll admit, hence the favourable bias to start with. When done right, it is at once epic and tremendously energetic, and it thrives almost exclusively in longish song formats, which is maybe the chief reason explaining why few bands ever ventured that road. A suitable number of riffs are indisputable neckbreakers, often starting off as growing themes in the midst of a down-tempo part to reveal their uplifting potential as the savagery returns. Another asset up Drengskapur's sleeve would be the compulsory acoustic parts - intro, outro and various intermezzos within the songs - which really stand out through their creative, dynamic and stirring character. There is something immediately lovable about individuals who so obviously (yet not haughtily) don't care shit about their neatly airbrushed promo pics gracing the pages of sell-out German magazines like Rock Hard and the like. I don't mean to wish Drengskapur eternal anonymity, but one thing is for certain: that would never stop them churning out more of such great music, and hopefully greater. (BG)

DREPHJARD - MAKTDOMINANS

Frostscald Records, 2009

Drephjard is one of the bands I missed on Northern Silence a few years ago. He never sends me any promos, but I like to hear pretty much everything on his label. Maktdominans is the second or third Drephjard CD and is some violent fucking shit, nasty, fast black metal done the ugly way, and what's unexpected - it actually feels like some brain cells were using in making it. This is ugly and extreme, but done with class. I would even call it beautiful in a way. It's a rather short release at 7 tracks and 30 minutes, but no less than required. A warfare theme permeates the record, with a sample of gunshots at the beginning, sirens going off, preparing the listener to the total war to come ahead. It doesn't sound terribly special, one should not expect any revelations, any calls from beyond the grave, but the material is played really well and I simply adore the sound of the drums and percussion. Great vocals, too. Raw, extreme black metal usually bores me these days but these four Norwegians know what they are doing. More than adequate production highlighting the blasts, excellent screams, deadly guitars with feeling - Drephjard have the ingredients to turn a frustrating day dealing with ignorant and arrogant people into a satisfying one - post-genocide. (YA)

DROWNING THE LIGHT - THE BLOOD OF THE ANCIENTS

Dark Adversary/Werewolf Records, 2009

Another band I have never heard of before with some 50 recordings to their name graces my mailbox yet again, this time from Australia. One must hand it to these guys for having the drive to create such a high quantity of music, but naturally the question must be raised: does the quantity suggest a commensurate quality, or do matters end there - just a lot of "stuff"? Generally speaking, I tend not to look at such prolific activity in a positive light; having come late in their oeuvre might likewise undermine them and their work, but here I only have this one album to judge, or talk about, and I believe that is how it ought to be with any solid work. So where does this stand, then, in the abstract spectrum of my imagination where music

ranges from cynical, nondescript pastiche to life- and consciousness-altering brilliance? Drowning The Light have captured a fitting lo-fi sound for themselves, a production that might work effectively in bolstering material already strong, but here that is unfortunately not the case. The music is rather average throughout and the execution, especially that of the vocalist and the drummer (crash cymbals overwhelming everything), uncomfortably clumsy and uninspired. Not a single track makes any mark, the entirety simply plugging along in fixed line with patterns and configurations that were already long exhausted by other, far more interesting bands at play. The mood appears to be one of a search for authenticity, a kind of desperate pining for the perfection of pre-established paradigms of what a "true black metal" band should sound like. It is quite unfortunate, actually, because several of the bands that these guys come from are infinitely more suggestive and powerful; bands like Pestilential Shadows and Nazkul. No, for all of its anachronistic flavor and its laudable intent (recapturing the aura of the early 1990s black metal scene that I never got tired, anyway), it is ultimately the substance that matters, not the setup of the guitar or the production, and in this respect I think Drowning the Light have not done a very good job. Of their numerous other albums I cannot say. [By the way: the band has released 11 new recordings since this album. This is not a joke or an exaggeration: 11 new recordings... and counting. I guess writing music like this is quite easy.] (YA)

DYSPERIUM - DYSPERIUM

Frostscald Records, 2009

Can you actually ruin a good idea by grafting too many not so good ideas around it? Yes you can. Oregon-based Dysperium show the way. Tell you the truth, Dysperium is one of those bands with a desperately thin balance point, or should I say none at all. What they do either tips the scales towards the (very) inspired, or towards the (very) lukewarm. No middle ground. The oddity with Dysperium is that the dichotomy not so much lies in an irregular playing level than it does reflect different - and, in my view, rather ill-assorted - stylistic incarnations. The guys truly are at home walking the lonely, twilight paths once cleared by such history-book names as Ulver or Empyrium, like they do on the intro, interlude and outro, and at given points within the regular tracks. It is there, under the breeze-shaken, dimming undergrowth, that their craving for solemn atmospheres and the unadorned splendour of nature comes into its own. The acoustic guitar and passionate, deep

choirs (totally Ulver-like, those) distil these humble yet unfaltering tunes of reverence that can only spring from the womb of a windswept night, when powerful fits of fear and serenity can grip the heart in unison at a mere rustle in the dark. Would that they kept to this ethos and built around it... Unfortunately (for me), Dysperium seem rather keen on taking their metal inside four walls. Unfortunately (for them), they seem confused about which key fits into the lock. To cut it short, they play a type of doom-laden dark metal meant to be full of surprises, but coming across as very rigid and to a large extent over-painstaking, with too much emphasis on obtaining bold, well-plotted arrangements and too little on the quest for actual emotions. I feel something kind of similar when listening to other US acts such as November's Doom or (late-)Morgin: solid doom/death metal crafted by the book but stubbornly refusing to let my soul in for tea and biscuits... In addition, unlike those bands' music, Dysperium's just lacks height and composure on the whole. The vocals are maybe the worst aspect of all, with their very aggressive and even at times screechy edge that just fails to compute in the overall design. However, the really excellent second track or the mid/closing section of the sixth, flowing leisurely in irresistible loops of evening celebration, is where the band should definitely make a stand and shape things up, siding with the more spaced out and bucolic elements in its sound. That might sound like a tight-assed piece of advice, but that's one from someone wishing Dysperium to produce something large, commensurate with the amount of promises shown. (BG)

DYSTHYMIA - THE SHIVERING OPUS

Pest Productions, 2009

Very unusual release here, not least due to the totally (purposefully?) understated production that makes each sound feel slippery and liquid, slipping from memory as soon as one hears it. In normal circumstances, such a sound would be a case for early dismissal, going home, but for Dysthymia, oddly enough, it is a different story. The music on this release, evidently the outcome of just one human being outside of a little external, "session" help by a few friends on tracks two and six, approaches some of the most obscure I have heard in the last few years - a ghostly, haunting cross, one may imagine, between your choice of dismal ambient band from the 90s and what one would find in some of the early depressive black metal bands before they became defined in a new genre (not to mention stereotyped to death by the current Myspace gen-



ELHAZ - GOETIC EXPERIENCE

Pest Productions, 2009

A lot of strong black metal has been coming out of France these days, and Elhaz is my favorite of the lot. I have to thank Odium from Forgotten Path for introducing me to this band through his second issue; it was one of the interviews that stood out the most. Elhaz has two albums out now and this is their second. Both albums are pretty long, Goetic Experience running at nearly 70 minutes, and, let me tell you, those 70 minutes are intense. Rarely are the ancient doors unlocked with black metal post-2000, but this release has brought me back to the glory days with its decrepit, cold-as-iron guitar sound, spectral keyboards, undead voice and an overall atmosphere that is as creepy and haunting as the old Norwegian classics were in the 1990s - which is no small comparison, I would think! There is just something that cliques with me in certain bands, like the music was almost "meant" for me, and I feel that here. Goetic Experience contains 11 tracks, three that are instrumental or ambient pieces, and chilling ones at that, with acoustic guitar interludes spread about mostly as intros. The guitars are used not just in a musical fashion but as a tonal layer in parts, which I found interesting, most of the work falling under a generally mid or slow pace with some sporadic bursts of speed. Everything on this album feels confident and intelligent - no speed for the sake of speed, doomy, slow passages just for the sake of meeting out some quota of variety. I curse the use of the word, but Goetic Experiences feels supremely natural from start to finish - natural to me, anyway. To dissect it and cut it into parts, as I sometimes do, seems out of place for an experience as holistic as this, an experience greater than the sum of its parts, which is to say that Goetic Experience is highly atmospheric and evocative. It's an atmosphere created by neither undue repetition, nor an overuse of keyboards or reverb. I personally feel like I am witness to a strange alchemical process as I listen to this CD, a ritual performed by the creaking bows of an eldrich oak tree in the middle of the night, eerie, whistling winds swaying the flames of candles around an ancient sarcophagus holding a corpse about to awaken. Truly quality stuff. The cover features an occult symbol of some sort, visual counterpart to the Goetic Experience, while the interior of the booklet shows an incredible photograph of luscious women in a lascivious pose, bent toward one another in a kiss while surrounded by hooded figures - an actual photo, it looks like, staged or whatnot. In short... this is even better than the already quite good Malemort from 2006, and a highly likely candidate for an interview in my next issue. Except for the last bit of The License to Depart, the final track, which goes on a tad too long (the only song to use a drum machine, I think), I loved pretty much every minute of this long masterpiece of dark art. Albums as strong and complete as this are a hard come-by these days, especially for someone like me who has heard so much (I'm not being arrogant, just look at the number of reviews in this issue I've written). I'm not sure if this will be everyone's "cup of tea," it is quite moody and cannot be listened to at all times, but, for me... this is excellence. Black metal lives again... (YA)