

PARTY BY GENRE



Suburban Melodic Dissonant Metal

Skullshifter/Here In Hell
Independent

I never knew this, but apparently hell is Parsippany, NJ. One would think I might have noticed, considering I grew up there, but somehow it must have slipped by me. I mean, it's not the most exciting town on earth, probably less so for a raucous metal outfit like Skullshifter, but really, hell? Have you guys ever been to Wyoming?

There's shades of Prong and early-to-mid-'90s hardcore/metal. Biohazard without all the tough guy fronting and gang vocals, or a downtuned Black Label Society. The guitars are heavy in the mix, which in the case of many local bands I might say is just a result of a low recording budget, but for a three-song demo/EP to be mastered by Alan Douches of West West Side (Clutch, Mastodon, Swarm Of The Lotus, a million others), it's fair to say Skullshifter's going for something professional.

And they've got it with *Here In Hell*. While I might debate their geography, the band means business. The clarity of production and full jewel case packaging, not to mention the capable performances therein, all speak to a real commitment to their music, which is almost as admirable as that music itself. It's not what the up and coming crop of metal bands are playing, but Skullshifter demonstrate enough skill to ably open the show for whoever's getting ready to hit Starland Ballroom this weekend.



Avant Noise-Laden Explosive Grindcore

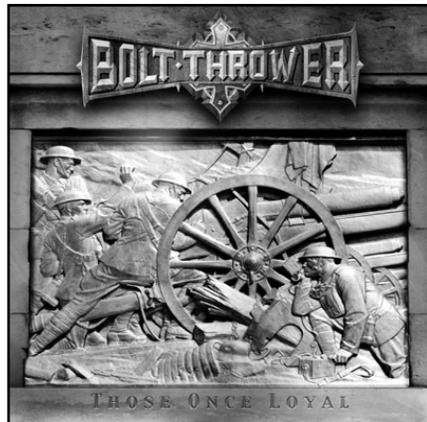
So I Had To Shoot Him/Alpha Males & Popular Girls/Crucial Blast

After careful analysis and several listening sessions, I have eliminated all other possible X factors and come to the conclusion that the unsettled feeling in my stomach is directly related to the volume at which I listen to *Alpha Males & Popular Girls*.

Musically, the band skews toward grinding noise, somewhere around a less restrained Dillinger Escape Plan or Daughters, but vocalist Libby's approach brings an element not so different from what Mike Patton did for Faith No More. She croons sweetly, screams at the top of her lungs, and never has any trouble keeping

up with the barrage behind her. The word is versatile.

You might find yourself put off initially, as I did, but *So I Had To Shoot Him* show definite potential, and if nothing else, are an adventure to hear. For that alone, they're a worthy and challenging touchstone for your endurance.



Traditional UK Death Metal

Bolt Thrower/Those Once Loyal/Metal Blade

In the beforetimes, in the long, long ago, every time I heard the name Bolt Thrower, I thought they were a power metal band. Honestly, I was like, "Oh sure, Bolt Thrower. You guys gonna tour with Manowar?" to which Bolt Thrower replied, "No, asshole, we're gonna tear your skin off the bone with our devastating death metal." And so it was. Now I don't have any skin. Is it cold in here?

A band who found their niche a decade ago and are quite happy to reside in it, Bolt Thrower clearly feel no need to start experimenting with their sound. They were there as death metal was really beginning to take shape in the late '80s, and they're here now. You can't really ask much more than that at this point. What's left to prove?

Instantly familiar even to those who've never heard it, at times bordering on predictable, *Those Once Loyal* is nonetheless a great starting point for anyone looking to get their education in true death metal.



Revivalist Mercyful Priest Power Thrash Metal

DarkBlack/The Barbarian's Hammer/Hot Dog City

Name your band DarkBlack and you've already got points in my book. The power trio of Tim, Art and Carl (bass/vocals, guitars, and drums, respectively) play a purposefully old-school stoner thrash and give ready nods in the direction of King Diamond, Judas Priest and more or less the entire NWOBHM.

A five-song outing, *The Barbarian's Hammer* is the tribute album that never got made, with kind of hollow production that would be really good to hear on cassette. The vocals can be off-putting, but only if you're wholly unfamiliar with the singing style of the old New Wave. Given that, with even a modest appreciation for that to which the band are paying homage, it's easy to be charmed by *The Barbarian's Hammer*.

If these guys could get together with Goat Horn and tour with Early Man headlining, they could call it Monsters

Of Metal and be right on the mark. It's a retro sound, but it's hardly ironic or gimmicky. DarkBlack just really like those old Maiden records, and they think you should too.



Decay Metal

Sourvein/Emerald Vulture/

This Dark Reign

Sourvein's latest qualifies as an EP, but honestly, the music's lurching groove might trick you into thinking you're engaged in something larger. That's their thing, man. Sourvein might not be the most known of Texas' chronic sludgesturbators, but their darker take on *Emerald Vulture* is sure to change that.

This kind of music buries its bodies in the middle of the night. It's trudging through a muck of molasses guitar riffs, enraged, straining vocals and plodding drum work, with a near constant crash cymbal and bass that rumbles low and slow. If you've ever held a beer aloft and offered it to the gods of doom, you can't lose.

The title track, second of the four, speeds things up a bit, but for the most part the formula is the classic play low, play slow ethos that characterizes so much of the genre. Rather than be content with interchangeability and forgettability, Sourvein work within the framework they're given to call forth memorable, formidable riffs and an anger that sits on the mind like the cold cloak of a Texan night.



Blackened Monster Groove Metal

Centurions Ghost/A Sign Of Things To Come/ I Hate

From the first note of opening track, "Devils Disciple," I'm thinking Entombed. There's that same rock groove under the death metal exterior, but once the vocals kick in, it's clear Centurions Ghost are moving in a different direction. Frontman James Begley hits like black metal or even old school thrash in the vein of Exodus or Overkill more than anything remotely resembling the aforementioned Swedish powerhouse.

That's not to say there's anything un-modern about Centurions Ghost. While the imagery in a song like "Stigmartyism" might be familiar, and the band's influences easy enough to identify, they work well to establish an identity off the bat. Begley's a big part of it, but the staggering guitar work of Dan 138 and Gareth Millsted don't hurt either.

There are thrashing moments, slower, doomed-out moments, and plenty of creepiness to go around.

Don't be surprised if you start hearing their name more over the next couple of years in the metal underground. If the title is as prophetic as it would have you believe, Centurions Ghost have big plans.



Broken Neck Headbang Metal

The Sword/The Sword/ Kemado

Caught them earlier this year at SXSW and picked up the demo. Even more than I couldn't believe there wasn't already a band with this name, I was left stupefied by the ferocity of their riffs and the hugeness of their sound. The Sword's guitar wall could split Berlin at a moment's notice. It could keep the Mongolians out of China and is visible from space. Okay, maybe not, but they're fucking huge all the same.

Entrenched in medieval and appropriately swordsman-like themes, the band careens seamlessly between Sabbath sludginess and early Melvins complexity, keeping a cool '70s air about the vocals that would make Bobby Liebling smile and remember days gone by. It's an awe-inspiring debut. One can only hope that The Sword tour their asses off to support it.

Don't look for it yet, the record's not out until February of next year, but seriously, expect to hear this name a lot more when the time comes, especially around these parts. In the meantime, hit up swordofdoom.com for info, mp3s, etc. You'll want to know more about them before they completely obliterate your soul, because, yeah, they'll do that.



Get Drunk And Fall Over Metal

Earthride/Vampire Circus/Southern Lord

Earthride are nothing less than an onslaught. Produced by Mike Dean (C.O.C.) and Jean Paul Gaster (Clutch), *Vampire Circus* comes in as a late contender for this year's muddiest record. Stoned out and ready to ride, the band are definitely in top form.

With former Spirit Caravan bassist "Dirty" Dave Sherman as the hoarse, whiskey-drenched vocalist, Earthride sit atop so many sick grooves it's impossible to listen and not bob your head up and down. From "Understand" to "God's Own Medicine," and the fuzzy take on Motorhead, "For Wrath And Ruin," the band is driven and tuned all the way down to the key of kickass.

Listen to *Vampire Circus* and understand why it's a crime against humanity that these guys aren't millionaires.