



CARCASS

'Heartwork' / 'Swansong'
EARACHE

Carcass fans are, in general, broadly divided into two categories; those who prefer the earlier grindcore incarnation and those who worship the later melodic death metal incarnation of which 1993's 'Heartwork' [7] is regarded as the pinnacle. What unites these two other than a fair bit of respect for their opposite period is a hatred for 1995's 'Swansong' [9]; the bumper sell-out commercial nadir, their 'Cold Lake', 'St Anger' and 'The Unspoken King' all rolled up into one piece of mind-bogglingly odd cover-art. Sadly, most people who believe that either haven't heard it, instead numbly regurgitating this folk wisdom, or are idiots. Whilst 'Heartwork' is invaluable as a historical artefact, the absolute pinnacle of melodic death metal at the time, with some blistering lead work and epic production, it's a pretty weak album in terms of actual songs. And it's okay to think that: the bible's an atrocious read, and that's shaped millions of lives. 'Swansong' however is a triumph — get that — a *fucking triumph*. And the leap from modest groove numbers on 'Heartwork', like 'No Love Lost', to the full-on fist-pumping necroticism of 'Black Star' really isn't all that great. What changed was the input of timeless rock song writing and deliciously wry lyrics that followed on from 'Heartwork' in tapping gore on the shoulder and asking it to leave. It's still death metal as much as 'Wolverine Blues' is considered such, it's still brutal, arguably more so than it's predecessor, so all that really justifies the hate is the fact they left without saying goodbye in 'proper' grind-grind-grind rargh-rargh-rargh fashion. The quality of the digipaks may be similar to those unofficial 'Harry Potter' sequels sold in Chinese newsagents, but the bonus content represents unprecedented value-for-money in Earache reissue terms, being that it hasn't actually appeared anywhere else before.

JAMES HOARE

DEAD CONGREGATION

'Purifying Consecrated Ground'
ENUCLEATION

Following the release of their hype-laden first full-length on Nuclear War Now!, Enucleation decided to share early work with the world and re-issue Dead Congregation's debut EP. 'Purifying Consecrated Ground' takes us back to the formative years, when our dear precious death metal was being crystallised in the crags of deranged American minds. Bits of Morbid Angel make an appearance in the death generics (as they always do) but they mainly tend to nick that old school New York sound in the form of Incantation worship. Their riffs modulate from pummelling, to threatening, to downright grotesque, always making plenty of room for the sludge to seep in. Unfortunately, like most of those engaged in idolatry, they emulate their heroes without elaborating much on the premise. They stick to the basics and are noticeably lacking ingenuity when it comes to crafting the kind of mega hooks and abyssal grooves that made Incantation legendary. There is nothing particularly distinguishing about their sound and, while this EP



is good, 'Graves Of The Archangels' is better.

[6.5] JILL MIKKELSON

EXHORDER

'Slaughter In The Vatican'
'The Law'
METAL MIND

"I spit in your face," hollers

Exhorder front-bawler Kyle Thomas furiously on 'Desecrator', for no apparent reason. His N'Awlins-based band are most commonly mentioned these days in the same breath as Pantera, both being pugilistic Southern-based bruisers who upped the ante mercilessly on aggression and brutality in thrash. And sure, '90s bruising, belligerent 'Slaughter In The Vatican' [8], hilariously childish and *outré* sleeve included, is well deserving of a re-appraisal, being a

delightfully out-of-order helping of beefed-up riffage and incandescent ire. 'The Law' [7] alas, fares slightly less well, owing to a slight dearth of new ideas other than an 'oh-so-'92' helping of Mordred-style slap-funk and a Sabbath cover. Exhorder were always too nihilistically nasty and lacking in anthemic bravura to achieve the success of their cohorts, but for chunky rhythmic aggro, not to mention a bile-sodden rage that occasionally bordered on comical, they're still liable to shift every thrasher's dandruff, apparent reason or not.

JIM MARTIN

LEVIATHAN

'A Silhouette In Splinters'
MORIBUND CULT

The earth has barely come to rest on Leviathan's grave, but Moribund are wasting no time in exhuming Wrest's harder-to-find works. 'A Silhouette...' originally came out via Profound Lore on vinyl only, and this CD release can only be considered timely and welcome (except of course for BM vinyl elitists, who're unsurprisingly giving vent to much wailing and gnashing of teeth). As Leviathan records go, this one is both instantly recognisable and distinctly atypical. More an ambient work than anything else, 'Silhouette...' six tracks hover in an amorphous fog of shifting guitar FX, each semi-improvising around a core melody line. It's mostly instrumental; the only track that features drums and vocals is the title track, where it has to be said they interrupt the atmosphere rather than compliment it. At times, the music reminds of Danny Cavanagh's mid-'90s leads, all ethereal feedback and sombre melancholy and at others, Luasa Raelon, though delivered with Wrest's characteristic, opaquely sinister vibe. Spine-chillingly haunting.

[8] MICHAEL BLENKARN

MALEVOLENT CREATION

'Eternal'
'In Cold Blood'
'The Fine Art Of Murder'
'Manifestation'
METAL MIND

After a lengthy absence in Malevolent Creation terms, a three year gap in what had been an album every year since 1991, 1996's 'Eternal' [7] proved that the Floridian second tier heroes could function perfectly well without Brett Hoffman on vocals and Roadrunner signing off the cheques, though the last collaboration between those now absent parties, the appropriately monikered 'Stillborn', meant that few mourned their loss.

With the creative cobwebs vacuumed to buggery, 1997's 'In Cold

Blood' [9] seems more than a year removed from its predecessor, its finely-honed viciousness bettering most contemporary acts — probably something to do with that Derek Roddy fella getting behind the kit — with a collective brainfart obviously having blown out the cells storing all recollection of 'Stillborn', Brett Hoffman rejoined and out came a sickly, awkward affair that didn't even have the decency to entitle itself something cautionary like 'Stillborn 2: Ho-Hum', 'The Fine Art Of Murder' [5.5] is spirited but ultimately dawdling. Seeing as 2000's 'Envenomed' isn't here, it's up to the same year's 'Manifestation' [7.5] compilation to prove that Hoffman wasn't a force for ill in the Malevolent Creation camp, a mission that falls a bit flat with six of sixteen tracks all taken from 'Stillborn 2: Yawn Of The Dead' and, presumably, for obscure licensing reasons, everything from the band's first two — Roadracer/runner — albums being represented by live tracks.

JAMES HOARE

MOONSORROW

'Kivenkantaja'
SPINEFARM

Moonsorrow are currently riding high on the crest of the folk metal wave, enjoying a level of commercial success that would have been unthinkable before the likes of Turisas, Finntroll and Korpiklaani managed to breach the walls of the mainstream, and thanks to their mastery of all things epic on 'V: Hävitetty' and their more recent 'Tulimyrsky' EP, they have cemented their place in the genre's 'big league'. Taking full advantage of this success, Spinefarm have chosen to reissue the band's 2003 album 'Kivenkantaja' ('Stonebearer'), but is it just a quick cash-in?

Not really. This, the Finns' third full-length, was a milestone for the band and, with hindsight, clearly signposted the direction that they were destined to follow with later releases.

Trading in the somewhat overly pompous, exuberant energy of their earlier material for a more measured, well-rounded approach, songs like album opener 'Rauniolla' seem to tap into a rich vein of genuine pathos that captivates the listener from the outset.

As expected, the music doesn't quite reach the dizzying heights of maturity and passion experienced on 'Hävitetty', but nevertheless, 'Kivenkantaja' shows a band coming to terms with their identity, and is a worthwhile addition to any pagan metalhead's collection.

[6.5] IAN FINLEY

PRONG

'Beg To Differ'
'Cleansing'
SPV

Tommy Victor's Prong, thanks to a mighty, rhythmic economy of riffage, not to mention a nominally artsy austerity, always stood both somewhere to the left — and head and shoulders above — the majority of the early-'90s thrash pack. Not to mention boasting ex-members of Swans and Killing Joke in their alumni, and having the good taste to cover sci-fi obsessed psych-weirdoes Chrome. Despite being let down by a flat, dated production, 1990's 'Beg To Differ' [7.5], which contains said tune, is a mean, muscular salvo of no-frills, mid-tempo spite and malice. 1994's 'Cleansing' [8], meanwhile, was perhaps Prong's *piece de resistance*, boiling their thrasher motions down to a punchy, pugilistic groove while packing hooks that would floor many a heavyweight, including the timeless dumbass anthems 'Whose Fist Is It Anyway' and the murderously infectious 'Snap Your Fingers, Snap Your Neck'. In an ideal world, this litany of testosterone-fuelled hollerin' would be hailed as the great lost 'disengage brain' album of the '90s.

JIM MARTIN

SOLEFALD

'The Linear Scaffold'
PEACEVILLE

1997: the year post-black metal arrived. Solefald's debut stood next to Arcturus' 'La Masquerade Infernale' and Emperor's 'Anthems To The Welkin At Dusk', in a triad of must-have groundbreakers of a genre reborn in true elitist fashion. And it was Solefald that redefined philosophical and artistic dimensions we were more used to finding in the neofolk scene. 'The Linear Scaffold' presented a complete and overwhelming package. Originally out on the now-legendary Avantgarde Music (Katatonia, Therogthon, Unholy), it immediately stood out with its dramatic cover art (somewhat poorly reproduced on this reissue) and song titles ('The Macho Vehicle', 'Countryside Bohemians'). Next to the breathtaking, stormy and idiosyncratic classicist extreme metal written to the words of Lord Byron, it was 'Philosophical Revolt' that proclaimed the arcane intellectual frontiers of post-BM, with a passage simply reciting, "Confucius, Lao Tse, Socrates, Plato, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sartre and Beauvoir", then proclaiming, "Defend the name of nobility itself, the art of intellectual reflection". The album is highlighted with the ferocious riff-march and swirling keyboards of 'Red View', with its chill-inducing call to "Burn the edges of your thoughts, feel the air beneath." A true masterpiece.

[9.5] AVI PITCHON