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Admiral Browning - Magic Elixir (**Dancing Sasquatch**) Review by Metal Mark



This disc, from Middletown, Maryland's Admiral Browning showed up a few weeks ago and I promptly stuck it in the stack I think of as "need to be reviewed at some point". Eventually I pulled it out of the disc and popped it in the player to see what this three piece instrumental band was capable of doing. I was promptly greeted with a brief old time salesman pitch which goes along with the theme of the album title/cover and liner notes. Then the opener "Vortexer" marches on very deliberate and simple strides. Heavy for sure, but all rather ordinary until a few minutes in when they started to deviate from the simple path they were on. All of a sudden my senses were assaulted from multiple angles as the

instruments involved seemed to explode bringing tones, various beats and a barrage of all things slow and brutal. Only one track in they in and this band has already set me up and knocked me down. "O! Martini Man" is up next and this much more aggressive from the start. The main riff sounds like they took the core of classic Sabbath and Pentagram, but pumped it up and twisted it into a huge and powerful Frankenstein monster style creature. Then it stomps its way through knocking aside everything in it's path. This one is a behemoth that shows it's muscle from the beginning and never backs off. Up next is "No Good Stones" which is as Led Zeppelin influenced blues rocker. Only Admiral Browning add a smoky haze to the mix yet still keep a big beat going in the background to guide this one through. The next track is the very appropriately named "Speaking in Tones". This is a wild, riff-fueled rant that comes on like a storm and never lets up. Like a boiling cauldron, they keep steadily stirring the pot and adding odd and bizarre ingredients that all help keep the mixture swirling. All these songs have somewhat different approaches, but they all show that this band are a talented group with a mass of ideas at their disposal. This is only an EP and it manages to stand up great on its own and also whet my appetite for the next full length offering.

www.myspace.com/admiralbrowning

Augury - Fragmentary Evidence (**Nuclear Blast**) Review by Luke Goaman-Dodson



The French settlers of North America must have been an exceedingly talented bunch, because at least two of the major cities they founded – New Orleans and Montreal – have produced some of the most inventive metal bands of the past two decades. Luckily for me, Steve has welcomed me back into the Live4Metal crew with a real treat in the form of Augury, a progressive/technical death-metal band who hail from latter city. This band has a real Quebecois sound, operating somewhere between Kataklysm and a more progressive Cryptopsy, which is not too surprising as the Kataklysm guitarist J-F Dagenais actually mixed this album.

Opening track 'Aetheral' features some very nice rhythm work, with patterns weaving in and out of each other. 'Skyless' and 'Jupiter To Ignite' showcase some King Crimson-esque atmospherics, and some of the heaviest riffs on the album. 'Brimstone Landscapes', easily my favourite track on the album, begins with a comparatively melodic prog section, before shifting into blitzkrieg mode featuring the most disconcerting use of clean female vocals I've ever heard. The album's denouement is over ten minutes long and showcases some very impressive guitar work. The only thing that didn't click with me was the screaming that occasionally veered a little close to Metalcore for my liking; but this is a very, very minor detail in an album that is a really strikingly good piece of progressive death-metal. Highly recommended. www.augurymetal.com

Dalriada - Szelek (**Nail Records**) Review by Steve Green



This was originally released last year in the bands native Hungary, but now it's being made available to us lucky souls in Western Europe for the first time... and my advice to you, would be to grab this as soon as you can.

Dalriada, formerly known as Echo of Dalriada, until they shortened their name in 2007, mix folk music, presumably a lot of which is traditional Hungarian folk, with, well I guess a Power Metal base, very similar to, in places Blind Guardian and at other times, Ensiferum, but with the Trollhamaren sound of Finntroll keeping an eye on the proceedings, and not forgetting a healthy dose of Medieval leanings, which often veer towards crazy circus

music, (think Slovakia's Lunatic Gods).

Making Dalriada stand out (even further) from the crowd are the medieval feel of their of their multi-layered vocals, which include both male and female harmonies and a deathly growl and I can (rather perversely), imagine Dalriada winning the Eurovision song contest with their very happy sounding mix of Folk and Metal. Unfortunately, I fear that this album will forever remain in the underground, but that doesn't stop it being a generally undiscovered gem. www.myspace.com/dalriadahu

Dark Castle - Spirited Migration (**At A Loss**) Review by Metal Mark



In general, I like a lot of doom metal, but it is one of those genres that takes some time. It's a bit of an exploration process on occasion and I found that to be the case with this release from Saint Augustine, Florida based duo Dark Castle.

The first time I listened to this disc I made it through a few tracks and just had to remove because it wasn't taking with me. I knew there was enough that wasn't the end of my playing this disc. The second time I put in the stereo and was feeling the low and slow vibe begin to sink in, but had to stop about half way through as I still didn't feel settled in my opinion of it. By the third play I was coming to terms with this disc and was able to give an

opinion that was fair to the band, the music and to me. This is the kind of doom where the band unwinds every note with a lot of attention and every movement is done very slowly with a great deal of precision as they carve out their path. Oftentimes the music reminded me of YOB with the plodding pace and large explosions that accompany each note and beat. Dark Castle has a sound that is perhaps darker and slightly less mechanical sounding than YOB. At first I thought the vocals were low in the mix, but I think that is very much deliberate. By that crucial third play of this disc the vocal approach fit perfectly to my ears. In fact I think the slightly below the surface approach caused me to listen more closely and thus take in even more of what was going on. For an album of this pace there is certainly a lot going on if you focus in close enough. It's not all gloom and doom and either because there are enough variations and just pure energy to really make this a fairly versatile offering. No, it didn't catch my attention completely on the first play, but now I am sure it is an album that will keep me coming back repeatedly over the next several months.

Dawn Of Tears - Dark Chamber Litanies (**Self Release**) Review by Steve Green



With a very pleasant classical style intro, which reminds me of a slow downed version Danny Elfman's theme to Desperate Housewives, I had a feeling this was going to head into the cheesy world of Power Metal. The rough textures of J. Alonso's voice told me immediately this was going to be a much heavier affair. I guess melodic Death, with hints of Gothic Metal and Cradle of Filth influences (mainly because of the vocals and guitar melodies) is a fair assumption. There's also a bit of a symphonic feel to everything, but it's the guitar work of J.L Trebol and A. Perez that do it for me. These guys are serious axe masters and throughout the huge amount of styles crammed into this EP, it's the guitars that

grab my attention every time. It's worth getting this EP for their performances alone. And once again this is a band who are allowing fans to legally download their EP for free. Head on over to the bands website at www.dawnoftears.com and enjoy.

Havok - Burn (Candlelight Records) By: Dave Schalek



The retro-thrash revival continues, for better or worse, with the release of “Burn”, the debut full-length from Denver’s Havok. Havok appear to be Candlelight Records’ response to the other big independent metal labels signing American retro-thrash acts (Blood Tsunami are European, so they don’t count). For example, Century Media’s signing of Warbringer started a cold war of sorts with Nuclear Blast jumping on the bandwagon soon after with the signing of the wholly pedestrian Mantic Ritual. Sure enough, Havok get signed to Candlelight. Interestingly, Merciless Death is still kicking around on the relatively unknown Heavy Artillery Records.

At any rate, Warbringer really have nothing to worry about, however, with their status as the reigning kings of the thrash revival as Havok are nothing special. Playing typical second tier Bay Area thrash with nods to Exodus, Vio-lence (who else?), and so on, Havok have the patented snarl, galloping speed, hooks and riffs, you name it, that you’ve all heard a million times before from bands over the last 25 years.

More or less, “Burn” is decent as you’ll find yourself nodding along as you listen, and I’ve no doubt that the band is probably fun to watch on stage, but “Burn” is really just typical and does nothing to stand out from the crowd. That said, though, the musicianship is good and Havok eschew the 80s production values for a deep, bass heavy sound. In fact, the fluid bass work does stand out, something that’s always been missing from thrash metal as a whole.

Havok show some promise and may end up being something noteworthy as “Burn” does have its moments, but this is pretty typical Bay Area thrash. Not bad, but not great.

www.myspace.com/havok | www.candlelightrecords.co.uk | www.candlelightrecordsusa.com

Kult Ov Azazel - Destroying The Sacred (Arctic Music Group) By: Dave Schalek



Floridian black metal beasts Kult Ov Azazel return after a four-year hiatus with “Destroying The Sacred”, released on the Arctic Music Group label, and their fifth full-length overall. Right off the bat, “Destroying The Sacred” is a bulldozer of an album that is exceptionally well played, well written, and, somewhat unusually, well produced. Consisting mostly of balls out, fast black metal with a few moments of atmosphere and the odd melodic touch or two, particularly late in the album, “Destroying The Sacred” features plenty of fast riffing, blastbeats galore, rasps, and a noticeably loud bass. Combine the stellar musicianship with very catchy, well written songs spread out over nine tracks (ten, if

you count a fast cover of “Hang The Pope” to close the album) that blow by in just over thirty minutes, and Kult Ov Azazel should vault themselves well to the forefront of the USBM scene with “Destroying The Sacred”.

What strikes me the most about “Destroying The Sacred” is the ability of the band to retain a feeling of all out, black metal brutality while attaining a very clean, professional sound. Compare “Destroying The Sacred” to “Triumph Of Fire”, and the band’s progression in this regard is obvious. All the while, “Destroying The Sacred” is backed up with a huge, crisp production, and the album immediately becomes highly infectious. This one should give well established giants such as Marduk and Dark Funeral cause to look over their shoulders.

Although not the most original album that I’ve ever heard, “Destroying The Sacred” is so well done for the genre that I can’t help but begin to consider its inclusion in this year’s top ten list. Yep, buy or die!

www.myspace.com/kultovazazel | www.arcticmusicgroup.com

