



Stemm "Blood Scent"

(Catch 22 Records 2008)

It takes some serious stones to stack your band up to Pantera. That kind of thing is expected in the press kits and one-sheets that publicists cook up to fluff a band's cred and give new meaning to the term "garish hyperbole," but to come straight from the band itself? Sure enough, Stemm frontman/guitarist Joe Cafarella has been directly quoted as saying his band's new album "Blood Scent" is their "Vulgar Display of Power." It's not hard to grasp the subtext of what he's saying: it's an album that is highly aggressive but at the same time should appeal to a broad spectrum of both hardcore and casual metalheads. But, on the surface, there it is: dude just compared his band to Pantera.



If Cafarella is going to put his new album next to Pantera's name, it's only fair that it be judged as such. And while "Blood Scent" doesn't even hold "Vulgar"'s jock strap, it does stand on its own as a fine slab of groove metal. Stemm know how to get heads a-banging, ripping off chunk after chunk of biting yet melodic tracks, with lots of razor-sharp riffs and hooks galore. The band alternates between neck-snapping rhythms and a more mid-paced crush, punctuating each track with scalding solos and Cafarella's Phil Anselmo/James Hetfield/Corey Taylor hybrid vocals. But even with all the (admittedly intentional) nods to their iconic inspirations, Stemm seem just a wee bit hesitant to truly go full metal, if the soaring, radio friendly choruses on display in songs like "House of Cards," "Awake," and "Beneath my Skin" are any indication. That's really only a problem if you want an album with its foot on the accelerator front to back. No, the real whiff here is that there aren't any truly standout tracks; no instant mind-blowers to elevate an otherwise solid collection of tunes to anything above a fun listen.

Stemm have had some attention pitched their way via a long-standing partnership with the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Seems the chaps at UFC have been using Stemm songs as the themes to several of their shows for years now. Which is completely appropriate, since "Blood Scent" is perfect for kicking back and watching guys Superman punch and arm bar each other into oblivion. Or lifting weights. Or anything that has a disproportionate testosterone-to-brain cells ratio. Is it vulgar? Mildly. Is it a display of power? No question. Is it a vulgar display of power? Not even close.

B-

- Joe Smith

★ buy it!

posted October 14, 2009

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