

THE TOP  
**40**  
ALBUMS OF 2023

TOP 5  
FAVORITE (NOT BEST)  
GAMES OF 2023,  
BY KILL SCREEN

1. *Resident Evil 4 Remake* [CAPCOM]
2. *Baldur's Gate 3* [LARIAN STUDIOS]
3. *Blasphemous 2* [THE GAME KITCHEN]
4. *Dredge* [BLACK SALT GAMES]
5. *Final Fantasy XVI* [SQUARE ENIX]

TOP 5  
TAKEAWAYS FROM THE  
BON SCOTT STATUE IN  
KIRRIEMUIR, SCOTLAND,  
BY RAOUL HERNANDEZ

1. Like the eight-strong siblings of the Glaswegian Young clan, Bon Scott remains Scottish, not Australian.
2. Birthplace listed as Forfar nearby, a distant cousin of his there told us people from Kirrie drive to the hospital the next town over for birthing.
3. Pop. 6,000 in the Scottish highlands, Kirrie's other most famous son rests in the cemetery at the top of the town: Peter Pan creator J.M. Barrie.
4. Every year Kirrie hosts a Bon Fest, at which the singer's son usually sings and plays, and last year, on a flatbed truck à la "It's a Long Way to the Top" video, a Top 10 Aussie hit on which Scott famously played bagpipes he bought and learned that same day of recording.
5. I could scarcely read all the Scott and AC/DC info at the statue to my fourth grader without choking TF up.

TOP 5  
FLEXI DISCS OF 2023,  
BY ALBERT MUDRIAN

1. **Mother of Graves**, "Sunset"
2. **Doro**, "Heart in Pain"
3. **Terminal Nation**, "Concrete Hell / A Pound of Flesh or a Gallon of Blood"
4. **The Silver**, "The Vagrant Soul"
5. **Wayfarer**, "Night Shift"  
(original by Siouxsie and the Banshees)

**30** **KRIGSGRAV**  
FIRES IN THE FALL ▶ WISE BLOOD



Nestled in Keller, TX, a quaint hamlet outside of Dallas-Fort Worth, one of America's best-kept secrets resides. Somewhere between aggro-harmonic Dawn and the mountainous verdure of Wolves in the Throne Room, Krigsgrav quietly reign supreme. *Fires in the Fall*, the group's latest full-length, ups the ante considerably from its high-octane predecessor, *The Sundering*. Here, commander David Sikora conjures atmosphere, intensity and energy with the same mastery as more prominent counterparts, while guitarists Justin Coleman and Cody Daniels paint the sky and depths as if they're meant to rule both. Don't fucking sleep on these *Fires*. —CHRIS DICK

**29** **WILL HAVEN**  
VII ▶ MINUS HEAD



Will Haven's cult credentials were secured in the wake of 2001's *Carpe Diem*, the band's third, understatedly influential LP. The Sacramento act's sludgy metallic hardcore was underscored by an unnerving atmosphere heightened by vocalist Grady Avenell's desperate screams. However, such insidious horror has been brought to the murder room front and center on their seventh album. No band with as fractious a past as Will Haven's should sound this relevant, threatening or powerfully reenergized 28 years into their existence. *VII* is midlife crisis metal as a sustained howl into the void. —DEAN BROWN

**28** **SMOULDER**  
VIOLENT CREED OF VENGEANCE ▶ CRUZ DEL SUR



Smoulder aren't the first musical swordsmen and sorcerers, but they seem determined to be the best. Having the members spread all over Hyboria didn't slow them down for their second full-length. If anything, they go even faster and heavier than on their debut. Influenced as much by the writings of Michael Moorcock (who appears on the album) and Tanith Lee as they are by Omen or Manilla Road, this anti-fascist epic doom act truly comes into their own here. "The Talisman and the Blade" and "Path of Witchery" solve the riddle of steel easily. —JEFF TREPPEL

**27** **KRUELTY**  
UNTOPIA ▶ PROFOUND LORE



*Untopia* is an album best experienced live, and witnessing Kruelty earlier this year on their recent North American tour is a major reason why these sadistic Japanese death metal brutalizers landed so high a position on my personal year-end list. Watching the venue almost literally torn asunder by the crowd during tracks like "Harder Than Before" or the titular crush 'n' roller title cut is the stuff of long-lasting memories. As far as truly memorable albums of the year, images of violence and mayhem will forever be synonymous with Kruelty's *Untopia*. —DUTCH PEARCE

**26** **NIGHT DEMON**  
OUTSIDER ▶ CENTURY MEDIA



Though the ambition to write and record a concept album is impressive, those types of endeavors always struck me as a little restricting for a band. That's definitely not the case with trad metal wizards Night Demon, who on *Outsider* have simply made a really compelling album that just happens to have a story that runs throughout the nine tracks. Appreciate this for the killer songs, meaty production, pro performances and spectacle of a band at the peak of its powers. —ADEM TEPEDELEN