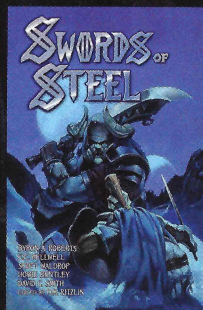




# LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

**M**etalploitation films discussed in this month's music feature make for fun retro viewing but, like all lowbrow exploitation films, they don't exactly treat their subject matter seriously. Movies such as *Trick or Treat* deal with heavy metal in the simplest way possible, playing up to the stereotype of dumb headbangers. A couple of recent literary horror anthologies might be changing that, however, by aiming to deliver something more sophisticated.



*Swords of Steel*, out now from DMR Books, is a collection of fantasy/horror stories penned exclusively by members of metal bands, including Manilla Road and Bal-Sagoth. In its introduction, David C. Smith (author of the *Red Sonja* novels) describes the book's content as a kind of "weird adventure" that differs from traditional high fantasy by focusing on darker themes, brutal reality and more morally complex characters than the heroes of typical sword and sorcery epics.

"The stories in *Swords of Steel* are darker and more serious than a lot of the Tolkien-derived sword and sorcery stuff that's been popular for so long," says anthology editor Dave Ritzlin. "The characters' lives – and sometimes souls – are at great risk, and you don't know whether or not they'll survive."

In "The Riddle Master" by E.C. Hellwell (from Manilla Road), a man makes a wager with the devil with his soul on the line. "Into The Dawn of Storms" by Byron A. Roberts (Bal-Sagoth), introduces Caleb Blackthorne, an English buccaneer on a quest to save himself from the dark forces haunting him.

"Some of the stories are in the style of H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe," explains Ritzlin. "The rest of the stories are more along the lines of sword and sorcery fantasy, filled with strange magic, inhuman gods and monsters, horrible curses, and more fun stuff."

Meanwhile, Despumption Press recently released *The Healing Monsters*, an anthology of dark fiction featuring stories by both horror authors and members of extreme metal outfits such as Broken Hope and Pig Destroyer. A benefit project with proceeds split between the trust of late *Metal Maniacs* editor Katherine Ludwig and ailing horror author Dustin LaValley, the book strives to add a sense of optimism to its tales of monsters and madness.

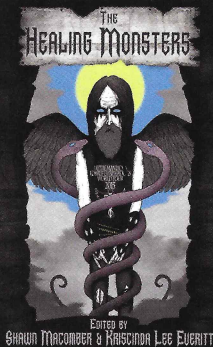
"The only real guideline I gave potential contributors was to tap into the triumphant, defiant side of horror and metal rather than rote, played out nihilism," says co-editor (and Rue Morgue Writer) Shawn Macomber. "We're dealing with deadly serious matters here, and I wanted *The Healing Monsters* to inspire people in tough situations to persevere and overcome, not lay down before fate and give up."

Clocking in at 400 pages and containing 28 stories, *The Healing Monsters* covers a lot between its dark covers.

"Several contributors did something explicitly metal-based and others spun off into completely bizarre territory, merely adopting the snarl and velocity of metal," says Macomber.

If anything, both *Swords of Steel* and *Healing Monsters* prove that when it comes to horror, metal is capable of favouring the profound over the profane.

AARON VON LUPTON



hangover, but the overall impact is washed out by a sea of similar sounding groups in an increasingly overcrowded genre. That said, fans of rough-around-the-edges bands like American Werewolves or Devils Whorehouse may still want to skip school to see these Norwich UK ghoulies. 🐼🐼 TD



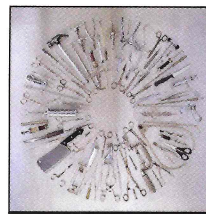
## VINCE RIPPER & THE RODENT SHOW

PSYCHOBILLY

*It's Fun to Be a Monster*

ECLECTIC

The corpses of classic deathrock and psychobilly get dug up on *It's Fun to Be a Monster*, but is it a worthwhile resurrection? Ex-Alien Sex Fiend drummer Andrew "Ratfink" Wilson lends his gravelly pipes to this collection of covers, and while he obviously has the greatest respect for The Cramps' Lux Interior, his takes on "New Kind of Kick," "Zombie Dance" and "Sunglasses After Dark" (among others) will leave listeners longing for the licentiousness of that lean, lewd and late singer. Ripper and Ratfink also scrape the sonic gunk off several Fiend tracks, including "Attack!!," "New Christian Music" and "Smells Like...," but we prefer the lo-fi viciousness of Nik Fiend's originals. The band's ooky-spooky approach, which includes cheesy horror movie dialogue and Ratfink's demented laugh, works best on its version of the *Spider Baby* theme. Indeed, it is fun to be a monster and it is almost as fun listening to this record. 🐼🐼 SP



## CARCASS

METAL

*Surgical Remission/Surplus Steel*  
NUCLEAR BLAST RECORDS

Riding the crest of a wave built on massive critical and fan acclaim following 2013's *Surgical Steel*, Carcass returns with an EP of unreleased tracks and B-sides. Fans of the melodies, harmonies and tasteful guitar leads of *Surgical Remission's* predecessor and the legendary *Heartwork* album – along with Jeff Walker's trademark snarl – will find more than enough here to satisfy. That said, those missing the brutality of Carcass' early material (or the instant catchiness of the criminally underrated *Swan Song*) are sure to be disappointed. However, both parties should be satisfied with the closing duo of catchy, mid-paced "Livestock Marketplace" and the heart(string)work of "1985 (Reprise)." Still, for the old-school die-hards, this is only a remission of recent symptoms. 🐼🐼 GT



## INDESTRUCTIBLE NOISE COMMAND

METAL

*Black Hearse Serenade*

FEROCIOUS RECORDS

Remember when Zakk Wylde and Lamb of God recorded an