



at only 40-odd minutes, it is a hide-tanning lesson in downtuned brutal thrash, evidencing a Testament finally free of the wannabe-Metallica hooks that had plagued '92's 'The Ritual', and lingered even on the band's return to brutality with '94's 'Low'. Yet compared to its successor, 'Demonic' merely slaps buttocks with a wrist as limp as its paper thin 'Satanic' posturing.

Easily the most convincing metal record made by a former thrash heavyweight in the late '90s, 'The Gathering' [8] was where Testament brought out their nine-tail. Combining a dream line-up – Dave Lombardo on drums, fretless wonder Steve DiGiorgio on bass and the returning James Murphy on lead guitar – with an influentially intense production, courtesy of Andy Sneap, it opens with a skin-flaying salvo more potent and infectious than anything the so-called 'Big Four' have come up with in fifteen years or more, while in 'True Believer', it spawned an enduring Testament live anthem. Better than anything Slayer have done since 'Seasons...', 'The Gathering' could have cured many of the metal world's ills had it taken the place of the bad joke that was 'St. Anger'.

PAUL SCHWARZ

BELIEVER

'Extraction From Mortality'
'Sanity Obscure'
'Dimensions'
METAL MIND

It's funny to witness how those Pennsylvania thrashers from the late '80s are now tagged as the forefathers of technical death metal. First off, the band, devoid of cookie monster vocals and light-speed tempos, always leant more towards a classic thrash sound, with their skillfully carved blend of both the American and the European styles. And secondly, if there's one thing that helped them get noticed in the first place, it wasn't their demanding songs structures – mostly prominent in their final and only real masterpiece

'Dimensions' anyway – but their widely advocated personal beliefs that made them the first openly Christian metal band in the late '80s alongside, er, Stryper. If '89's 'Extraction From Mortality' [5] and 1990's 'Sanity Obscure' [6] are still somewhat available out there, their true masterpiece 'Dimensions' [8] has been officially out-of-print for over ten years. So those re-releases, once again available on lavish digipacks alas without any bonus (what happened to the extra tracks available on the 2001's re-release of 'Extraction Of Mortality?') as part of the Roadrunner re-release campaign by Metal Mind, are more than welcome. Despite its flat production and somewhat irritating vocals, 'Sanity Obscure' earns some kudos by planting some of the seeds that would only blossom three years later, most notably on the track 'Dies Irae', one of the first successful attempts, after Celtic Frost's 'Tristesses De La Lune', to mix thrash with classical music and Latin lyrics. After a brief split in '91 and a swift line-up change, Believer convinced their label to finance the renovation of their own studio to allow them to have "more time and control" over their music. The result of a year long excruciating recording process, 'Dimensions' is one of progressive thrash metal's finest hours, with 'Trilogy Of Knowledge' sounding like a crazier and twenty-minute-plus sequel to 'Dies Irae'.

OLIVIER 'ZOLTAR' BADIN

GODLESS RISING

'Rising Hatred'
MORIBUND

Long before Glen Benton entered the picture in 2003 for 'Dechristianize' to rejuvenate their career, Vital Remains had altogether a whole different look upon the death metal genre. Back in the middle of the '90s, when the band was signed to Deaf, a sub-division of Peaceville, they belonged to the Obituary or Massacre school of DM: heavy, straight-forward and maniacally old school. Formed in 2005 by two VR ex-members, vocalist Jeff Gruslin and guitar player Paul Flynn, Godless Rising therefore unsurprisingly took the road their former comrades refused to follow after their second full-length 'In Cold Darkness' in '95. Riding high on the well-received second GR offering ('Battle Lords') out last summer, their low-profile debut from '06 is now being re-released, along with new artwork by Chris Moyan and two bonus tracks. Since those two extras are new versions of songs from 'Rising Hatred', their sole purpose here seems to be to display how much the band has evolved in only twelve months. And indeed, the new takes on 'Divine Blasphemy' and 'Souless'

are far superior to the originals, which indicated a band desperate to escape the shadows of their former selves.

[6] OLIVIER 'ZOLTAR' BADIN

LEGION OF THE DAMNED

'Feel The Blade'
MASSACRE

Legion Of The Damned's second album, '07's 'Sons Of The Jackal', had many a metal fan drooling uncontrollably over their blackened take on Slayaaargh and all things thrashtastic, but what many maybe didn't realise is that this Dutch quartet plied their wares under the name Occult for well over a decade, and 'Feel The Blade' is actually a repackaged reissue of their '03 full length, 'Elegy Of The Weak'. It snuck out through Karmageddon and admittedly didn't get the attention it deserved, so here it is again, untouched sonically and still sounding as raw as you like, thanks to a gritty Andy Classen (Belphegor/Dew Scented) desk job. To persuade fans to part with their money over again, the digipack version comes with a two-hour DVD, and three newly-recorded bonus tracks (including a cover of Pestilence's 'Chronic Infection' with guest vocals from Bolt Thrower Martin Van Drunen), and as such, this is a real treat for fans of thrashing European death.

[7] IAN GLASPER

STRIBORG

'Mysterious Semblance'
'Trepidation'
DISPLEASED

Fittingly for a band who have collaborated with Sunn O))), this Tasmanian Solo project is considered by some to be harrowing artistic genius and by other to be talentless cack. Certainly anyone who has yet to explore Striborg should be warned that this is far from easy listening even by black metal standards – and it's not only the bleak monotony and peculiar vocals either, the disturbing production here is quite a boundary in itself. We're not talking primitive or raw, more *uncomfortable*, the piercing and troubling keyboards and wafer-thin guitars really getting under the skin and into the ear canal. Stick with it long enough and there's something almost peaceful in the seemingly never-ending compositions but it takes some persistence and at times it's simply poor in terms of songwriting and execution. Some will be able to embrace these albums wholeheartedly, but this music is a very acquired taste and its hard to rate it objectively. Nonetheless of the two recent reissues from '04 and '05 respectively, 'Mysterious Semblance' [6.5] is the more rewarding, thanks to a more epic vibe and not least because the vocals on 'Trepidation' [5.5] sometimes become so odd as to be comical.

ROSS HOON

Terrorizer's KxSxP fires up his positive outlook and breaks down the walls of the latest offerings from the hardcore scene.



The last edition of the HC round-up saw the entries grouped into three loose categories. No such luck this time 'round as we have bands from all sonic delineations offering up releases. Although, it would appear that Sweden's **Dead Reprise** have created a new sub-genre: in-one-ear-and-out-the-othercore. Actually, this isn't a new creation and neither is it exclusive to hardcore, but the band have fought their way to the head of the pack with 'Day Of Defiance' [3] on Germany's GSR. They're self-described as a cross between Madball, Ringworm, Terror, Hatebreed and Slayer, which speaks to a certain truth. Pummeling and powerful, yes; but also dull as fuck. Also from GSR comes Germany's **Crushing Caspars'** fifth release, 'The Fire Still Burns' [7.5]. Considering their moniker and a vocalist/guitarist called Snoopy, could they be spear-heading the burgeoning 'cartooncore' genre? Probably not, but they play an infectious brand of NYHC with vintage Agnostic Front being a big inspiration. When they sing about unity, family and all that luvvie-duvvie bollocks you can almost picture a ginormous circle-pit full of sweaty, tattooed dudes hugging each other in breakdown bliss. **Fall Of Serenity** are former leaders of the in-one-ear-out-the-other movement. The Germans have gone through a line-up overhaul and the result is 'The Crossfire' [7] on Lifeforce, a vast improvement in terms of viciousness and song writing quality. The guitars slay like a corpse-painted, breakdown-throwing Darkthrone, while new vocalist/former bass player, John Gahert bellows like an underworld denizen. Featuring former members of With Honor, **Ambitions** have had their debut 'Stranger' [7.5] brought to our attention courtesy of Bridge 9. They've corralled the energy and speed of their former band and pumped up the melody, resulting in speedy punkcore somewhere between Strung Out, Quicksand, 7 Seconds and Dag Nasty, with excellent composition smarts and anthemic singalongs. From the incestuous London scene comes eight-man crew **TRC** and their debut full-length 'Destroy And Rebuild' [6] from Rucktion Records. A slab of meaty rhythmic hardcore it is, though there are too many times where they sound like the cast of 'Bromwell High' doing weak-ass hip-hop and street-life skits. Stick to sounding like Breakdown and Knuckledust... please. Well, that was quick. A month after its North America release, Iowa's

Too Pure To Die have had their debut 'Confidence And Consequence' [4] remixed and remastered for European release through TrustKill/SPV. And while it may sound bigger and thicker, the source material was never going to set the world ablaze. Essentially, what you get are better sounding versions of songs originally written (in theory, of course) by the likes of All That Remains and Unerath. The hand-drawn picture gracing the cover of Belgium's **True Colors** 'Focus On The Light' [6.5] on Powered Recs looks a lot more menacing than the band's clean-cut image. Their music falls somewhere in the middle. Straightedge hardcore in the vein of Youth Of Today and In My Eyes was never designed to scare the shit out of people, but their sound is a razor-sharp take on classic old school HC played with clear heads, clean minds and at a 100 melodic mph. From the Boston area come nautical obsessives **Shipwreck A.D.** It's difficult to tell if 'Abyss' [5.5] on Deathwish is a concept album using the seven seas, crash landings on a beach, isolation and triumph of the spirit as the theme, but if it ain't, then they might consider re-jigging the album's background. Unfortunately, Shipwreck A.D. are striving for a more progressive feel than their talent level allows. Their ideas are light years ahead of their ability and thus, their Integrity, early-Cave In, Slayer and Cast Iron Hike mix is entertaining and ambitious, but clumsy. Lastly, the band many are touting as hardcore's next big thing. It's a bit strange hearing all and sundry throw accolades at **Pulling Teeth** and 'Martyr Immortal' [8] (also on Deathwish) because this particular hack remembers former Day Of Mourning guitarist Dom Romeo as a goofy kid from the Toronto metal/hardcore scene. Dom's now a Baltimore resident and has formed this shit hot proposition. Agnostic Front, Integrity and Cursed's raw guitars clash with Slayer leads, almost too-natural sounding drums and a vocalist who has cobra venom coursing through his testicles. Powerhouse metallic hardcore the way it was meant to be played.