



Jordan Blum

Philadelphia Rock Music Examiner

Roswell Six's "A Line in the Sand" a generic symphonic metal concept album.

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Conceptual albums have always tried to craft stories as if they were novels, but rarely have the two every actually been combined into one crossover project. *A Line in the Sand*, the second entry in Roswell Six's *Terra Incognita* chronicle, is just that. As ambitious as the idea is (and the music), unfortunately, the record is really just more run-of-the-mill symphonic prog metal. The musicianship is fantastic of course, but there really isn't any uniqueness or soul to escort it.

Acclaimed author Kevin J. Anderson and ProgRock Records began the project last year with the first novel, *The Edge of the World*, and companion album, *Beyond the Horizon*. Anderson has stated that *A Line in the Sand* (which accompanies his second novel, *The Map of All Things*) "features a different, grittier part of the story, focusing on the devastating generations-long war between continents, and it has an entirely different sound." As you might expect, Roswell Six, following in the footsteps of Allan Parsons and Arjen Lucassen, is made up of respected musicians and vocalists. On this album, Steve Walsh (Kansas), Michael Sadler (Saga) and Lucassen himself appear. *A Line in the Sand* is really just a generic prog metal release, of which there are certainly better, and Roswell Six doesn't come close to the genius that Lucassen brings to his Ayreon albums.



An epic cover
Photo: courtesy of their official site

The LP opens with some bland heavy tracks, featuring orchestral strings, heavy guitars, and vocals that oscillate between sandpaper textures and falsetto urgency. Again, if you've heard one of these power metal albums before, you've essentially heard this too. There are a lot of horns and complex time signatures, and again, the quality of playing here is top notch, but the songwriting and vocals are factory produced to fit the pattern. "The Crown" has especially annoying singing. "Loyalty" is like a Queensryche piano ballad if they used more classical instruments. "My Father's Son" has some interesting Middle Eastern production, almost like Orphaned Land ventured into the genre, but still, it's nothing new.

A Line in the Sand does have some worthwhile moments though. "When God Smiled On Us," is probably the best here because its melody actually invokes some emotion and it alters its intensity nicely. The riffs are like a progressive version of Disturbed and there is some interesting vocal layering in the middle. "Battleground" is an awesome instrumental full of intricacy, ferocity, and interesting timbres. It effectively conveys an epic battle for survival. The album closes with its most varied track, "Victory," which either brings closure or a cliffhanger to the storyline. The familiar voice that opened the album with "a line in the sand" recites it again during the last seconds, bringing a nice sense of continuity and suggesting that this chapter in the *Terra Incognita* saga has successfully been told.

The problem with *A Line in the Sand* is just how ordinary it is. We've heard this music before and these voices are all too familiar. It's like a second rate version of more respected works, and even other contemporary emulations, like Neverland's recent *Ophidia*, offer more worthwhile music. If you're a fan of this stuff, obviously you'll like what Roswell Six has to offer, but even diehard aficionados might find it a bit stale.

For more info and song samples, check out their [official Myspace page](#).



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