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Roswell Six - 2010 - "Terra Incognita: A Line in the Sand"

(65:18, Progrock Records)



TRACK LIST:

1. Barricade 8:24
2. Whirlwind 5:01
3. The Crown 5:21
4. Loyalty 6:15
5. My Father's Son 6:09
6. When God Smiled on Us 6:01
7. Need 6:06
8. Spiral 6:45
9. Battleground 6:10
10. Victory 9:06

LINEUP:

Henning Pauly - guitar, bass; keyboards; drums; backing vocals
Steve Walsh - vocals
Alex Froese - vocals
Nick Storr - vocals
Sass Jordan - vocals
Michael Sadler - vocals
Charlie Dominici - vocals
Arjen Lucassen - backing vocals

Prolusion. ROSWELL SIX is a project planned by Shawn Gordon of Progrock Records and author Kevin J. Anderson. The idea is to create concept albums chronicling the events described in a series of books by Anderson, combining his fantastic realms with a suitable musical score. "Terra Incognita: A Line in the Sand" is the second chapter in what may become an ongoing series of concept productions, and was issued in the summer of 2010.

Analysis. When I encountered the first chapter of this series, I have to admit being less than thrilled about the end result. A few good songs aside, the initial part of the Roswell Six project was a somewhat underwhelming affair according to my musical taste. And I was therefore pleasantly surprised by the second chapter of this series. This time around Henning Pauly, a composer and multi-instrumentalist who has contributed to a great number of productions previously issued by Progrock Records, has been given more or less free rein in the compositional department: He has written all the music and handles all instrumental parts himself. Anderson and his wife Rebecca Moesta provide for the lyrics department, with Janis Ian co-credited on two

numbers. The plethora of guest stars this time around caters solely to the vocal aspect of this endeavor. The end result is a good album. The lead and backing vocals are great, the production top notch and the CD has a great sense of cohesion about it from start to finish. Progressive metal is the chosen style, on this occasion a darker and grimmer sounding variety of it, often bordering on heavy metal. Dark guitar riffs and rich symphonic backdrops are key features throughout, while well-planned and effective use of Arabian-tinged textures supplies something of a lead motif throughout. Within this general framework there's room for quite a lot of variety. *The Crown* comes across as an AC/DC track on steroids with added art rock arrangements. *When God Smiled on Us* is a quirky and rather challenging affair, offering the arguably heaviest as well as the mellowest passages on the album; the latter in the shape of almost ambient, brief inserts in between the gritty yet sophisticated riff-dominated constructions. And concluding number *Victory* is a jubilant affair, with a general positive vibe and a sing-along chorus of the variety that will stick like glue, and containing melodic and compositional aspects that I associate with gospel music. It would be a brilliant alternative for sports clubs to use, replacing the somewhat overused Queen track "We Are the Champions" after goals have been scored. But I digress. Opening number *Barricade* is the best effort on this disc though: sophisticated and rich arrangements, excellent vocals, momentum and energy that keep you listening, and a chorus that is just as catchy as the one on the previously mentioned final piece. All the best parts of this CD assembled into one composition and in a league of its own when compared to the following nine efforts.

Conclusion. "Terra Incognita: A Line in the Sand" is a well-made concept album, and a better production than the first chapter in this series. Those who find their curiosity intrigued by concept albums within the progressive metal genre should add this effort to their list of material of possible interest, in particular if they enjoy a variety of it containing darker moods and bordering on heavy metal in stylistic expression.

OMB=Olav M Bjornsen: Agst 25, 2010
The Rating Room

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