

"Jingle Balls", complete with video online that is both melodic and funny (both intentional and not) which drags the mark to a six.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

MATT STEVENSON

LVCIFYRE

"Sun Eater"
Genre: Black/Death Metal
Dark Desecent Records



This band's debut, reviewed in issue 140, was a colossal explosion of blackened death wrath, and this second album sees this London outfit continuing on from that barbaric template by forging nine wholly abominable tracks that spew out hell fury like molten brimstone. The nine-minute opener, "Night Seas Sorcery", is a torturous terror trip into your worst nightmare. The slow, pervading pace is excruciating, with vocal demonising palpably tearing strips from your soul. Elevating the pace towards its close indicates what is to come next on "Calicem Obscurum"; a song befitting their debut, it launches its venomous assault with warlike insanity. The battering continues with the title track, and as your brow breaks out in beads of sweat, you'll wonder just how much more insane this album can get, but more it does, with unrepentant feral black violence on the title track. Much of this album resides in death metal, but the war mongering drum work produces hints of Behemoth and Belphegor. The guitar work has sparks of Nile and Immolation, obviously, but this act sits in a niche of their own; their brand of murderous intent is one that will be hard to match this year.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

MARTIN HARRIS

VITNE

"Neon"
Genre: Hard Rock
Relectric Records/Hart As A Rock



Lots of rockin' riffs and big hooks but Vitne's latest effort, "Neon", is dimly lit. The hair metal sound he's going for was so audacious in its prime (and still is when done right) but this takes itself a little too seriously and doesn't have the balls to back it up. Lyrics such as "just let me (make love to you)" found on "Royal Nights" could have been scrawled on a teenagers' school book.

The real stroke of genius by Vitne is the hiring of lead guitarist Julian Angel, a German player who tears open a dull song with his electrifying solos. There are tracks to listen out for in "Cruisin'" and the Billy Idol-tinged "I'm Feeling Deadly", but for the most part it all sounds like a slowed down Ramones riff, albeit backed by a decent drummer.

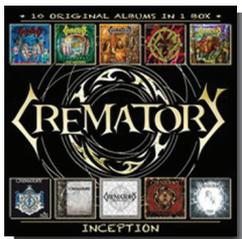
"Neon" makes a hum, but it doesn't light up.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5

DAN BOND

CREMATORY

"Inception"
Genre: Gothic Metal
SPV



German gothic/death metal act Crematory are one of those bands that every metal fan has heard of, but who still remain on the relative periphery of the scene. Blending gothic metal with death metal and industrial elements, without wishing to sound too disingenuous, the music has always been on the more simplistic side, with a focus on straightforward heavy riffing, lots of keyboards and plenty of decent melodies. They've been going for well over twenty years and in that time have released an impressive ten studio albums. And it is these ten albums that feature in a limited edition box set entitled "Inception", to celebrate a new deal with Steamhammer/SPV, the release of which will coincide with the release of a single, "Shadowmaker" from their upcoming eleventh album, "Antiserum".

This box set will, I suggest, appeal to those who are currently unfamiliar with the band, rather than existing fans. The reason why I say this is that each album is simply housed in a cardboard sleeve, similar to promos of old, adorned by the original artwork. As such, there are no booklets, liner notes or, as far as

I can see, any exclusive extras. However, if a cursory look at prices on the internet is any indication, the box set works out at about £2.50 per album, so it is pretty decent value and a great way for the band to gain some new fans to their cause. And I hope they do, too, because as I listen to the band's back catalogue, there's some great stuff to be heard and enjoyed, with rarely a duff album within the whole bunch.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MATT SPALL

THE DEAD DAISIES

"The Dead Daisies"
Genre: Rock
Spitfire Music



With CVs that boast stints in bands such as Guns N' Roses, INXS, The Rolling Stones and The Cult, your expectations should be high for this Australian based band. Generally, these expectations are met on an album that dishes out rock 'n' roll grooves and radio friendly hooks. On the up-tempo material, you sense that these guys have a similar record collection to The Temperance Movement. Not quite as incendiary as those UK rockers, the duel guitars nevertheless ensure that they have enough upfront riffs and squalling solos to get you up on your feet, shaking your tail-feathers. Jon Stevens has a good voice, somewhere between The Black Crowes' Chris Robinson and Lenny Kravitz (especially on "Washington"). Live, having seen them on tour recently, I can report that his voice was less nuanced than the studio version has captured him here, where he adds real brio to the likes of "It's Gonna Take Time" and "Writing On the Wall", on which his soulful singing reminds you of his fellow countryman Jimmy Barnes. "Lock 'N' Load" is the song that calls for special attention, as Slash makes a guest appearance on guitar, and "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah" is as blatantly catchy and commercial as its title suggests. "Miles In Front Of Me" and "Bible Row" lift the latter half of the record.

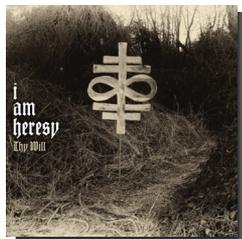
With uncomplicated rocking that's well performed by seasoned musicians, this is a very easy album to like.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

DUNCAN JAMIESON

I AM HERESY

"Thy Will"
Genre: Metalcore
Century Media



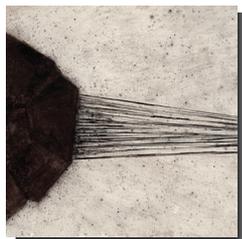
Formed by Boysetsfire front man Nathan Gray as an outlet for his love of 'dark, violent noise', I Am Heresy certainly fits the bill. With this, the band's second full-length release, the six-piece pummel their way through fourteen sonic punches to the temple with relentless efficiency. There are moments of melody in amongst the carnage ("March Of Black Earth" and the acoustic "Alarm", for example) but "Thy Will" is at its best on the rage-fuelled likes of "Year Zero In The Temple Of Fire" and the utterly fantastic opening "Rahab", blending the hardcore ferocity of Boysetsfire with metallic clatter that only the sound of three guitars can bring. Music to break bones to? Absolutely!

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MIK GAFFNEY

DIRGE

"Hyperion"
Genre: Sludge Metal
Debemur Morti Productions



The sixth full-length album from Paris based Dirge, a new name to this reviewer, is, as the band name suggests, full of less than happy songs. The band's current line up which has been pretty stable for the last decade is founder Marc T on guitars, vocals and programming, Alain B on drums, Luz on bass and Stephane L on guitars.

Opener "Circumloaris" sets the stage for what is just over an hour of music – six tracks of well crafted and executed tunes. Intense and atmospheric and in places, very dense and heavy, there are passages where Dirge ease off a bit and give the listener time to reflect and draw breath, but as to what the songs are actually about, your guess is as good as mine. Guest vocals come from Milena Rousseau (Miroda), Nicholas Dick (Kill The Thrill) and Tara Vanflower (Lycia) – personnel from what I

must assume are French bands of similar ilk.

This is one where you may need to focus on the rich, deep, dark and well played, heavy tones that abound on this album. Understanding might well have to take second place.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

ALLAN BANNERMAN

FAREWELL, MY LOVE

"Gold Tattoos"
Genre: Emo
Standby Records



When the first handful of notes hit me here, I was seriously expecting a neo-classic power metal assault of the highest caliber. Turns out that Phoenix-based rockers Farewell, My Love are, naturally, a modern emo act with a flair for the theatrical touch of bands like Royal Hunt. What we get here is a set of tunes that take the vocal attack of My Chemical Romance and fuse it with the symphonic stylings of Saint The Sinner. It's an interesting mix, and at times the band really hit the mark, with killer tunes in the shape of "Mirror, Mirror" and "Afraid Of The Dark" giving AF1 a run for their money. It does get a little much after a while, especially with the vocals having that irritating Gerard Way-esque whine. Still, goth and emo kids will have a blast with this.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

BRUCE TURNBULL

SWITCHBLADE

"Heavy Weapons"
Genre: Heavy Metal
Killer Metal Records



The label 'traditional metal' is bandied around usually when a band sounds like one of the denim and leather brigade of the 1980s or similar. Israel's Switchblade want to be 'trad metal' but really this just means that they do a passable imitation of European metal monsters like Accept and Helloween.

Debut album "Heavy Weapons" is a decent enough record, but suffers from a lack of songwriting creativity. There are solid, chugging guitars, a powerful drummer and a theatrical lead singer, but Switchblade's songs do little more than imagine they are being performed at the Monsters Of Rock festival.

"Metalista" is the pick of the bunch thanks to its chugging guitar riff, and "Curse Of The Father, Sins Of The Son" gives a swift kick up the arse with pounding drums and solid riffs, but power ballad "Lost Lovers Unite" is a dreary mess that suffers from Lior Stein being unable to change his vocal range.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

DAN BOND

REO SPEEDWAGON

"Good Trouble"/"Wheels Are Turnin"
Genre: AOR/Melodic Hard Rock
Rock Candy



Whilst the flame of AOR continues to flicker and burn to this day (much to the chagrin of the naysayer's who've been proclaiming its imminent demise for decades), the scene undoubtedly had its heyday in the late 70s/early 80s. Perusing the somewhat modest sales figures of today's releases, it's hard to believe that albums like "Foreigner 4" and "Escape" sold by the truckload, but multi-platinum sales and the lavish lifestyle trappings that it brought with it were the norm for bands such as Foreigner, Journey, Toto and REO Speedwagon back then.

As a teenager cutting his teeth on the hard rock of the day, REO Speedwagon were invariably dismissed as 'wimps' or 'sell outs' by my peers; often solely on the basis of the sugar coated, oft overly syrupy ballads that seemed to dominate the charts at the time. However, over the ensuing decades I've learned that judging a book by its cover alone rarely tells the real story, and that's particularly true in the enduring tale of this band.

Emerging at the tail end of the 60s from the lush musical scene then prevalent in Champaign, Illinois, success wasn't instant for REO Speedwagon; years of graft, sweat and dogged determination were needed before fame came a knocking. But a knocking it eventually did, and after groundswell of support for their brand of melody infused, guitar driven hard rock came to a