

LAIR OF THE MINOTAUR

Evil Power

THE GRIND-HOUSE RECORDS

It's a testament to the conviction of these Chicagoans that they can drop a gang-shouted chorus such as, "We fucked them all, let's fuck them all again, let's kill these motherfuckers!" ("Let's Kill These Motherfuckers") without a whiff of cheese or a hint of camp.

In fact, the group's metal is so manly, the only thing missing from it are the shrieks of terrified virgins as this conquering horde thunders through their village! The eleven punk-inflected odes to vengeance, slaughter, cannibalism ("Hunt and Devour") and witchcraft ("Blood from the Witch's Vein") that make up this lean, mean album are firmly rooted in the classic Swedish death metal sound of early Unleashed and Entombed, but are also imbued with such personality that they never come across as imitative. More importantly, the quality of the writing is consistent from helmet to boots. Drain your flagon and saddle up, into battle we ride! **GM** ☠☠☠

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quotes poet Lord Byron, and lyrical influences from Poe and Lovecraft. Strictly for those with a taste for the theatrical, *Set Sail to Mystery* is suitably available in a beautiful hardcover book version featuring 56 pages of exclusive art and photography.

AVL ☠☠☠



BARREN EARTH

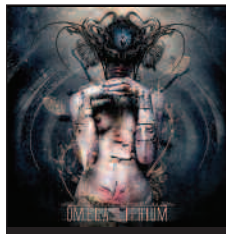
Curse of the Red River

PEACEVILLE RECORDS

The term "supergroup" can be a mixed blessing. On one hand, several thousand prog-metal fans just creamed their jeans at the thought of what alumni of Swallow the Sun, Amorphis, Moonsorrow and Kreator have strung together. On the other, the guys are standing in the shadows of their beloved day jobs. Without reinventing the wheel, Barren Earth has played to its strengths on this debut – a dense and melancholic record

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that mashes Opeth's heavy progressive tendencies with elements of folk, doom and psychedelia. The arrangements are, unsurprisingly, a whirlwind of gloomy atmosphere, heady rhythms and enviable technicality, while vocalist Mikko Kotamäki's elastic range shifts from Cookie Monster growls to theatrical warbling. Thematically, *Curse* doles out heaps of the morose; death and solitude take centre stage on "Our Twilight" and the pummelling "Cold Earth Chamber," with its bleak, symphonic crescendo. Tense and overwhelmingly dire, *Curse* is a fitting first chapter for a group which rivals the sum of its parts. **ED** ☠☠☠



OMEGA LITHIUM

Dreams in Formaline

ARTOFACT RECORDS

Call them goth metal, symphonic metal or industrial metal, the common

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denominator of Omega Lithium's sound is *metal*. Fronted by nineteen-year-old singer Mya Mortensen, this Croatian quartet fits neatly alongside its most obvious influences: Evanescence, Within Temptation and Lacuna Coil. What distinguishes these musicians from their peers is an affinity for EBM and industrial-style synth flourishes, which gives their debut album, *Dreams in Formaline*, an edge on the dance floor. In fact, songs such as "Stigmata" and "Angel's Holocaust" sound like Rammstein fronted by Amy Lee (although Mortensen is not as accomplished a singer as the Evanescence frontwoman). Whether you approve of that description will gauge your interest in these dramatic, guitar-heavy songs – and, *caveat emptor*, *Dreams In Formaline's* eleven tracks are not entirely dissimilar from one another. That said, we can certainly see spooky girls and boys grooving to Omega Lithium's particular brand of heaviness.

SP ☠☠☠



UNHOLY GRAVE

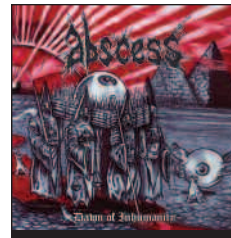
Grind Killers

SELFMADEGOD RECORDS

Japanese grindcore mongers Unholy Grave (a name taken from the classic Death tune "Beyond the Unholy Grave") issue another raging blast of simplified dirges on their latest 23-track behemoth, *Grind Killers*. Merciless and raw, the band's coupling of political tendencies and physical malice is once again expressed through gruesome lyrics – that is, when one can actually decipher what the fuck they're saying – on tunes such as "Murderer," "Morbid Dark Angels," "Buried Terror" and a hilarious blast version of The Ramones' "Beat on the Brat." Coming across like a twisted amalgam of Obituary's baritone rum-

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bling over music reminiscent of early Carcass (before they became prodigious and began recording in a studio that couldn't properly capture bathroom sounds), this is an experience in ultra-low-fidelity discomfort. **KC** ☠☠☠



ABSCCESS

Dawn of Inhumanity

PEACEVILLE RECORDS

Pigeonholing California's Abscess isn't easy. Straddling death metal, doom and punk, their musical aesthetic is ever-evolving. Toss a deranged pinch of psychedelic influence into the mix and you've got a band (featuring members of Autopsy and Death) with a history rooted in classic gore. Unnerving and unhinged, this eighth album has heaviness in spades, yet it's the experimental atmosphere that really stands out. Opening track "Goddess of Filth and Plague" begins with 50 seconds of desolate ambience before bursting into a churning storm of speed and guttural riffing, introducing the album's dichotomy of tension and catharsis. "The Rotting Land" evolves from a frenzy of squealing guitars and pulsating drums into a dense, snail-paced dirge, while the layered vocals of Chris Reifert and guitarist Clint Bower sound twisted and blood-thirsty. *Dawn of Inhumanity* is a lot to digest, but ultimately Abscess has created a satisfyingly disturbed, glorious mess of metal. **ED** ☠☠☠

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