

FORTRESS EUROPE



part one // CCTV et mon droit

**This promotional document includes both the first chapter (& prologue) of underground journalist Ryan Bartek's new book "FORTRESS EUROPE (*The Big Shiny Prison Vol II*). "FORTRESS EUROPE" is the follow-up to 2009's "The Big Shiny Prison" -- a book in which the author traveled the USA covering all forms of counterculture through nonfiction journalism & the classic autobiographical road novel.

With "FORTRESS EUROPE," the author takes it to the next level while traveling Europe throughout 2011 & investigating the true state of the European underground through London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Prague, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Milan, Ljubljana, Venice, Bologna & Brussels.

"FORTRESS EUROPE" will feature a number of face-to-face interviews with members of LAIBACH Rotting Christ, Wolfbrigade, Killing Joke, LAIBACH, Moonsorrow, First Blood, Enochian Crescent, Funeral Winds, Hello Bastards, Fondlecorpse, Defeated Sanity, Armed Response Unit, PANTHEIST, Deranged, Beherit, Abortion, General Surgery, Dickless Tracy, Fides Inversa, Arkangel, Excavated, HATE, Vanguard, Pyramido, Black Breath, Spacemen 3, El Schlong, Ingurgitating Oblivion & legendary Detroit writer/60's radical Mr. John Sinclair + many more...

Despite offers for publication, Bartek will be releasing FORTRESS EUROPE as a FREE PDF early 2012 & the author encourages this document be spread freely to any of interest. "FORTRESS EUROPE" is the third book by Ryan Bartek. To download any of his other material (books & music), links can be found at the following site: <http://ryanbartek.angelfire.com/blog/>

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I. "CCTV et mon Droit"

In the mind of the foreigner, there is a substantial gulf between tangible impression & vague reality. One can theorize about alien culture until the sun bursts, but no amount of raw-dog experience hammers the senses like high-voltage transoceanic vagabondage...

Take for instance the Kiwi's -- no one bothered to inform me that those Zealanders have a penchant for Richard Simmons the way the Kraut's have a boner for Hasselhoff. Frizz-hair Richie is sweatin' for the newbies on the airplane monitor, hosting the safety video & gymnastically leaping through the aisles. Flight attendants copy-cat his motions, slipping on life jackets & oxygen masks...

If the Air New Zealand plane spirals towards irreversible doom, it's not the buzz from huffed oxygen that will pacify everyone's fears -- it's the lingering image of Richard Simmons in his tiny blue shorts, that 80's leg slit flashing pasty white thighs bright as the belly of an Orca...

The plane elevates from American soil. All in-flight purchases are Kiwi cash only --complimentary wine, lunch & dinner; monitors dug into the hind-side of every chair offering free movies, tourist intel & 8-bit Tetris. *At 20,000 feet, I soar above The Big Shiny Prison; the terra-vortex spittoon of casino immolation...*

What I know, what I think I know, is that Europeans do not actually detest Americans -- they loathe FOX America, which is a separate race altogether. The Europeans have seen it all before, learned the historical lessons & have ingrained bullshit detectors like Geiger Counters. They withstand the American advance, shrugging off naivety as a hangman's morality contorts the pleas of the condemned...

I'm clearly not one of them & I have absolutely no issue with spitting venom at my homeland in return for a nightly squat. Indeed, my hatred towards the greediness of my country is ice cold. So profound, in fact -- so extreme -- that I hope to utilize such volcanic rhetorical eruptions as an omnipresent party favor...

Writing about America makes me want to napalm America. Yet in this vein of insult, it is cautionary to mention that it's really not all that difficult to repeatedly kick a mongoloid in the face. This is the case with America -- a target so rancid you can't help but to assault it while it's down. The stars & stripes bleed as profusely as a dog with broken legs, shot to pieces by the B.B. guns of white trash children in a back road dirt-alley of Arkansas...

Just keep moving forward at all costs & abandon the beast its own self-calculated degradation -- *just make sure to wipe your feet before you stroll back inside...*

**** (Day I): "الخنزير الأمريكية"**

There is but a mammal blockading total freedom; a lone female clasping that final "ker-chunk" of the visa stamp. I've everything in order, theoretically -- *fresh passport, proof of return ticket, \$5,000 in the bank, no felonies...*

But irony, destitute irony – she is a Muslim draped in ḥijāb, and has already sent 5 people into the authoritarian scrutiny limbo line. She locks eyes with me & I read it all too clear: *“That’s right Americano -- I know the stereotypes you possess. Even as you write this now, the audience will from one thousand directions scoff at your political incorrectness. Your stupid nation & foolish assumptions, you all fear us. Your warped paranoia justifications regarding us all bloodthirsty terrorists. That I am here to engage in treason...”*

“It’s tough enough dealing with this bullshit on the street -- at the grocers, on The Tube, but you – ignorant Americano – I will prove to you & to the Orwellian apparatus that employs me & that aims its hideous electric eye at my brow every ticking second of every paycheck – I will DESTROY this stereotype of my great people. Fuck you Americano & prepare to be grilled -- prepare to be made an example of myself making an example out of you...”

Or maybe I’m just overreacting. Maybe it’s just the American in me fearing the other Americans that normally surround me but accumulated into one entity that is in turn projected into her: *“Hi there, I’m just coming in as a tourist. I’ve never been to Europe before. As you can see I have my return ticket information right here. I plan to stay in London for a week and then head on into France and then Italy.”*

“Well, where are you staying?”

Damn. I hadn’t even thought of that. Like almost everything my life has become, the absurdity of what I’m doing fails to register as even a moderate truth & the actual truth at this point would be suicide.

Yeah, ok, so I have no idea where I’m going apart from a loose itinerary & a landslide of contacts which involve a number of potentially shady people whom I all met online in a non-transparent manner. All of these telephone numbers you see scribbled here on this computer print-out include an array of internationally renown Satanists, Anarchists, drug beasts & dissidents who all surely have lengthy criminal backgrounds in the Interpol databank...

Furthermore, I don’t have a dime saved for a hotel or hostel nor would I pay for one, as I’ve specifically come to be homeless & regularly eat out of your fine Euro-trash receptacles. You see Ma’am, I intensely crave those rare feats of disillusion when one is helplessly isolated & anonymous in a foreign gutter, dropped back to the absolute zero. I have no phone, no maps, no traveling partner – I don’t even know how to get out of this airport, nor do I technically have anywhere to go once I measure that one all out.

Yes, I’ve places to stay all over Europe -- but the truth is I never even bothered to look at a map. Sure, I know where France is, the UK, but I’m totally lost on the majority. Say *“Romania”* and I’ll respond: *“Somewhere over there, probably by Slovenia,”* because I have this notion that Slovenia borders everything in Europe. Or maybe it’s the notion of LAIBACH bordering everything, since you can’t contain a global state like NSK & their occupation is omnipresent, eternal...

So I give her a line I think will fly: *“To be honest my plan was to head downtown and find a cheap hostel or hotel. I figured it would probably be cheaper to do this in person.”*

FIRES OF NAPALM: ***“You mean you don’t have anything booked in advance? Why would you come to a country and not have any arrangements?”***

Damn, she’s got me again. My eyes are vacant & obvious -- I have the air of a man totally aloof with no clear idea why he is even there. *“Well I like to be a bit spontaneous, you*

know. It's always been a dream of mine to visit here & see all the tourist attractions, meet some authentic British folks in their natural environment."

"Well then, what tourist attractions are you planning to visit?"

Double damn. I can't name a single thing except Big Ben, Hyde Park & Buckingham Palace which I promptly declare. If it weren't for those name-dropping airplane monitors, I'd be fucked...

But she's still not buying it, demanding names & intel. She says she needs an address where I'll be staying or I can't be let into the country. I tell her again that it will be figured out once I get into town and not to worry, because I've plenty of money in the bank & if I get low on cash my parents are well-off financially and promised to assist whilst I give this Norman Rockwell gee-whiz purist Americana vibe & empathetically explain how I saved for a whole year to make this happen.

She half-buys it, so I cut the bullshit & go in for the kill: *"Look, I also write for some tiny online zines doing band interviews. I have contacts that will be meeting up & giving me a place to stay. I'm planning to go to some concerts."*

Danger Will Robinson, *Danger!* ***"Well what are the names of these magazines? Are you getting paid? If you're getting paid why don't you have a work visa lined up? If you're going to all these concerts where are your tickets for these concerts?"*** I try to explain how I do this for free as a hobby & no money is involved, and that these concerts are bar shows: *"You know, like punk rock – you just show up & pay at the door."* The punk rock concept is unsurprisingly lost on her -- she demands proof that I've purchased entry to these gigs well in advance.

"Where do you work? Where do you live? You're just leaving you're apartment and job and you tell me that it's just there when you show back up?" I explain that I'm a cook at a small family owned non-corporate restaurant, that they approve of my adventure, and that I'll be staying with friends upon return.

Not buying any of it, she demands I go to the ATM and get a bank statement. Nervous, shaky & obvious -- with her molten eyes dissolving my skull -- the rotten machine won't take my card. SKYNET is flipping me the bird. When I re-approach the customs desk & tell her this, actually incorporating the word SKYNET into my description of the problem, she tells me to sit in the line of possible dope dealers, con artists & economic refugees.

Is it already over? Are they really going to deport me? I think of all the press outlets that promoted this lunatic experiment & my characteristic fear of humiliating defeat. I cannot lose this one -- I'll jump out the fucking plane screaming *"Vive Gay PARIS!!!"*

She gives the head nod to the other Arabic security officer & I'm double-teamed by example setters... *He grills me. I'm sweating. I'm fucked...*

But then he asks what my parents do. *"Well, my step dad, he's a retired cop and..."* The guard lights up, smiling: *"Good enough for me -- let him through."* Muslim lady drops her hard-edged persona -- but she still knows whatever I'm hiding is larger than that avalanche of horse manure I dropped on her desk...

"Look," she says, ***"We've got this bad problem with illegal immigration. We have them pouring over our borders looking for work. You're story sounded like it could be..."***

And, like a Boy Scout, I reply: *"No Ma'am, I love living in the United States; I wouldn't leave it for*

anything. Let me be honest with you -- I'm a lil' homesick already..."

And just like that, I was in...

* * *

6pm; the descending nova casts crooked lengths of shadow architecture. One Man vs. FORTRESS EUROPE, entrapped by the dimensions of time & the unorganized spatial limits of one thousand eight-hundred hours. Every millisecond is spontaneous origami & menacing as the ominous, black obelisk. Snake Plissken was granted 24 hours; I've got 75 days to kill...

I collect from my long nap at the park; the sidelines of a football field amidst a sprawling complex of gardens, brooks, asphalt pathways & open grass plateaus somewhere beyond the limits of Camden Town. An idyllic scene with clear blue skies, little humidity; babies, bicycles & ice cream vendors...

I caught quick glimpses of Camden & Piccadilly Circus; cobblestone streets, a twisting maze of buildings. The modern world has had its way, but the Victorian frame remained intact yet coated with corporate neon logos. Tiny Brit cars zoomed about as I played *Frogger*, continually stumbling into wrong lanes of traffic...

Shuffling through it with 15 hours of jet-lag, I caught glimpses of San Francisco. The city was brimming with life, hope & promise. The buzz in the air, in terms of humanity – you could feel the depressurized aura of a healthy people not quite living in fear. Even in the humidity you could feel the absence of psychological weight...

But the staggering economics drove me into a frustrated cat-nap. It was, after all, 5am PDX time & whenever the shit hits the fan, just slip under for some slumber & maybe when you wake up it'll all really be some turgid dream. At least you're brain gets a manual restart. In any case, it's quite daunting when a widespread American concept like a fast food 'value menu' is foreign to the foreign Burger King. In the USA every McDonald's, KFC, etc has a \$1 menu with 20 or so items. This is why, my dear Euro-readership, that Americans are raging with obesity statistics. We are poor & therefore live off this genetically modified, heart-clogging filth.

But not in the UK. Here, a \$1 hamburger in the USA comes out to like \$7.00 in conversion. And black coffee -- *the juice of the American bloodline* – the smallest to-go cup clocked in around \$6.00. Even bottled water clocks in around \$3.00 USD – unless, of course, you want to chug this cheap & awful carbonated fizz water the Brit's are seemingly hooked on... Then again, I am in one of the most expensive cities in the world, and should've seen this coming. Still, when experienced first person, the reality whaps you harder than the enraged fist of Joe Louis...

Dayal Patterson cordially shakes my hand, dispersing the fog of nervousness. Patterson -- a long-haired, long-time metal journalist & photographer -- has just swooped me up from the entrance of The World's End; a pub so adequately named I've decided to make it my HQ for the duration of this UK campaign.

We're in the heart of Camden Town, the freak village of London. In every direction the

streets are clogged with mobs of ravers, punks, metalheads, artists, the deftly unclassifiable. It doesn't take much to realize this is the New York of Europe, insofar as music/art goes. Just like LA, every luminary & hack flocks here that's trying to '*make it*,' wheeling & dealing until they scurry back from whence they came. Most will come & go within a few years, if not a few months. Dayal estimates that the vast majority of those on these streets are immigrants.

Patterson is my Bob Hawk; he is the Q to my 007 whom will fill me in on everything I need to know about the civilization here. Tonight he is taking me to a metal press junket filled with journalists, photographers & whatever local musicians felt like stumbling in for the free booze & political schmooze.

We're headed to a listening party for the new In Flames & Arch Enemy records, hosted by Century Media & Nuclear Blast [***record labels*] whom are providing an open bar & faux-money gambling. You can win prizes with the fake cash, but I'm way more into the infinite Guinness tap...

We turn down a cobbled alley & reach a back entrance, climb a steep staircase into the party area which is a confined sweatbox of a miniature tavern. In Flames posters coat the walls; a silkscreen flag of Arch Enemy. No one seems much interested in either of the promo records being jammed by the stereo – its all background noise to the loud crowd of Englishmen gambling with Monopoly money.

20 minutes with Dayal & he's already nudged me in front of the Earache Records upper echelon, *Metal Hammer* staff, management from Century Media/Nuclear Blast. The guitarist from Evile, a Spanish photographer that did Burzum's *Belus* photo shoot & the former editor of *Terrorizer*, Jonathan Selzer, who is now one of the main writers at *Metal Hammer*.

I waste no time & when I introduce myself to Selzer, I was surprised to find out that he actually knew who I was. That he's had *The Big Shiny Prison* for sometime now & was more than happy to participate. So we head back down the long staircase & into the alley, drinks in hand...

Mr. Selzer spares no time in unleashing the well-scripted rant of a journalist who has conducted 8 million heavy metal interviews: "Well I'm the editor of '*Subterranean*' in *Metal Hammer*, the extreme metal section where they channel all the filth. Before that, I was editor of *Terrorizer* magazine. As you know there's kind of a big debate at the moment about the fate of metal -- I'm actually quite a purist in this way. The reason metal's still existing after all these years is because metal, more than anything else, has this continuity that if you're really into metal, where it came from, you know all the basic elements. Metal as a whole, there is continuity."

"Now, the whole indie scene, they seem to be based on everything that's happened in the last 2 or 3 months. And there's no collective memory anymore -- there's no development, no avant garde. To have avant garde you have to know about the whole span of things. What I'm trying to do is... If you care about metal, you have to know where it comes from, you have to care for the continuity. I'm a bit worried that some of that's getting lost in the flavor of the month. Now you get 2nd or 3rd generation bands playing At The Gates stuff. And I think once you lose that sense of continuity, everything starts becoming 3rd tier & falling by the wayside."

I quickly jump in: "***I'm sure you've interviewed hundreds of bands – what were some of the strangest encounters you had in person?***"

"To be fair I don't rate interviews if they're really weird or not, just if you make a connection with people. I've spoken to WATAIN quite a few times, in their sort of blood dripping studios... So you're wearing blood, but you actually have a sort of beautiful rationale for this. Most interviews, they're set environments. I've never had anyone do something really fuckin' weird during an interview -- I just try to get eye contact, get into their world, and then you find a narrative that makes this band make sense."

"How do you feel about the evolution of metal journalism? What's the next step?"

"Looking at all the metal journalism around, I find its really dry. Very '*what this sounds like/what that sounds like*,' drum sound, this n' that. And you never know what the spirit of the album was... Now you have this kind of black metal theory of things down in America. I like some of the context, but I find most of it pretty nasty & its not really communicating what the spirit of black metal is, or even the spirit of metal. I think you've a lot of imaginative writers doing a sort of forced personality to get across the spirit of being ritualistic."

As I contemplate what a horrid example I am of that particular shtick, I ask:

"What were some interesting personalities you've met?"

"Without a doubt, WATAIN. I've done lots of interviews with some pretty crazy people -- one was Pete Steele, when *Origin of the Feces* came out I was in Queens & we argued about an hour. He's basically 3 times the size of me & really into the whole social Darwinism thing, so I was arguing the whole time with him about that -- it was brilliant & really great. In the end he was telling me about his stock car and was like '*you need a ride?*' and Pete Steele, he drove me to the airport in his evil fucking car. Pete Steel was for real -- still is for real -- cause everyone said as mad as it is, he had a complete coherence & logic to him. And those are the people that I really trust. And its usually the people that have the most coherent logic that do the craziest shit. I love the chaos & the rationale at the same time."

"So in terms of contemporary black metal, you'd trump WATAIN?"

"I think WATAIN have that totally, I think Gaahl -- in a real kind of way, in a weird postmodern way, he's very genuine. I think a lot of what he says about himself is made up. But at the same time, there's a kind of truthfulness in everything he says that makes sense... I think Adam Namethenga from Primordial is totally genuine. Aaron Weaver from Wolves In The Throne Room, he totally has a world. In black metal you have to create a world -- that's the most important thing, to create a rationale."

"Do you ever have a weird sense of jigsaw pieces in doing this, like when the right people just appear at odd times & any other time would be an incomplete meeting for whatever reason?"

"I believe in connections, and when you're on the right track things connect. Things kind of happen at the right time & for the right reason. I was at college doing my first piece of journalism, and I was obsessed with Alan Moore. All I wanted to do was get an interview, but I'd no idea how to get a hold of [him]. He's a man that odd coincidences happen to a lot. And this one Saturday I went to the comic shop & then to the coffee shop, a ritual of mine -- and the first time ever I couldn't find a seat. So I went to the coffee shop across the road, sat down & 5 minutes later who walks in? Alan Moore. It's like FUCK -- and I'm a shy 16 year old. So I do the "*Um, you don't know me, I have this project for my class.*" He gave me his home phone number... The basic moral of that story is, if you really know why you want to do something, and

you have a mission, that attracts things to happen around it, I'm very lucky that I am where I am & I never take that for granted. But I had one mission in mind – I wanted to write for these magazines that have amazing writers & I want to be as good as them. I think that's why I like black metal so much, because black metal has a mission.”

“What do you think of Aleister Crowley”

“The trouble I have with the a Crowley stuff -- at least The Golden Dawn -- is it's a kind of quasi-religion in the sense that there's something out there that you have to accept like Cabbalic or Egyptian. I'm agnostic with The Golden Dawn -- especially in England, it kind of gets mixed in with a slightly camp, Hammer horror thing, without people actually really getting to grips with what Thelema was really about. I think that takes a massive amount of work & knowledge to come to grips with Crowley's cosmology. You know, magick is all about systems. Its about – as long as you have a system, it doesn't really matter what it is. The most important thing is to create a correlation between things & to really have a connection to animals. That's when magick occurs. I think whichever system you go with is pretty arbitrary. I believe in magick, but I believe it takes work -- and it doesn't matter which system you go for...”

The guitarist from Evile has had a little too much barley & hops distillation & has apparently bolted. But the Burzum photographer – a Spanish woman named Ester Segarra – is glad to jump into the fray. She's from Barcelona and has been covering extreme metal for just over 10 years now: “I'm a photographer first of all – that's my medium of expression. One of the first magazines I started working for was *Terrorizer*. My first passion is horror film; my second is metal. I work for *Metal Hammer*, *Decibel*, *Rock Hard* in France...”

“What's the Burzum thing all about?”

“Last year I was asked to photograph Varg Vikernes -- how could you say no? He's such a character, such a legend. I was going to be the only photographer to be allowed to take pictures of him [***post-prison release*]. I landed in Norway & his manager took me to his place. Personally it was very interesting talking to him; it was amazing to see how much he's misunderstood by people. Actually he's a very charming man & has a wicked sense of humor, and he doesn't take himself as seriously as people assume he does. It was to the point where we joked about killing each other. At the time I didn't really think to much about it, but after I'd left, I was like, ‘*Hold on a second – I've been with Varg Vikernes who just came out of prison for 17 years over stabbing someone & in a small room of his house with him holding a knife & him joking about killing me.*’ We got along very well...”

“What do you have to say about Barcelona? I know it's a leftist stronghold...”

“Barcelona is very anarchic. After the war & before the war, it was the only city where the anarchists took over the government. There's still a strong left-wing movement there, there is a very strong squatting scene... My generation grew up hating Franco, and Franco's been blamed for a lot of things. I think the civil war that happened, it happened for a reason. In a sense, Spain is very violent. You have a strong sort of right wing mentality and left wing mentality. After the war, people wouldn't talk about politics because it had been so painful -- the way the country was divided. And it was a military state, the police presence was very strong. People were just quiet, get along with their lives. As time went by & democracy came along -- you still have a lot of people who support Franco ideas, and you have the usual resistance. So it depends who you

ask.

“What sort of government is in place today? I heard a lot of unrest has been brewing with student & activist demonstrations?”

“We have a left wing party in government – before that the party that was rooted out after the terrorist attack in Madrid was the right wing party. It was founded during Franco times, so a lot of the politicians from that party were working in Franco’s government -- and people still voted for that. All the politicians in Spain, even though they work in democracy, were born into a dictatorship. We had a dictatorship for 40 years, so that’s a whole generation & you have all these people in power meant to work according to the rules of democracy, but they actually have no ideas. I think that explains a bit of the problem in Spain...”

Dan Tobin is next on the list. He’s worked at Earache for 17 years and before that Peaceville as well. Tobin grew up in London & has been involved in the scene here since he was 14 years old. 20 odd years later, he’s still doing *“the same old shit.”*

“What am I excited about in music? Everything that sounds different & new. I love death metal, brutal music, but everything’s been done... People think [*working at Earache is*] more exciting than it is. Meeting random people, of course -- I’ve hung out with Darkthrone, Pentagram, Morbid Angel, Napalm Death. The bottom line? They all just love the music & what they do. Essentially were all there for the same reason. I’ve tried to analyze it a number of times, why the hell I’d turn up for Napalm Death gigs when I’ve seen them 300 times before. I mean, why the hell do they even turn up? Because they fuckin’ love it, don’t you? When you hear Napalm kick in & the blast-beats & all that – god knows what those guys feel on stage; something must swell up inside them.”

“Still, you’ve probably accumulated a ton of crazy stories during your tenure...”

“Crazy stories? Yeah. But the point is sadly -- and somewhat disappointingly -- its just according to the music, and that’s... You came all the way from America, right? Detroit or whatever you were saying, so you’re sitting there in your bedroom listening to fucking Terrorizer or Morbid Angel & you felt the same thing I did but you were 6000 miles away. That’s what counts. All the bullshit like *‘we played in front of 3000 people or we sold this many t-shirts or fucked this many chicks’* or whatever – yeah that’s all awesome too, but deep down -- when we all get back home -- you still turn on the Terrorizer album... I don’t have any gospel to give to anybody -- all I know is if you love music go for it, support it, promote it, do anything you can to get involved with it. Enjoy it. Its music & none of us are going to be millionaires...”

**** (Day II): “Tele-Mutation Through The Lens of BBC”**

I wake up in a jolt somewhere on the south side of London, on Patterson’s apartment floor. The living space is just as cramped as his tiny Euro-shower, which I had to crouch in with a little spray nozzle hoping it wouldn’t shoot all over the tiling. No matter which position I tossed & turned in all night, some part of my body was rubbing up against stacks of CD’s or guitar equipment. So I head off for a brief walk...

I realize then how impossible it will be to describe London without mentioning BBC programming or Monty Python, because as a Yankee my only glimpses come from the media.

The apartment complex is like one polygon inside another & tightly compacted. Brick chimneys hit the skyline like the backdrop of one too many Pink Floyd videos. The alien habitat slowly etches itself onto my brain...

Some hours later, Patterson & I have headed up to the local diner. Pork & Beans come as a side dish on all UK food, the same ways we'd get hash browns in The States. Eggs sunny side up, sausage, breakfast potatoes; complimentary OJ thrown in the mix & some black coffee to liven the mood...

Patterson is a Cornish guy from the not-quite autonomous South. He has traveled abroad in Europe but finds himself quite content within the perimeters of London. I hit record & let the MP3 player do it's magic. Such a huge step up from the last book, might I say, where it was all cassette tapes & excess weight: "...as I was saying earlier, it's good to be in London because a lot of stuff comes here before it goes elsewhere -- like press trips, that kind of stuff. I've thought about moving to Berlin, somewhere else in the UK, but you always ending up here. About 50% of my work is writing & photography, music related stuff -- the other 50% is design, photo-shop touch-ups... Music's always been my passion -- photography I do for *Terrorizer*, *Metal Hammer* -- but I just fell into writing. I started doing *Crypt Fanzine* in 2003. In London, in England, you used to have so many print zines in metal -- in the late 90's there were maybe 15, and that's what I grew up with. By 2004 you could see that was disappearing & webzines were taking over, so *Crypt* was a tribute to that -- one final print zine..."

"How did you end up in the big leagues, per se?"

"I never had the intention to write professionally -- its only because I sent a copy [of *Crypt Fanzine*] to *Metal Hammer* for review. And that was just the hope that maybe a review could sell 10 more copies & I could get some money back... I'm always interested in meeting musicians but I was never into that 'fan thing' -- you know, where you're looking up to somebody & idolizing them. I was never the guy waiting outside the gig trying to meet somebody or get their signatures... The Gorgoth interview I did, that was what got me the gig at *Metal Hammer*. That was with Infernus -- it was very intense. They were all in the room -- Gaahl, King, Infernus -- they're all quite intense people in their own ways. Infernus, I've been to his place & I get on with him pretty well, but I guess that day he was in a fairly intense mood. A lot of these people tend to be very... I've never had an interview that was unreasonably difficult. I've seen others doing interviews & you can see that their putting them on a pedestal already, so that changes the whole dynamic. And then maybe it seems more intense or strange, because they're playing up on it a little. But I think if you just treat someone like an equal, like a human, people tend to be fairly straight with you -- you can cut through a lot of the bullshit. Even though a lot of the black metal people have this image on stage & are quite strange people, still they are human. It's like Gaahl, you see him on that *Headbanger's Journey*, and he's nothing like that. I don't think there's anyone I've interviewed who laughs as much..."

"Gaahl recently came out of the closet. It's no stereotype that black metallers in The States are pretty homophobic. Is there an equal variable of crude opinions towards queer lifestyles in European metal, or do you think the Europeans are a little more over it by now?"

"I think if it had been anyone else, it might have been a bit more extreme. The thing is

nobody in their right mind would say anything to his face. I think if it had been a member of Cradle of Filth or Anorexia Nervosa, or a band already seen as slightly effeminate or not true black metal, or maybe if it was like the guy from Creed – then it would've been a bit more extreme. People would have turned on him a bit more... I think the fact that he was so unapologetic about it all -- also its Gaahl, you know, who's going to say anything to him? I know there was an incident at Wacken [***the festival*] – that's the first time I saw Gaahl with his boyfriend, and somebody said something to him, and you know, it didn't end well for him. You know, you see all these NSBM people with Blasphemy patches. I interviewed Blasphemy once, and I said, '*Do you ever get any problems for having a black member?*' And the guy said, '*Well you ever seen the size of his arms?*' So I think its about the same as that. Rob Halford is still loved by everyone, even homophobic people. And also Gaahl is friends with Faust, which is a another strange twist..."

"Did Faust disavow what he did?"

"Now he does... I think the problem with black metal – the good thing and the bad thing – is that everything becomes drama. Importance is placed on stuff in a way I appreciate cause it gives things significance & weight. And it tends to place a deeper emphasis on events. It tends to be very dramatic – here's the power of nature, or here's the power of Satan or murder. And that's great in many ways, but the problem is that fans tend to glorify everything that happens so they glorify the murders or when Dead died -- when he committed suicide -- Euronymous built a legend. It kind of removes the human aspect, that these guys were quite young. I've spoken to Necrobutcher a number of times, and he hates all that cause he was really good friends with Dead. He was very upset about dehumanizing -- just turning someone into a myth or a legend. I think it's the same with Faust -- a lot of people want to glorify, you know, he killed, no remorse, and all this sort of stuff. But he was a young guy & he's trying to get over what he's done..."

"Have you ever made it up to Norway?"

"I've been to Norway about 10 times now, but I would never want to live in Scandinavia. It's great to visit – I love the clean air, the clean water, but its so depressing. The darkness, the cold -- I'm too old for that now. I used to think that was great when I was a teenager, but now I'd rather live in Istanbul. The only thing that stops me is making a living."

"What about Finland?"

"I really like Tampere [Finland]. That's the most alternative place I've ever been to. Honestly, I got out the train station – I walked downtown & within 30 seconds I saw a guy wearing a Vlad Tepes shirt. 50% of the people under the age of 45 were wearing punk stuff, metal stuff. I remember one Sunday evening at midnight there were 3 bars still playing metal. In London, on a Saturday night, you'd have trouble even finding 3. So Tampere is the place man, and Finland in general. Metal is really entrenched in the culture -- you can buy Lordi Cola at the supermarket. You know Reverend Bizarre? They got to number one in the normal charts, with a 15 minute demo track. You know, in radio play. So I would say it's the most metal country in the world -- I think Finland is the metal success story of the decade..."

* * *

Back in March, buried deep in odd correspondence, was one random email that stood out with a

subject heading I couldn't ignore. It read, quite simply, "**HAIL SATAN.**" *"Greetings from Chicago... I am contacting you to inquire about your upcoming odyssey into the geopolitical epicenter of the culture of death. I am also writing to volunteer my services. To be brief, I have reached a place in my life where my inborn curiosity combined with a festering wanderlust has overcome my common sense. I feel the need to escape because the prospect of a continued downtown grind grows increasingly untenable by the day..."*

"Bike messenger, 23, Polish-American, metalhead, weirdo longhair extraordinaire. Been done with college for a little while now, miraculously debt free, and now I gaze down the barrel of a working class life. I'm eminently aware of the fact that my situation could easily be worse. Maybe I've read too many books, maybe I've seen 'Fight Club' too many times, or maybe I'm far less mature than I think myself to be, but I feel trapped. To be blunt: I'm willing to forsake the meager possessions I've accumulated and put my energies into assisting you in blazing a trail of across Europe..."

"I'm near certain we would get along on a personal front, and I might actually be of assistance: I have experience with media (been involved in radio since high school), and I'm good with bikes. I imagine you've received emails like this. I imagine you could construct quite an entourage, if you haven't already. I'm open to the idea that there might not be a place for me in this, but I don't want you to get the idea that I'm pining for this for the wrong reasons, which is to say, I'm not volunteering myself out of fandom. I would prefer you think of me as an aspiring co-conspirator. I want to contribute somehow, and I am not without ideas of how I might do such a thing... I'm asking for your serious consideration. What would it take?"

So I give the gentlemen a ring at something like 3am his time, since his message clearly read 'wired insomniac.' His name was Matt Rozycki; said he found *The Big Shiny Prison* on a random message board & read nearly the entire thing in one burst. Said he wanted adventure & I was the guy to make it happen...

To asphyxiate the element of surprise, I was upfront about my peculiarities. In terms of traveling, I'm a lone wolf. There is only one guy that I'll hit the road with as a duo, and his name is Dr. Jeremy Sullivan [***of the Free Therapy Brigade*]. But Doc, that old scallywag – you can't get him off the rails, let alone the North American continent. Fuckers is a trainhopping junkie & I've never been a fan of that hobo jazz. Too many obnoxious oogles want to flex their street cred & the choo-choo ain't my jive, nor is dodging railway conductors & yard dogs, salt-guns & trespassing citations. I'm more into rubber tramping, or the cheap bus-line or rideshare -- *plus I'd rather just Flakfizer some Oglethorpe then deal with an extremist roach squat of dogmatic crusties far too punk rock for their own good*. But that's just me & if you didn't understand a lick of what I just said, you weren't really supposed to anyway...

So I told Matt that I was inconsequential & what he really needed was the correct lunatic to kick him in the ass & get him on the move. That my hustle is a perpetually doomed ship & I was going solo at all costs. But I was OK to hang with him in London, get him up to speed & then possibly meet back up down the line.

I encouraged him to do his own book on the underground, or at least a siege of radio interviews for his show, & promised to export him to contacts/countries of the FORTRESS EUROPE experiment that I wouldn't be able to make in person. Said a Free Agent Surrogate was what I could offer, but at least it was something. He thought it a negotiation: *"Well then, I*

guess I'll sell all of my shit & see you in London..."

Time goes by & I hear nothing. Write him a few times but never get a response. I fairly much gave up on Matt & his crazy mission -- until I checked my Facebook account after Breakfast with Dayal...

Matt & I are in a section of London called Tottenham, which is equivalent to a Brit ghetto. Whereas any raw section of The States would have shady characters congregating in dark alleyways, Tottenham keeps them at bay due to CCTV, the Big Brother system of government installed cameras that are in every nook & cranny, light post & traffic stop, shopping mall & street corner of the UK...

Tony Blair is the culprit behind this. His cabinet created this Department of Homeland Security styled security apparatus which now employs hundreds of thousands of snitches. 24 hours a day the British government records all reality & savors it in a massive, continual database of stock footage. CCTV is used by the law enforcement in any case they see fit. No crimes pass unnoticed, unless you live with a ski mask glued to your face.

We're following Keef Thomas to his flat down cobblestone streets of a seemingly ancient Victorian neighborhood -- this stretch of grimy houses & businesses built upon the what you'd consider the hunting grounds of Jack The Ripper. Keef is the vocalist from hardcore punk band FLOWERS OF FLESH & BLOOD. Initially tonight's interview was to be Black Ram/National Anarchism founder & spokesman Troy Southgate, but he bailed out of the project at the last second. It would have been an epic mega-rant with the progenitor of "Anarcho-Fascism" [*as it's been dubbed by Southgate's opposition*] but Keef -- this blonde dreaded block of a Scotsman -- is quite epic in his own right.

Matt, on the other hand, is fearless. For a newcomer to the traveling game, he remarkably hit the bull's-eye in finding us a communal squat on Chalk Farm, an area within walking distance of Camden Town itself. There are at least 20 people in & out of the place -- a 4 story flat currently fighting eviction but will last, at least, until the end of the UK mission. More on that later...

As for Matt, being new to this whole game, he's rusty as the Titanic on the Arctic floor. He's a skinny & tall metal freak that literally sold everything he had & took a plane into Manchester arriving with little more than eight grand, a tape recorder & high-speed bike which he plans to cycle through most of Europe with this summer. He's got this rough plan of cruising his own *Tour De France* & then popping up in Poland to attempt dual citizenship due to his Grandparents immigrant lineage...

Our walk to Keef's pad is marked by a frank discussion over the ever-growing Pan-European police state & the general rise of right wing politics abroad. We agree that the exercise of force is never a jolly thing, but at least in the UK, the cops don't carry guns but rather billy-clubs. Which is far more noble, because at the bare minimum they actually have to fight you like men to take you down. Fisticuffs is still a samurai-like code of honor in England, unlike the USA where they'll just brutally tazer you to death like cowards...

"I've lived in London for 12 years; I came down [*from Scotland*] with the idea to spend as much of my life doing music. First I did a band called The Mirrormen, which lasted about three

years. That band dissolved and became FLOWERS OF FLESH & BLOOD. In 2006 I hooked up with Matt Jarman & Wagner, our drummer, & formed LamRatLazIt1st which was inspired by Washington DC hardcore, something a bit less like the full-on hardcore of FLOWERS. We did that band for 9 months, went to Brazil, put a record out... Wagner's [the sole Brazilian member] visa actually elapsed & had to go back, but then we met another Brazilian guy named Santiago who's been our drummer ever since."

"What's the message?"

"Things that make me angry, but articulated in a reasonably intelligent way – my frustration with the general public's apathy. The sense of disenfranchisement you have when you see stupid fucking rules & laws coming in that restrict peoples freedoms to do things they shouldn't have a problem doing. I guess kind of standard anarchist, anti-governmental lyrics..."

"When I look at the UK, the parliament -- it seems there is much more of an authentic democracy then a lot of other countries. At least in The States. Do you feel that it is hopeless in any mainstream sense? But again, I'm coming from America..."

"I think what's happened in my lifetime is that we've actually gone from a situation where there was a genuine alternative to right wing government. When I was a kid, the Labor Party had genuine aspirations to be socialist, but Tony Blair kicked that all into oblivion. Now its like something you have in The States where its two parties with little actual difference. That is a great source of frustration to me & other intelligent people who believe you can't have a functional democracy unless you have two parties who are fundamentally different from one another."

"Does the general population detest Tony Blair?"

"Tony Blair is not a popular guy because of the Iraq war & the lies that were told. A lot of people were really upset about that, but did you not think there is a professional politician that rises to the top of his profession who doesn't fuckin lie to you? I guess not everyone is as cynical as me."

"Tell me about the crusty, anarcho hardcore scene..."

"I think that squatting should be much better protected by law. There's a lot of movements around Europe to ban squatting. In Holland, they've virtually banned it. In the UK, the government we've got now -- they're definitely making moves to try & end the squatting movement which I think will be a great cultural loss. There's still a lot of prejudice against squatters that is fanned by the media & politicians, people who feel that everybody's got to pay for a home whether or not they can reasonably afford it. I think that's pretty ridiculous. If there's empty buildings, people have the right to take them. A lot of people just cant get their feet on the ladders. Not only do they sort of look after a building which would otherwise go to ruin, but they also add vitality. Saint Agnus was the last holy squatted street in London – that was an amazing place, these enormous Victorian town houses – five-story houses, terraces, community centers, people sharing skills, bike workshops. They would have reggae festivals, street festivals – an awful lot of artistic cultural events. When that got evicted it happened almost completely overnight -- they literally were dragging people, pregnant women out the houses. In one night they got everybody out & bulldozed it in 20 minutes."

"What does anarchism meant to you?"

"Well, I don't think its realistic to expect that it would mean overthrowing the government."

I think anarchism is about looking at what you can do in the circumstances of your own life & contributing positively to your community in that direction. To meet like-minded people who want to put themselves out a little bit for what they actually believe in & do things which are positive and make a real difference. Think lively/act locally is the way that I see it."

"What are some of the best bands in this scene here in London?"

"Armed Response Unit, who you'll meet later tonight -- definitely one of the most interesting bands in the London scene. Very original approach to doing some very aggressive music, but also they've got influences from the Mike Patton side of things, the fucked up noise, jazz kind of stuff but also crust. Hello Bastards who are a full-on straightedge sort of band. They're a very multi-national band -- one of their guys is Israeli. Don't quote me on this, but I think he was in some trouble because he refused to go back to be a part of the Israeli Army because they're a very pro-Palestine band. They've actually been on tour in the Gaza Strip, which is fucking impressive. Cavity Search is another one..."

"That's a great band name."

"They're sort of London's 2011 answer to GG Allin."

"Do you think the UK is becoming a police state?"

"The assault on peoples liberties & public sector pay in The States is more advanced -- but I'm also very scared that the UK is heading down that road. Blair's government passed something like 3000 pieces of legislation in 10 years, which was about 20 times as much as had been done in any 10 year period of parliament. Most of it was aimed at restricting peoples personal freedoms. Before they came in, we had the Criminal Justice Bill. It basically made it illegal to have parties outside. Before that we had a really healthy scene of people though would just turn up in a field with a sound system, or a forest, & it would maybe last for a week. These were some of the most glorious events I'd ever been to. After Blair got in, they built on this platform of reducing what people were actually able to do. There's been a specific series of changes aimed at preventing protestors from effectively being able to protest -- it's now impossible to protest anywhere within a mile of parliament. I've honestly given up in terms of marching in the streets because its so limited now that its got no chance of actually affecting anything..."

6 blocks or so from Keef's flat we've found ourselves dramatically stoned at yet another pad with this manic Italian woman & her husband, a refugee from the San Diego area. He's got that gleam of victory, that dream-like stasis of having forever escaped the United States by randomly hooking up with a Venice punk rock goddess while on vacation. He & I swap stories of sweltering El Cajon madness in this cramped flat covered with black sheets over the walls & dominatrix gear & leather whips & cuffs & chains & all you can imagine dangling on nails like casual decorations. You'd think someone popped *The Lament Configuration*...

Kiara Banuet is animated, ranting, talking with her hands like spastic Jiu Jitsu. She's the bassist of Armed Response Unit, this weirdo hardcore punk act that crosses innumerable genre boundaries. They've been around for 6 years, put out a bunch of vinyl & LP's. They are very multi-national with members that also include an Irishman, a born-in-Brazil Brit & a mixed member of Spanish/Slovakian background: "I come from a squatting background -- this is my first flat in some time. Cause I got married & everything & blah blah blah. The thing about the

London scene is there is this split between the north & south, -- the south is like the crust, the north is more the drunk punks. Armed Response Unit, we've never been one or the other...

"What's your background, in terms of Italy?"

"I left Italy in '94, mainly because that's when Berlusconi got elected prime minister & I realized it was going to be really tough shit for musicians & artists & that's exactly what happened. Years later they are still in the same political situation -- its become a fucking circus. Its too much, its surreal -- its completely ridiculous. I just cannot believe they let him slowly change the law to make it entirely convenient for himself. The man could kill a man & not be prosecuted. I personally believe that he is bribing everybody -- he managed to get 5 television channels & now he's got his hands into the actual state channel. He's managed to brainwash the whole fucking population -- slowly, with tits & asses -- & in the meantime he's diverted the attention of the people. The problem with Italians, they're all a bunch of sheep. But all countries are pretty much like that. Italians, in particular, are like that -- there's a lot of tradition involved, its hard to come out if you think differently. Avant Garde is not really promoted or supported; everybody looks the same. In Rome, or Milan, bologna or Florence, there is still space for art. You will find alternative people -- usually all in the same spot."

"It's tough to squat there then?"

"You can't squat anymore in Italy -- we used to get 40, 50 people and then barricade ourselves in with food & water. Just stay there for a month then the cops come with their dogs & guns & you just make sure that you fight back for as long as you can until they eventually lose interest. It's hardcore -- *nothing* like here. When I came here it was like, '*Oh shit, the law actually sort of protects you.*' If you don't break anything, there's no criminal damage -- say that there is a window open & obviously no one lives in the property, if you get into a place & change the lock, it becomes your home. People cannot kick you out -- it becomes a civil dispute & they need to take you to court. The police are not allowed to come & kick you out -- but now they do it."

"So the anti-squatting ban in the UK is growing more aggressive?"

"Its harder & harder to squat in London, but we've been doing it for years & years. And obviously a lot of people will say the wrong thing, '*Oh yeah we broke the window.*' BOOM. Done -- criminal damage. Well obviously you have to break the window, yeah, because if you find a house with an open window, chances are there's no toilets, no running water. But the law still protects you, in theory. I've seen the attitude of the cops changing a hell of a lot. But you have to know how to play 'no comment.' But if you know they got nothing on you, CCTV didn't see you break in, and you have your story -- no comment, no comment -- there's nothing they can do. A lot of people don't know that so they start saying 'no, yeah, it was my friend, blah blah blah' -- sooner or later you're going to say the wrong thing & that's how they're going to nail you. Truth is there's so much property its disgusting -- people've got 5,6,7, houses. Point is the rent in London is ridiculous -- it s a joke. Homes should be a right for anybody. Once you're born, you should have the right to a home, to water, & you should have working opportunities, education. It's like £2,000 to uniform a soldier, £95,000 a year to keep someone in prison..."

"Where do stand politically?"

"I consider myself more of an anarchist, but there isn't much difference between communist & anarchist collectivism. The problem with communism is I fear it could lead to some form of totalitarian state. The difference with collectivist anarchist communities is that it can still

be organized in communes that not only listen to the people, but are made of the people. Its not like representative democracy that's voted on by a few people that kind of represent us. The problem with communism is that individualism wouldn't be respected enough. I don't really believe in *'majority wins,'* because in the end it isn't fair. In my opinion, majority democracy doesn't really work... I think the problem is how to educate people. Every time you mention anarchism, people are like, *'Oh my god its gonna be a mess -- everybody's gonna shoot each other.'* No -- absolutely not. That's not the idea of anarchism -- its giving a voice to everybody in the community."

"I've been told that the underground scene in Turin, Italy is drenched in occultism..."

"Turin is the black magic capitol, actually. So its very dark & very weird & the vibe is really, really crazy. I don't particularly like Turin, but its got a very powerful vibe -- its not something that I can rationally explain. Milan, there's a couple of really good squats, but the problem is that it's the fashion capitol, so there's a bunch of fucking fake motherfuckers & all this post-yuppie, Berlusconi fuck followers & everything costs 3 times as much & blah blah blah. Florence is beautiful -- its like bologna, a little like Paris."

"Well, I ask everyone this, but do you have a crazy story? Something that happened to you and when you tell people about it they think you're making the whole thing up?"

"Not far from here we found a new squat -- broke the window, come down & fucking awesome man -- but it was obvious someone was living there, kind of working on the place. It looked abandoned -- there were no floorboards, blah blah blah. We left the window open, came back, me & Hannah -- we go back and we're like, *'Let's just take that 8x10 amp.'* So I'm pushing it and I hear Hannah go *'AAAAAH!'* There's this dude in the back room with an axe staring through the window. BOOM! Breaks the window with his eyes man looking like fuckin' crazy -- boo-wah fuckin' charging and we're like *'AAAAH FUCK,'* you know, and in that moment there was no *'Oh my friend'* -- no, fuck you, I'm out that window; fuck off I'm first. So we run & Hannah falls, so I stop & pick her up & were running & I lose my shoes & blah blah blah & the dude is behind me & he grabs me & *'OH SHIT'* and I'm on the ground like BOOM & he's like *'Fuck you fucking burglars what did you take from my house!!'* & I'm like, *'I swear we thought it was squatted were not taking anything.'* He's like *'Yeah, fucking -- I fucking swear to god I'll fucking kill you, I swear to god!!'* & he grabs my fucking hoodie and I swear, I fucking saw it in his eyes & I'm looking at him & I'm like... I know this dude. I've sent his dude before man, what the fuck, you know? He starts dragging me & I try to escape but I had a mullet of dreads & he grabs them & starts dragging me back into the house & Hannah, she pisses herself -- that's how scared she is. His eyes man, his eyes dude -- he was gonna kill me, he didn't care -- he break his own window to get into his house faster. So I chicken out completely & I'm like, *'Call the cops man -- call the fucking cops!!'* And the cops get there & they're like, *'Oh -- hello Mr. Giff.'* And I'm like, *'Mr. Giff? Mr. Giff? OH FUCK -- ITS HIM! Its Roland Giff, the fucking singer of the FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS!!'* He hid the fucking axe when they arrived & they got fucking autographs and sent us home. They didn't do to him anything..."

*****(Day III): "A Doom Fiend, Industrial Legend & Shabby Journalist walk into a bar --***

somehow they manage to leave the Punch-line on The Tube..."

Morning at Keef's – French pressed coffee & an intriguing rant with his Irish roommate whom details the enigma of EasyJet, an airplane company that Europeans have dubbed "*SleazyJet*" because it's uber-cheap, drops you a hundred miles from wherever you are actually trying to go & will only let you take carry-on luggage. But the beauty is that when you book months in advance, an airplane flight to Belgium from London is only €15 – most Euro-capitals you can hit for around €30. He also details EuroStar, which is like a bullet train on the Eurail which can get you over the English channel & into France for around €100.

The plan was to get a €1000 month-long pass on the Eurail train system, but that might not even be necessary since I've been given intel on a dozen ride-share sites in multiple languages. The big ones in London, I'm told, are Gumtree.com, BlaBlaCar.com & Rideshare.co.uk – as well as Kayak, the "Priceline of Europe."

Craigslist isn't really much of anything across The Atlantic, though you can fairly much live off it in The States. But the German site & its English counterpart – mitfahrgelegenheit.ch & carpooling.co.uk – are far stronger. Further luck is that my high-tech, wifi-laced Ipod has free apps for all this as well as language translation software. *Plissken's little wristwatch seems so apropos...*

Keef's Brazilian friend ceases being an unconscious lump beneath blankets on the fold-out mattress, rubs his eyes & slams some black coffee. His name is Wagner Antunes & plays drums in an outfit called LamRatLazIt1st: "Basically I dropped everything in Sao Paulo to come to England to make music; LamRatLazIt1st, its hardcore stuff -- melodic. Then I came back to Sao Paulo, we went on tour in Brazil. They came back but I couldn't cause visa problems. I was patiently waiting for this bureaucracy then I just gave up. 4 years later, I'm back..."

"So what's the scene like in Brazil?"

"The scene in Brazil is quite big now -- hardcore & punk's the biggest stuff. My first band was a hardcore band called Newspeak. We make two compilations, one EP & a split with Catharsis from Atlanta – brutal hardcore political stuff... The scene in Sao Paulo is really nice – loads of venues, they really organize."

"Is it true they live in a less populous, more familial based way?"

"Brazilian culture is completely different than the northeast & the very south. Basically the police are fascist -- really, really corrupt. Not as much bad as the beginning of the 80's -- we came after the dictatorship, so the police were much more violent. The punk scene suffered so much more then now -- you couldn't hang around with a band t-shirt. The skateboarding is something really important to make this scene, because hardcore & punk was associated with skateboarding in Sao Paulo. The first bands, the first vinyl, CD's, t-shirts -- the scene is totally based in the American scene. Sao Paulo is an Americanized place..."

"What's the deal with Cubatao? Is it like a toxic waste dump city & if the people are mutated & dying of cancer & having flipper babies?"

"Exactly -- its totally fucked. Now they make some companies try & clean it, but no way man. Cubatao man, it's a chemical processing plant – babies born with two heads, two brains... My friend Niño, he's a hardcore drummer. He lost all his teeth because of this company,

because he used to work in the chemical stuff. They fucked up the rivers. It's like Mungi – you know what is Mungi? Mungi is a quiet environment, like a swamp. The thing when they built this city – its close to the seaside. They don't realize people would live their after years. It's terrible man, loads of kids dying...”

5pm; back in Camden Town at World's End. Earlier I'd went for a long ride on a public bus getting the lay of the land. Tried to find Big Ben but got fed up with the traffic, hopped off & got caught up in a mob of people waiting to meet Dr. Who [Tom Baker] outside a television studio that was cramped in an alleyway...

That soon grew older then Baker himself, so I shot over to the next journalistic target Pantheist. Originating in 2000 by vocalist/songwriter Kostas Panagiotou, Panthiest were one of the first funeral doom bands in Europe & still going steady. They've lived abroad, released a wealth of material and have hit the road touring amongst the likes of doom stalwarts Skepticism, Gallileous, While Heaven Wept & Mourning Beloveth...

Panagiotou returns from the bar clutching some much needed brews, so we kick a few back & hone the verbal chops: "London's a very cosmopolitan town, but the difficult thing, especially when you're in a band, nobody is here to stay – you're here for a few years. You won't find many people who spend their entire lives here. Most people are foreigners. As a band, we don't have a single English person. We have Greek, Serbian, people from Poland. In the past we've had people from Spain, Australia..."

"Doom is pretty accepted in the USA underground – it's kind of a wedge sound that even the most ardent black or death metallers can agree on, and there is also a huge crust punk following. Even a lot of hipster indie rock types are into sludgy, droning shoegaze stuff..."

"Doom is a very split scene. Everything starts from Black Sabbath -- then it became *Winter*, the first album of Cathedral. We kind of fit into that second class – the doom/death side that evolved into funeral doom. More atmospheric, also keyboard -- but still very slow, very minimalist. When we get offers for gigs, they are usually very diverse. In a year we played 3 gigs in London, then abroad like Finland, Poland, Latvia, Czech Republic, the Moscow Doom Fest... It's a small scene. Bands like us don't sell very much at all, but they're very enthusiastic people. In the early 90's there wasn't much funeral doom. Very isolated bands -- one in northern England, maybe a few in America. So these bands never used to play live, there were no groups, there wasn't much support other than doommetal.com, which I used to write for. Suddenly all these people were into this music & started talking to each other."

"What was the Moscow Doom Fest like?"

"In Russia, man -- these guys are crazy. There was this guy, he was almost like a stalker. He was like, 'Can you sign this, and this' & he was following me around. And he had a page with him where he'd written some things in Russian & a friend had translated these questions. Like what's your favorite color, what's the meaning of life? I'd come out the toilet & he'd be standing there – 'what's your favorite color?' Strange, strange people. After the gig he kept sending me emails saying how he wanted to start a family, but he couldn't find a girlfriend, and this made him stop believing in god."

"You originally come from Greece – what is your comment on the current

demonstrations? What went wrong?”

“For years they’ve been living beyond their means – tax evasion, things like that. They call it ‘*working in black*’ when you have a second job that is illegal. The economy was built on a bubble; the country almost went bankrupt. The debt was growing higher & higher & nobody wanted to pay taxes so it started to collapse. It’s a sad situation, but if you go to Greece, you will know it when you see anarchists. Groups of anarchists having massive demonstrations, burning cars, smashing things. Otherwise other people are going out -- just living, they don’t care. That’s typical Greek – they live the ‘*carpe diem*’ theory. They have to take austerity measures, which are very harsh. And its not just in Greece – petrol is at its highest, its almost possible to afford a car. The taxes have gone up so much its unbelievable.

“What sort of political environment is at play? Do people take Marxism or even Democratic Socialism serious?”

“In the elections you have like 10% voting for the Communist Party. There was a very strong communist movement in Greece that developed after the Second World War. There was a civil war in Greece, basically between the government & the communists. After Metaxas, there was a strong movement towards the left and a lot of artists that were inspired by Marxism that ended up in jail. It’s a historical thing, and metalheads sometimes took it over – especially in the beginning. A lot of people in heavy metal, or alternative people in Greece, are often associated with Marxism. Not saying all of them are – there is also far right, in Greece. There’s a lot of anarchism, a lot of counter-movement. A lot of people in the extremes, they are joining in on the crisis, not because they believe in it, but because the idea of, ‘*The government is fucked up.*’”

“Is Italy similar to Greece?”

“The south of Italy is very similar to Greece. Italy is a funny country -- you have to be careful when speaking to Italians because there’s a massive difference between the north & the south. The north of Italy is like the rest of Europe – high industrial, technologically advanced. The south of Italy’s quite poor & similar to attitude in Greece. This traditional, rural structure. Greece -- in terms of philosophy & mentality -- has always been closer to countries like Russia. There’s a strong anti-American feeling. They don’t have any problem with individual Americans, but more the American institution because they feel America is policing the world...”

Kostas floats out the entrance, leaving me to the rowdy, packed club of drunken Englishmen. Everyone is riled up because a football match is going on that has some sort of deep ramifications for two distinct areas of the country [*but don’t they all?*]. No matter – my text message beeper goes haywire because Reza Udhin is now somewhere in the mass of bodies on the upper floor.

Reza is the keyboardist from Killing Joke, one of the most important industrial bands in the genres history. He’s also the brainiac of industrial outfit INERTIA & heads up the independent label Cryonica. INERTIA are more of an upbeat electro-industrial outfit, as opposed to a nitty-gritty harsh monster. They are somewhere along the likes of Razed In Black or Lords of Acid. Killing Joke, on the other hand, are their own particular colossus & their reputation surely precedes them. The label Cryonica has been active since 2000, putting out a slab of releases from fellow industrial acts like Octolab, Knifeladder, Void Construct, Swarf & Mono Chrome...

When I spot Reza at the circular tabletop, I'd half-expected a gruffly accented, chain-smoking filthy ol' bastard – instead he's a babyface that could pass for 23. He's got jet-black hair slick from gel; all black clothing, leather pants & boots. And he's totally friendly & smiling in high spirits...

“So How did the Killing Joke thing start?”

“I knew the old keyboard player & he asked if I wanted to join about 12 years ago but I couldn't really do it. I've done 3 albums with them so far. My main band is INERTIA -- it'll be 20 years as of this year. The new album came out 6 months ago & we've been touring for 6 months. We started out in London, did loads of tours – US tours, 9 European tours, 13 albums. Later this year we'll be going to Canada, hopefully the US – Australia, South America.”

“How do you feel about the industrial scene in Europe?”

“The scene is good, the festivals are good. A long time ago – particularly Germany & Belgium – used to be amazing. These days I think it's a bit saturated. It's very difficult to get people out to shows in those areas. It's very quiet, I think – too much.”

“Are you from the UK?”

“I'm from London, been here all my life. If you want industrial, in the east side is Slimelight -- its open until 7 in the morning.”

“How does America stack up for you, in terms of touring?”

“Oh I love it -- much better then touring the UK & Europe. Doesn't matter if its Killing Joke or INTERTIA. In all fairness The States seem to be more open-minded. Europeans are very dead-set on what they like, or what they're told to like. Whereas The States, they like anything. Europeans, they like all the new stuff & just stick with it. In The States they just go out & find all the old stuff – they're into the history, really into the music.”

“Is there a misconception in Europe that everyone in the United States is a hillbilly?”

“Yeah, exactly, but I've never felt that way at all. At one point on tour 10 years ago – we'd tour the USA twice a year – and we'd play in Birmingham Alabama at a really small place. It was great, absolutely amazing -- One of the best places we've ever played. Just a small club filled with freaks – goth, mettalers, transvestites -- anything you want.”

“What's the main message that you like to propagate in your art?”

The new album is all about people bettering themselves & getting out of negative situations. On the last tour we put a bunch of bands together that would never play on the same bill. The punk scene, the industrial scene – its all quite separated. It's strange, it never used to be like that. Quite a few years ago it was all one without very much effort.”

“What changed it?”

“People getting into their own little genres too much. Before it used to be seen as music, not genres. These days people grow up in a particular scene and that's their scene. Its more about the lifestyle & people around them then the actual music, that's the difference.”

“Got any nutty stories from the road?”

“On tour once we had a little run-in with the US military around Area 51. We went out there once – followed an old dirt road & drove into the desert. There are signs that say you're near Area 51. We go behind the mountains & just as we got to the edge these helicopters came out of nowhere – just sirens & lights & telling us to get the hell out. Heh heh...

* * *

By 9pm I've fled across town, having been jammed with human cattle in the subway-like Tube. Reza had invited me out to Slimelight – the premier Goth-Industrial club of London for a chat with the owners – but I'd long since promised to make this gig at 12 Bar with Injury Time, Deal With It & Ninebar...

This show is familiar territory; a dirty Irish-style pub linked to a backroom concert area. The show's a monthly put-on by Rucktion Records, who are one of the most well-organized & important hardcore metal labels in the UK. Most the material they put out is Madball/Hatebreed territory – the spin-kickin', knuckle-draggin' beatdown stuff. The chap who roped me into this comes from a band called Kartel. His name is Tom Barry & meets with me briefly before he has to scoot across town to work merch...

"The Rucktion [Records] monthly residency has finally given the London scene a stable hub. Unfortunately tonight has been 'double-booked' & there's another show in Camden so it won't really get going here until that one finishes at 10. Bad communication! It shows that the hardcore scene is still a small underground affair & can be venerable to under capacity crowd issues if people don't stay in contact. The headlining band tonight, Ninebar -- they're legends in the London scene..."

"So you wrote a book yourself about the underground in Europe, right?"

"My book centers around the balance people in European hardcore have to strike between work & music. DIY Hardcore is not a music people can live off so they work to fund their tours, print their shirts, pay for rehearsal & at the end of it hopefully break even. I wanted to show that thousands are prepared to do this & essentially work two jobs to keep the scene alive... The book came about when my band played some shows in Portugal & our bassist brought a professional photographer along. Her name's Sophia Schorr-Kon; she hardly focused on the whole '*vocalist-as-god handing out the microphone for the raging throng to grab*' thing. Instead we used photos of guys at their DIY merch stalls, people at the back of mosh pits anticipating somebody crashing into them with worried looks on their faces -- the background stuff that people always seem to ignore. We wanted to document subjects at their day jobs & then at rehearsal, creating t-shirt designs, organizing tours, etc. I wanted to document the real hardcore scene in Europe, as there'd been some hyped-up retro hipster crap & felt it was a slap in the face for the people putting in the real work."

"What's the scoop on your band Kartel, if you don't mind me asking?"

"We were going for the metal/hardcore crossover but agreed on the need to have our own sound & got a hold of two guys from the scene to do vocals -- DBS & Pete. Our stuff has been released through Rucktion records & it's not easy running a band with members all perpetually broke, but I guess it's the standard in UK hardcore... When we started gigging some of these [venues] were legendary, but lots of them have since closed. There was a Jamaican pub in Tottenham, North London, called The Swan that was a real head fuck. You'd be in the back room with all these guys spin kicking to beatdown metalcore, getting yourself all hyped & sweaty & then decide to get some water or beer. You'd then rush through to the main bar & you were hit with a complete opposite vibe -- chilled old Jamaicans playing dominos & listening to

quiet reggae. It was really funny cause you'd realize how crazy you must've seemed as these guys looked up from their boards with a look on their faces like, *'what's wrong with you?'* Thing was, as the evening wore on & the rum flowed, a few of them would drunkenly wander into the back room a& stand there skanking gently as some band were screaming out their bile & people were jumping all over each other. I miss that place...

Tom introduces me to Pierre before heading out the door, the singer from Knuckledust. Coming from Detroit, it's admittedly weird to cross paths with a black guy that has a full-tilt full English accent: "I've been involved in London hardcore since '95; I'm 35 now. Knuckledust started in '96, been playing ever since -- no one else was supporting hardcore at the time. We felt we had to. You make friends along the way, family -- 15 years later I'm still doing the same thing. We've got two black members in our band, so it's a little unusual playing this music sometimes -- people don't expect it. Especially when we starting out man -- they heard the name and thought we were a right wing band. And then they hear the shit that we're playing..."

"Rucktion is more of a self-sustaining collective than an outright label, correct?"

"It's non-profit; any money we make form it goes right back into it. Some ignorant people would say all our bands sound the same, but if they actually paid attention, there's a lot more personality in those bands then you could imagine..."

"What are some bands that are exemplary of the London hardcore sound?"

"One of my favorites are Ninebar who're playing tonight -- they just capture the London vibe & attitude. Call it beat down, call it whatever. Besides that, Injury Time are doing the typical LBU style -- we got True Valiant from Bristol, Chains of Hate from Wales..."

"What's the bare-bones message?"

"I like to put a positive side, maybe something uplifting to the lyrics that people can relate to, maybe find some sense of hope in it. That's what hardcore was to me as a kid -- I was a bit lost & confused & listened to some hardcore bands, those lyrics were the ones that carried me & made me who I am in a way, so I want to give that back."

"There's a massive unemployment rate here in London, correct?"

"At the moment it's very hard for people out here --some of the highest figures that we've ever had. The funniest thing is the serious amount of youth not being able to get employed, coming out of schools, colleges & having no job waiting at the end. The figures there are bigger then anytime in the past. What else are you to do but make money by illegal means? Things are getting crazy out there on the street. But you see the money they put into the policing -- if crimes happen the police don't even care no more. It's only if physical harm is being done that they're likely to respond with any urgency, know what I mean? Last month a friend of ours van got ripped off -- robbed everything. He had all our backline equipment -- broad daylight, High Street -- CCTV all long the van. Police said, *'Well we don't have the time or the manpower to respond to this, so if you go and catch them & bring them to us we'll press charges, but we're not gonna sit down & watch the CCTV footage which would have the evidence on it.'* So now they are promoting vigilantes? And then when that happens, what are they going to do? Throw those people in prison as well? What the fuck?? I can't even remember a time without CCTV, to be honest. It's as bad as it could ever be right now, with cameras everywhere -- busses, trains, tunnels, walkways. But the way I see it is they can't have someone watching each & every

screen all the fucking time...”

******(Day IV): “EYE OF THE HURRICANRANA”

Sunday morning; June 5th, 2011. Today is a day off from the grind, getting contacts in order & continuing to flirt with the gorgeous Latvian girl in the next room that’s watching *Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas*. Spent the earlier part of the day acquiring supplies from the 99 Pents store & made it through an open air market that’s existed since the early 1800’s. There was a bronze bull as a landmark statue & a dinky head-shop that sold over-the-counter Peyote & Hawaiian Woodrose, although I’m unsure if lunging into such a psychological feat is apt for London...

The hardcore show was all it was promised to be, although it was totally strange for me to witness Brits playing up NYC hardcore. Not so much the bands themselves, but the audience. It was sort of this bizarre cargo cult of backwards Dodgers caps & mimicked slam dancing. And all these chicks that were sort of swaying to the left and the right, bopping back and forth, the whole crowd oh so bubbly & English & smiling the whole time with bright white teeth. East Coast hardcore is menacing when participating in the authentic deal on the East Coast, because there are all these tough-guy bulldog’s of men, skinheads & such, & so much amped up testosterone. Here it’s like you can only conjure images of Simon Pegg, and that’s about as threatening as a bowl of wobbling Jello...

Been ditching all possible weight from my travel pack. Such is the golden rule – the lighter the better because even a single ounce depletes the pain of a crooked spine or the possibility of eventually shaping one. If it wasn’t for this over the counter codeine, I’d be extremely rough at the moment. This is why Britain would surely kill me – a 30 pack of 1000mg generic Vic’s are €2. In the USA, you need a prescription or each pill counts as a felony [****one felony = you can never leave the United States ever again c/o The Patriot Act**]. And yes, to any European that will read this one day, even Penicillin is a felony if you don’t have a doctor’s note. Such is *The Big Shiny Prison*...

Matt is nowhere to be found – he took off with Whitney & Alex to some psytrance rave party on the outskirts of London last night. It’s another bizarre coincidence – the only other American staying in this place is from Ann Arbor, Michigan & she knows half my crew from the Theatre Bizarre in Detroit [****the greatest venue in the world & communal home to the slickest quasi-circus tribe you’ll ever meet**].

Alex, on the other hand, is a CouchSurfing.com ambassador from Canada; he’s built this squat up as under such guidelines & hosts a basement filled with mattresses for any & all whom want to share booze stories. It’s a great set-up that, most importantly, has no scabies crawling on the fabric. Alex is literally painted on the wall in homage, with a tag that reads: “*In Alex We Trust INC.*” Other sayings scribbled in sharpie throughout the high-ceiling kitchen include “*Life Is Short And Boring*,” “*Fuck Love*” & “*Death To The Free Wheeling Monkey...*”

I lucked out from the cell phone Keef gave me which takes SIM cards. Basically, I get a little chip for every different country at whatever 7/11 equivalent they have. €5 buys you like €10 credit, and since all I shoot over are text messages, this saves me a bundle [****note: to anyone planning to travel here, there is no such thing as a monthly unlimited call plan – every country is divided into their own specific tele-zone region & each country has it’s own national version of**

an “area code”].

Insofar as the UK mission is concerned, it appears that my guy from ANAAL NATHRAKH has dropped off the face of the earth, and both DISCHARGE & AKERCOCKE aren't returning messages. I've got others around the UK, but it's just too pricy – I can't justify \$200 USD for a bus up to Ireland/Scotland or an extra \$80 to hit Birmingham, Liverpool or Manchester. *So long Loch Ness, Black Sun & White House; apologies Arkham Witch, Pagan Altar, Into Sunlight, Esoteric & Bal-Sagoth...*

The conception as it stands is to hit Paris next, then Amsterdam, Brussels, Berlin & Prague which will leave me open for any direction by early July. Afterwards it's a loose itinerary that could go any which way, really. But there will definitely be a tour through Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Finland) & a roar through Italy, Spain & Portugal. I have a huge turnout of enthusiasm for this project in Greece, but it seems the only way to get there is fly & SleazyJet doesn't go anywhere close, nor are there any direct line for busses or trains. Above all, it's basically WWII on the streets right now, with anarchists chucking molotov cocktails at riot cops throughout the whole of Athens...

In Berlin I'm set to attend the first BETHLEHEM gig in 17 years at the reputed Under The Black Sun black metal festival. BETHLEHEM is the band that got me into black metal, and this is a once in a lifetime event that people will surely be traveling worldwide to see in person. BETHLEHEM main-man Juergen Bartsch invited me personally & hooked up the guest list, since we've been in contact for many years now.

The post-Berlin target is the Obscene Extreme festival in the Czech Republic – a one-stage, three-day open-air fest of 69 continual grindcore & death metal bands which I've been tipped off repeatedly as perhaps the greatest heavy metal festival in the world, supposedly besting even Wacken, Metal Camp or The Maryland Deathfest. And my lucky ass has scored a backstage media pass for the entire beast. Where I head afterwards will depend on who I meet at the fest, whether it be hopping on tour with a band or jumping on a road trip caravan to either Scandinavia, Greece or Italy. I've a few people in Poland [Warsaw & Krakow], but the number is pretty miniscule & it seems like a dicey country still ripe with bad Iron Curtain ju-ju...

But the trail I blaze will bring me to the one journalistic showdown I've awaited my entire career. No, it's not MANOWAR, it's not DANZIG. It's not even Trent Reznor. The target I admonish above all is LAIBACH, for LAIBACH's very existence signals: *“a purifying (EXORCISM) & regenerative (HONEY + GOLD) function. With a mystical, erotic audiovisual constitution of the ambivalence of fear & fascination (which acts on the consciousness in a primeval way); with a ritualized demonstration of political force, and with other manipulative approaches, LAIBACH practices sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and principle of social organization.”* LAIBACH: *“provokes maximum collective emotions & releases the automatic response of masses; the consequence [of which is] the effective disciplining of the revolted and alienated audience; awakening the feeling of total belonging and commitment to the Higher Order. By obscuring his intellect, the consumer is reduced to a state of humble remorse, which is a state of collective aphasia, which in turn is the principle of social organization...”*

Yes my friends, this has been in the works for a number of years – a legendary showdown between fearless Americano journalist Dr. Ryan Bartek & the pseudo-dictatorial

thought engine triad of LAIBACH, IRWIN & NSK. Twice now I've failed in this mission. Once I had an email interview lined up with Ivan Novak for PIT Magazine, which he never got around to returning. Then in Seattle, in 2008 -- during the 4-date *Volk* tour -- I had a roundtable in-person uber-meeting scheduled through their PR liaison for Hails & Horns Magazine. Yet when it came time for action, they declined at the last minute under the auspice that they didn't speak English well enough & didn't want to come off as foolish or ignorant with broken phraseology.

It will happen this time though, for I am adamant to infect their self-styled NSK territory known to LAIBACHian aficionados as OCCUPIED EUROPE. Because I, like Malevich, like Johnny Appleseed, am now traversing the European continent spreading the seeds of the new art, the new journalism, and they cannot & will not ignore me once again. I will steer a path clear into the heart of Slovenia like a renegade steam engine & they will have no choice but to submit to my demands. For LAIBACH may be *"the return of action on behalf of the idea,"* but Dr. Bartek is *"the return of the idea on behalf of the action..."*

* *(Day V): "FENLAND contra NORDLAND contra VINLAND"

Monday now; back at Worlds End waiting on a guy named Frank from an atmospheric/prog black metal outfit dubbed FEN that's named after a swampy region in England reputed for it's foggy, mysterious landscapes. Currently on the Code 666 roster, the FEN site describes their vibe as: *"An expression of loss and melancholic yearning... to draw the listener into a windswept & desolate landscape, bereft of hope..."*

The day has been raw for Whitney but superb for Matt. When we went on a little grocery store stocking, someone lifted her wallet straight from the purse -- thus goes all her money, her passport & any possible access to banking. She's freaked & has to be in Rome within days to continue the freelance photography work that's keeping her afloat...

Matt, on the other hand, who thought his \$2000 bicycle to be stolen, had apparently u-locked it in the middle of Camden Town days ago when drunk & simply forgot its whereabouts. So while one hinged on the verge of weeping, the other danced joyously as if a Dragonforce solo exploded in his head...

Frank saunters in & takes a seat -- he's a mid-built longhair metalhead with glasses & thick accent, animated & intelligent. He's 31 years old & about to head off to Brussels once we're all wrapped up: "I'm actually going on vacation -- a beer tour in Belgium with a couple friends. I'm a bit of a beer snob & enthusiast..."

"Is it true, the only thing to do in Belgium is get hammered?"

"Yeah, it's... Not just the beer, but the culture as well. It's got the European café culture so everything is open late & you don't really have to rush to get hammered. It's more a grown up, relaxed approach to drunkenness. Belgium's not a big country, you can drive across it in 2 hours..."

"Well tell me all about FEN..."

"We started off in early 2006 -- it was myself & my brother, playing bass. We'd been in another band for awhile, built it wasn't properly satisfying us. I think when you're in a band for awhile, it becomes a sort of straightjacket -- you feel compelled to play a certain way, there are

expectations. I'd sort of moved into a different reality. So let's just sit down, do something more organic. At that point I'd been listening to a lot more ambient stuff, post-rock & shoe-gaze, same with the other guys. Let's just put all this together... We posted demo tracks on Myspace, sent some press releases & generated a little buzz. Got a label offer... After about a year, we realized this whole post-black metal scene was – all these names being thrown out that we're compared to, a lot of people were going down a similar path. A lot of reviews we get, the sort of *'They're just copying Agalloch or Alcest'* – that wasn't the case at all. Yeah, Agalloch, they're an inspiration of similar direction, but they're not looking at whets happening now. Agalloch are looking toward early Ulver, Fields of the Nephilim – same with us. Fields of the Nephilim are a strong influence, they're one of my favorite bands of all time – so we're taking stuff like that but fusing that with the bleaker, more reflective side of black metal. Also adding electronic influences that take it into a different world."

"As you know there's an entire mystique that's important to black metal – have you made it through the Scandinavian territories? How do you feel about those people?"

"I played in a band called Skaldic Curse & we played Bergen. It was cool to meet some of the guys from Enslaved, meet some of the guys from Hellheim & Taake. The guy from Taake, he's an acquaintance – quite a nice guy. It's interesting to meet the Norwegians because you quickly realize why black metal is the way it is & why it went down that certain path. I can't speak for the whole population, but certainly the guys in the black metal scene – they are convinced they're not playing a part. If you're just putting up some veils of mystery, I think fundamentally you're being honest. But what offends me about some black metal bands is that it is an act. You meet some of these guys backstage & they're standing around acting pissed, throwing things around – they wanna be all nihilistic. It's like, *'Look, we're in the middle of sound check -- live your misanthropy, pour it out on stage, but this pissing about is just childish nonsense. This isn't contributing to some nihilistic ideology.'*"

"Do you feel the punk rock scene has a lot of that same problem?"

"I think anything where you have a strong aesthetic & overall ideology that has a habit of attracting extremity also has a habit of attracting people who are insecure, people who are just looking for an excuse to behave like an idiot. That's putting it at its most basic level. But the Norwegian guys -- there was a lot of sincere intensity there. I don't know if it was a cultural trait or not. They're incredibly articulate, incredibly polite – very, very focused... Black metal means so much to so many different people, but there is a central tenant. You've got the spiked die-hards that look at Alcest like, *'you fags, that's not black metal.'*" Well yes it is -- its just a different expression. If we're going to say that isn't black metal then you better look at early Burzum."

"So about those French BM terrorist guys – I'm supposed to meet some of them, theoretically. What do you know?"

"Oh, the Les Légions Noires – those guys, I don't know. Belketre, Vlad Tepes, bands like that. Apparently they're supposed to all live in a castle somewhere & they are completely and absolutely dedicated to the black metal lifestyle."

"And they still live in a castle after all this time?"

"I don't know the reality of the situation. They probably all live in a rental somewhere, getting drunk & slicing themselves with knives listening to fucking ANTAEUS or something."

“Have you met ANTAEUS? Does he do that slicing shit live?”

“MKM? I don’t now if he does it onstage but his right arm is an absolute mess. He is one intense guy. I saw them last year & I expected it to be a blood & thunder frenzy, but they looked a bit nervous & the venue wasn’t much...”

“Where I’m from in the Northwest United States, it’s basically a huge rainforest of pine trees. It’s called Cascadia. And it has, I reckon, the same bio-regional mystique as Scandinavia. The woods scream black metal, at least visually. But the scene in the Northwest is generally left-wing. Say, for instance, Wolves In The Throne Room – they’ve kind of gone ahead & started this self-sustaining urban farm commune sort of deal, which isn’t that big of a deal considering the population in Portland or Seattle, but in terms of extreme metal – especially black metal – that’s quite a departure from the usual attitude of blood & thunder. As far as this self-sustaining anarcho-BM thing, do you think it can be exported to Europe?”

“Let’s face facts – in every brutal & blunt way, its just not as cool. You know, the reason the whole right-wing imagery stuff took off was because the whole Nazi imagery stuff just looked – it identified the strength, the self-empowerment. I think that’s a more easily accepted message for people who are more socially outcast. Whereas encouraging people to grow their own turnips...

“But this isn’t in some lame, hippie-dippie kind of way -- this is more a dirty, squatty punk rock approach...”

[Something lights up] Well I respect anyone for gearing to that, the approach is noble, the self-sufficiency stuff I can empathize with. But can it practically be implemented in such an urbanized society? I mean, you try & export that to Mexico City & you’ll get nowhere. I don’t think that the new wave of extreme black metal ideology is gonna – I can’t see it, I can’t see it. Look at Drudkh, Nocturnal Mortem, Graveland – despite the fact that they’re incredibly right wing, the way it’s presented is in such a romanticized, majestic package. You see the imagery; the sort of beautiful sunset, the trees, our ‘noble homeland’ – people kind of fall into that. Naïve people can really get drawn into that. Like, ‘oh I almost cried listening to Drudkh last night -- it’s so, it’s so beautiful.’ And it’s like, ‘Yeah, well you do know that it’s essentially a rallying cry for white supremacists?’ [*****see note below***]

“Do you have a question for me about the USA?”

“Is it really full of fat people? Hahaha...”

“Yes. Where I’m from originally – Michigan -- it’s the fattest population in the United States because it’s cold as Norway & there’s nothing to fucking eat but fast food because everyone’s so poor & no one gets food stamps. And the environment & attitude is that if you receive any kind of help from the government because you are therefore a leech & doing so is a shameful & disrespected act.”

“The stereotypes we get over here are of some people who are almost willfully ignorant. Starved of any kind of...”

“They are marching hundreds of thousands strong against any form of single-payer health care or Medicare expansion – like even the most marginal NHS mirrored system. They’re throwing rocks at people, attacking them in defense against some perceived ‘communist plot.’”

It reminds me of a working class Tory over here – which is a man who's living in a council house, absolutely broke, absolutely fucked over by successive right wing governments. *'It's all about what you do yourself, you pull your own weight in this world & if you just work hard'* – but that's bollocks. The people telling you that have an invested interest in you staying where you are. They make you feel bad for wanting change. Basically, putting the blame on you for not having achieved that. I've seen a lot of this. Where my parents come from, it's a right wing stronghold. It's just people barking all about, *'we don't want handouts -- we make our own fortunes.'* What economical fortune? You're living in a pit. It's this almost medieval peasant mentality."

"Same deal – in Michigan, its almost impossible to even get food stamps unless you are crippled or a single mother with 3 kids, and then you need a stack of identification papers, and they have endless loopholes to deny you. And maybe you'll get \$75-\$125 bucks. In Portland, you show up homeless & unemployed with no ID and you get \$200 a month for six months automatically, that very day."

"So the impression I get, reeling through the stereotypes, is the lack of awareness as to why this situation even is. It seems people would rather sit on a street corner freezing then admit the government should provide them some aid to the situation."

"They have no idea what's going on. The root problem is Cold War propaganda, among a host of other things. The entire generation running the show were drilled from childhood onward that Communism was an apocalyptic threat & any sort of assistance was therefore a symptom of the Red Menace. They actually think that Soviet Communism & Socialism are the exact same thing..."

[**Note c/o Drudkh ringleader Roman Saenko: *"The absence of any comments or information from Drudkh's side gave an opening to a few ignorant internet warrior-fans to spread rumors, that the band embraces extreme political views. This is absolutely misleading and a total profanation since there is nothing in Drudkh's music or lyrics that would suggest any political outlook. Drudkh praise individualism, self-improvement and estrangement from modern values."*

**Note c/o The Central Scrutinizer: *"While Drudkh itself is apolitical, it should be noted that nearly every member also performs in an openly white supremacist band. Saenko himself is the ringleader of HATE FOREST, one of the most popular NSBM bands in Europe. Other Drudkh members perform in openly racist outfits Nokrutnal Mortem & Lucifugum. Thus is the reason DRUDKH has been given this 'racist tag' abroad. **Note c/o Dr. Bartek: "To be fair, this could all be misinformation. However, if that is the case, none of these bands are actively making an effort to confront the dozens of white power BM websites which list them as NSBM acts."]*

***** (Day VI): "Ironical Haunting from the Ghost of a still-breathing Baroness."***

Sometime during my walk on Sunday, I happened upon a bulldog of a mohawked warrior with a GBH t-shirt. Depressingly, he told me that there is nearly no scene for punk rock in London anymore. But he did recommend one spot – a small indie music store called All Ages Records that specializes itself as the last bastion of punk rock within the city.

With nothing to lose & a slow Tuesday prattling onward, I headed for the outskirts of

Camden Town. The wiry guy at the desk's name was Nick; at first he thought I was an undercover cop with my reflective aviator glasses, but I explained my deal. Still cautionary, I simply lobbed a rhetorical dung-heap at my country of origin & he lit up like a roman candle...

"This is All Ages -- London's only independent record shop. It's been in existence for nearly 10 years; there was previously no punk specialty shop in London, ever, which I found amazing... [*The phone rings, is promptly answered & slammed upon the receiver, sending Nick into a bug-eyed rant*] N' then you got bastards trying to sell you private health care, yeah? We have a fucking national health service in this country & we need to support it or it'll be gone. If we all sign up for private health care like that, we'll end up like America."

"How much are they charging?"

"I didn't get that far, because I don't want to speak to these people. How dare they ring All Ages independent record shop?!? Obviously they've got a list of numbers -- they don't know who the fuck they're ringing. Fuck off private health care, fucking hell! Terrible. If they all do this we will be America. Terrible..."

"So about..."

"Punk rock! Punk rock, yeah..."

"The CCTV thing..."

"It's getting claustrophobic in London -- they're about to outlaw squatting, completely. Unfortunately we've become very Americanized & that's where it comes from -- this apathy, this whole Wal-Mart thing. This whole situation... America's terrible. And unfortunately the people with the buying power are the people. If you don't want Wal-Mart, don't go to a fucking Wal-Mart -- it'll close. Like Starbucks. Do you know what happened in Italy?"

"Nah..."

"Starbucks, you know, McDonalds take over the world. They go to Italy -- it's just another country as far as they're concerned. And they open up all these coffee shops in Rome & Milan & all these Italians are amazed by how much it costs, then they buy it and *pffffff* [*pretends to spit it out*]. Starbucks, two months, out of Italy -- not a single Starbucks in Italy... Starbucks stopped running a tap in their stores. Did you know about that in America? That was fucking outrageous. Somewhere somebody went to Starbucks & the door was open & they looked through & there was a tap running. The guy said, '*That's right, we were told to run a tap.*' They were told -- worldwide -- run a cold tap all fucking day. All fucking Starbucks. I mean, if you didn't have an opinion on them then, surely after you found that one out, you just want to burn them all down. Yeah they paid for the water, but what an awful, awful waste of resources. Fucking hell -- this water is so precious & we don't know how precious it is..."

"What's your opinion of Tony Blair? Does every Londoner despise him?"

"You've got to remember George Bush was a republican bastard, very right wing, and you've got to remember Blair came from a left wing party. He was vilified by our press & the world press. I grew up through Thatcher & Thatcher destroyed the North of England. She closed coal mines that people's dads' dad had worked in -- 3 generations, maybe 4 had worked there. These whole towns were built on the pit & she gave them two weeks notice. Barnsley basically closed, Castleford closed, Pontefract destroyed. Take the pit out the equation & all the pubs closed, the shops closed -- it was devastation. And then she didn't do anything. And where does she get the coal from? America. Very, very sad... And then she privatized everything --

British Rail, British Steel, British Gas, British Telecom, British Water. We had loads of nationalized industries, and that kept us strong. And now the water companies have shareholders & expect to make money. *Out of water?!?* Come on, fuck off, that is wrong isn't it? The whole thing is fucked, it really is. It really is fucked -- *big time fucked* -- and nobody seems to give a damn. Although I must say there is a horrendous government being voted in... Just the fact that the world is turning into America, that's what I don't like. We're losing our identity. In Europe we had very strong identities, but we don't anymore... There's only punk rock -- *that's the last bastion of sanity in all of this...*

* * *

Do I even need to say where I am, once again? I should mention at this point that the entrance sign has but a few key demands -- "*No Dogs, No Cycling, No Unusual Pets, No Nuclear Weapons.*" I'm about to cross paths with Mr. Adam Sagir, a PR wiz that runs a company called The Noise Cartel Ltd which is a London based publicity company specializing in the "*louder end of the music spectrum, covering press, online, radio and TV promotion for a variety of different artists, labels, events & brands.*"

Sagir has run propaganda ops for a stack of bands including RAMMSTEIN, Children of Bodom & Dragonforce, among others. Like most of these guys I've dealt with over the years, he's just been some vague email address. Thankfully, that little rift gets to change if for one evening only: "Basically we're a PR company -- we do pretty much all that fits under the rock umbrella. If it's noisy & good, we'll probably want to work with it. We do a lot of bands that come through label deals. We used to do Nuclear Blast, so bands that came with that -- Nightwish, Testament, Meshuggah. We do Spinefarm Records -- Children of Bodom, Five Finger Deathpunch, RAMMSTEIN, Killing Joke..."

"Well, I'm asking everyone about London, obviously..."

"I've lived in London my entire life & I'll go so far as to say '*here.*' Camden is really for me, as a kid growing up -- they used to have Devil's Church every week on Sunday night. It was just a gig -- there would always be maybe 3 bands playing -- death, doom, black metal, hardcore, maybe a little crust. It didn't have anything to do with Satan really, not a religious cult or something. I'm talking about mid-90's -- it wasn't like you went on Myspace to hear a band. I... I'm spoiled really. To be in metal, or any kind of music, growing up in London. I don't think I'd be doing what I'm doing now if I lived anywhere else in England... The more I think about it now, it definitely all started for me at Devil's Church. Maybe I do have Satan to thank..."

"Did you put together the PR gig?"

"Noise Cartel is my company, I started it 4 years ago after I left Century Media. Sort of bumbled around on tour for a bit, tour managing, tech-ing, whatever to make some money before my wife was like '*you're not spending your whole life on the road.*' Fair enough, so I started doing press... The guy that used to run Noise Cartel, he used to share an apartment with a guy named Andy Turner who's now working at Metal Blade, but at the time was working with Century Media. Basically I just asked if he had any jobs & it took a year of nagging before he's like '*come in tomorrow.*' Eventually it became full time. I was playing in a touring band too -- LABRAT."

“That name does ring a bell... [*immediately I have this nu-metal ‘98 bingo vision**]*”**

“Ironically, Century Media put it out in the USA...”

“Are you still playing music now?”

“I stopped for 6 years – the last show was here at The Underworld. About 3 weeks ago I did my first gig, again, here, with a new band called Dripback as support for Soilent Green. We’re playing at Download this weekend, and at Bloodstock Festival in August. I don’t have any aspirations of making that my full time job.”

“I haven’t talked to anyone about Ireland yet – got any opinions?”

“Ireland is a strange place full of strange people. I love it but there’s something morbid about it. I was outside this bar & this guy puts his hands up and touches my shoulder – “*Fight?*” I’d done nothing, I was just standing there. “*Why?*” I asked. I guess he just wanted to fight; it was something to do on a Friday night. That happened a couple of times while I was there – it seemed like a sociable thing to do. If you’re not interested they don’t just beat you up, they’re like ‘Oh, OK, that’s cool.’ It was a bit polite, really -- a little too polite. Here people’ll start a fight with you for absolutely no reason. If you don’t want to fight they’ll probably be even more brutal...”

“They just want one good one in there to feel accomplished?”

“Like you could just as easily offer someone a pint, that was the impression that I got.”

“Is there anywhere in Europe where they aren’t totally obsessed with football?”

“I don’t think so. I think we’re probably worse here than anywhere else -- the only time you’ll see an Englishman cry is when it involves football.”

“So the RAMMSTEIN connection – I ate lunch with them once. Great guys.”

“Of all the bands we work with, they’re probably the one I’ve had the least interaction with. We do the radio & TV promotion for RAMMSTEIN; they have someone else do their press.”

“Were you working their album when ‘Ich Tu Dir Weh’ got banned in Germany?”

“Yes. That really wasn’t a concern for us, that song, because – the BBC wouldn’t play it here because the lyrics anyway, but most the other people -- its in German & they don’t really know. We had to work “Pussy” as a single though. You try taking a single called ‘Pussy’ and play it on TV & the radio – it was over before it begun.”

“Were they well aware that it was going to be a failure?”

“Oh yeah -- they’re not stupid people. I think everything they do is very well thought out, and in hindsight, genius. I was really excited about the prospect of working with RAMMSTEIN – this is great, huge band, we get to work with them, this is really cool – and then the chorus is ‘*You have a pussy/I have a dick.*’ No one in England is going to play that on the radio, its just not gonna happen. That was a bit of a non-starter really. Same with the video – no commercial music channel can play that video. In fact, the record company didn’t want to be associated with this video, so we weren’t even officially allowed to work it – not that there was anything we could do with it anyway. But its extreme content probably caused more people to look at it they would’ve seen it had it been in high rotation... I find them very difficult to work with because I’m so used to bands saying, ‘*we’ll do this, we’ll do that*’ & being conventional. Something that Rammstein are not is conventional. It can get frustrating at times, but when you see what

they've done & look back afterwards – ok, I understand. It's keeping the mystique, the sense of mystery.”

“What’s up with the Dragonforce live album? How are they in person?”

“We’re currently working with them at the moment & they’ll be supporting Iron Maiden. You know Herman Li? I’ve known him 16 years -- he’s one of the guys that used to come to Devil’s Church. He was like in every band in the scene – my old band LABRAT, he was in that for a few months. He’s such an incredible guitarist that everyone wanted him. But then eventually they’d get sick of the constant soloing. Great, but you can’t just do this the whole way through the entire song. So I think he found the perfect vehicle in Dragonforce.”

“What’s Jaz Coleman like from Killing Joke?”

“The first time I met him was when they were recording *Absolute Dissent*. He took me downstairs into the basement of the studio & wants to have a talk about press. He’s like, ‘*I’ll do anything*’ & I’m like, ‘*Makes my job easier.*’ Alright, well there’s a lot of silly Q&A’s out there that really aren’t filled with intelligent questions – like, ‘*what’s the last thing you put in your mouth?*’ He’s like ‘*Don’t worry -- you just set them up & I’ll make sure the interviews are about whatever I want them to be about.*’ And then he tells me that he’d like to interview people. Ok, that’s an interesting spin on it -- maybe the future would be you interviewing another band. And he’s like ‘*No -- I want that murderer Tony Blair.*’ Right, OK. Maybe his idea of what is achievable & my idea is slightly different. ..

“What’s your comment on the PR biz & how one becomes a sort of Wizard of Oz figure? A huge chunk of bands that are struggling for recognition are completely aloof to the overall importance of propaganda.”

“It’s really interesting how it’s changed. When I was at Century Media, you didn’t email JPEG’s to people – you sent a transparent, or photograph, in the post. Cut & paste was literally that – flyer, press pack, whatever. It was a lot more sociable as well; I spent most of my time in pubs or with other people. Now it’s just emails. It used to be standard practice that the press person would take the editorial person out to lunch -- the sales person would take the marketing person out. A lot of that is kind of gone now. There’s people I deal with regularly that I’ve never met – they’re just an email address. I do loads with them & they don’t have a face. With email – maybe you feel less obliged to meet people. I’m not on Facebook, but I could see one becoming obliged to add them – you know what their family looks like, last Sundays BBQ – its weird... The internet has really changed the way that PR press works. I didn’t know many independent press people because most worked for a label. The labels & magazines, between them they dictated what the kids would listen to, because that’s how they found out about stuff. The kids -- their favorite label or magazine would tell them what to check out. As a kid, maybe I’d see Phil Anselmo wearing an EYEHATEGOD t-shirt & I’d get into them, or the thanks list on an album. Now you don’t even have to work to find new music -- people are constantly pushing it in front of your face. You can hear anything you want within seconds without paying for it. So now I think the media is playing catch up with the fans. I don’t even need to play a note of music to know someone will write about them – all I say is they have 500,000 Facebook likes, or 500,000 YouTube views. I think the power is with the people now. It’s a lot harder to do those cynical PR campaigns without talking about this Wizard of Oz shit. You can do it, if you have a genuinely good product that people are going to get excited about. Now, if you try to do that with a crap

band – I don't think a Coal Chamber would stand a chance in this day & age – it would be over before it'd begun..."

**** (Day VII): "MEDICALture Shock"**

I've got this problem with my teeth. It started before I'd left America, this whole business of spitting blood. It was really bad once I got here, sitting on a ledge with Matt, sucking on my molar & spitting out plasma. Gruesome as it gets.

Basically the last push of my wisdom teeth came roaring through, shoved all my teeth to the front & relined my jaw in one day. Got too drunk & flossed with wax that was apparently sitting on a shelf for 5 years. Cut the shit out my gums & thought using tons of Scope mouthwash would fix the problem, but all alcohol solvent does is repeatedly clean a wound & all the bacteria which accumulates to heal it.

As a slave from the USA with Nazi healthcare, I had a hard time believing that a hospital would actually exist anywhere to help you. I mean, I knew it was bad, but then I watched Mike Moore's *Sicko* & wanted to vomit on the Constitution. I needed to know – needed to believe – that Moore wasn't just dropping horseshit DNC propaganda with the NHS system.

Gums on fire, I approached a sight that was not only a mirage to my eyes, but was an even greater jackboot-to-the-throat mega-insult lingering from my home country. Here was a public hospital 5 times the size of any hospital I'd seen in the USA, with gigantic plastic letters spelling out its name the way we groveling Americans are only accustomed to viewing above used car lots. It read [*get this*]: **"ROYAL FREE HOSPITAL."**

It was more surreal to me then the thought of walking up to a rotting drug house in warzone Detroit & seeing the advertised phrase "FREE COCAINE" in huge, glowing neon letters. And as I sat there scratching my head, I gazed to the right, and there was a 5 level parking garage that had another sign which read "FREE PARKING." Seriously? Not \$10 for three hours?

They didn't care who I was or where I came from. They were legitimately there to... *help me*? This thought, this abstract reasoning not guided by profit? To assist my sickness because they were humans & believed in humanity? And to do so for *FREE*???

Well, not exactly. I had to pay a small bill in the mail because I wasn't a UK citizen – like £30. But they didn't even ask for proof of identification. They weren't even concerned with sending me a bill. And the doctor, he was like: "We'll fix you right up, no problem." I was so shocked by his kindness I wanted to buy him dinner. And after he diagnosed me with a nasty case of inflamed gingivitis [*& not mouth cancer, as I'd subliminally feared & repressed*], he handed me a prescription for the strongest anti-gingivitis medication on the market.

At the medicine window, the sign read "*all prescription* £7." That's it? Like, everything? \$14 USD?? No matter the sickness, it was the same nationally guarded price. I neatly wept & when I turned to one of the Brit's standing in line & remarked on the price, she actually said: "*Yeah – it's outrageous charging people this, isn't it?*"

The instructions from the pharmacist were that if I drank any alcohol whatsoever with this stuff I would pass out, possibly die. Sadly, my lifelong dream of drinking wine non-stop in Paris & wearing a red beret amongst a bunch of Frenchie's chortling: "*Honh-Honh-Honh -- Fuck*

Amer-eee-kah & George Dub-you Bush -- Honh-Honh-Honh-Wee-Wee” was firmly out the window. But for the sake of my health, I could not complain – especially when the medical pigs I the US would’ve charged me around \$300 for the same pills. Still, two whole weeks & not one drop of alcohol? *Bullocks...*

* * *

My last action before shuffling off to Paris tomorrow afternoon is a punk rock gig in the south end of London. I’m at the last of the dingy punk rock bars in the area, a place called The Grosvener [***pronounced grove-vener*]. This is a hook up through Keef Thomas of FLOWERS OF FLESH & BLOOD; I’m about to have a long ramble with a cat name Max Ferrin from a sXe anarcho-punk band called HELLO BASTARDS that recently did a tour in Palestine working with the Anarchists Against The Wall protest group in opposition to Israeli brutality...

Earlier I had a chat with this oldschool punk from Northern England named Risky. He was in his mid-50’s, had that super-gruff Keith Richards accent & talked a mile a minute. The guy has been booking shows since the early 80’s with Reknaw Sound, who supply PA & tour support to bands all over the UK & Europe. I also briefly met with Christie from the Falling Down, another local punk band. She was a runaway from Southern California & described her escape from America like *“the breaking of a reel of film...”*

HELLO BASTARDS’ site describe their mission statement as a band created to: *“give voice to our views and beliefs, and to encourage punk music to become a political threat again. Punk nowadays means nothing -- it has been dilapidated & absorbed by the system. Most bands do not have a message & most bands have forgotten that punk music is political. Hello Bastards are a vegan band & strongly support the animal liberation movement. We believe in the liberation of all species, whether that means humans or animals. To us there is no difference & we do not place emphasis on one struggle over that of another, to us all liberation struggles are equal and feel that a holistic approach means a thorough and consistent standard of ethics...”*

“Every member of the band has retained sXe ethics. We feel that straight-edge is an important part of liberating yourself from the addictions of society. We understand the history & the importance of the straight-edge movement, which is why we sometimes feel so disillusioned with the current state of the scene. To us being sXe is not about drinking Coca Cola, wearing Nike’s or eating meat -- it seems to have morphed into some Capitalist consumerist subculture. HELLO BASTARDS exists for the sole purpose of spreading a political message. If it were not for this, we would not be a band. We do not like to label ourselves after any political movement. However, we feel that anarchism is the most natural & innate movement which exists. Music is the vehicle that we use to express our ideas and emotions; music without a message means nothing to us...”

Max Ferrin shakes my hand & we munch on some venue donated pizza before his side project STAB is scheduled to take the stage: “I have an Italian father, a French mother, but I was born in Argentina. I’ve been living in London for the last 6 years; I’m the singer in HELLO BASTARDS & also a band called STAB. BASTARDS’ started around 2005 with a bunch of guys from South America living in London. From the old lineup it’s just two of us – myself & Jefferson

from Brazil. New people – Santiago, our bassist from Israel, Amy from Germany & Herman who's from Poland. So it's a little like The United Nations, here in London...

“So this intense Palestinian tour that you guys did...”

“The thing with Palestine & Israel – it started with us being politically conscious & trying to approach the situation from a different point of view than the anarcho-punk scene. Even though we are against flags -- even though we are against nations -- what's actually happening in Palestine and the oppression of the Israeli government is completely unacceptable. So we decided to take a position to support the Palestinian struggle. We had the luck to have Santiago. Our bass player, he's from Israel & part of the Anarchists Against The Wall organization. It's based in Tel Aviv – they support the Palestinian uprisings in the West Bank. They go in as human shields during demonstrations or just help by any other means. We decided to go to Israel, and then Palestine, because it was the right time to do it. It's easy to be in the position to talk about things in a book or watching a movie -- but it's completely different when you're on the front lines. So we decided to go to Israel to play some gigs & also the Palestinian territories...”

“How difficult is it to get through the border? I'd assume cavity searches are quite popular with those people...”

“Before you get to Israel, you have to be prepared not to have any equipment & not to have anything related to political parties. You cannot be wearing an anarchist t-shirt – it cannot be in your luggage. You have to try to not look alternative. As soon as you reach Israel, the international airport, as soon as you get off the plane – even before immigration -- the IDF, the Israeli Defense Force, are checking your passports. *‘What are you doing in Israel, where are you staying, do you have any political affiliations?’* You pass through that, and then you have local police asking the same things. 15 meters ahead they check your actual passports. Immigration – of course they're gonna ask you the same things. At that point they put two stickers on your passport – one green & one red. If you pull a green you are free to pick up your luggage. If you pulled a red someone from immigration is going to escort you to your luggage, they're going to check your luggage, and ask you more questions. And only then can you actually get into Israel, which is how the country sort of feels as a whole. Being in Israel, you can feel that it is very repressive in a way. We stayed in an Arabic neighborhood in Tel Aviv and it feels... I would say oppressive, because there is a constant harassment by the government to the people who live there. They were actually bulldozing some of the houses. Not even specific properties – sometimes just to make the street bigger or to make a park, but of course this happens all the time. Very specifically it's illegally forced on the Arabic people in that area...”

“What about Palestine itself?”

“We started to go to the occupied territories. At the time there were local elections in Israel and this village -- half of it was in Israel & half in Palestine. The village was 100% Arabic. It turns out the far right party in Israel decided they were going to monitor the elections of this village. The elders and the people of course didn't want this person monitoring the elections, so the goal was to block all the entrances to the village at 4 in the morning. It was very interesting to be participating in the blockade, especially when there's 40 or 50 IDF with machine guns pointed at you. It wasn't violent, but it was direct action. We successfully prevented this guy from getting into the village -- the police said the conditions were not actually met for him to be in the village because they could not ensure the security. After that we went to the house of one of the

organizers. We were able to socialize with the Palestinians in a different environment, in a different way – a more human way. And while we were there, there was the news that some other people from this right wing party actually made it to the main school of the village. So we're rushing to this school to try and kick out this person, and at that point things started to get more violent. The IDF, even the local police, they started to fire tear gas, rubber bullets – I'm talking about kids, 10, 12, 16, 20 to 40, 50, 60 years old who were defending... If you think about politics in Israel, they are on the right end of the spectrum. And to say these guys are far right, that says a lot about what kind of people they are. The situation deteriorated and we needed to leave the area. It was our first taste of how things actually run in Palestine...

"What about the protest at The Wall?"

"After that we decided to go to the Anarchists Against The Wall demonstration. There are weekly demonstrations against the partition of this village in two – they've lost 70% of their land due to the wall that Israel is erecting in the occupied territories; it's actually all Palestinian land... The demonstration itself, they meet on a Friday afternoon, gather all the people from the village & just walk to the land where they are constructing The Wall. That's it -- there is no violence. As soon as you leave the boundaries of the village there are IDF units all over the place & they start to shoot with rubber bullets, sound grenades, tear gas. Also they use live 9mm ammunition... One of the rules of the human shields is to remain in the front to prevent the IDF from shooting the Palestinians. As soon as we started we were actually bombarded with tear gas, rubber bullets, sound grenades, whatever you can imagine. It was very unprovoked – situations where they use extreme violence in situations where there is no need. When they started to throw sound grenades we needed to retreat inside the village and the IDF came looking to arrest people."

"That's extremely surreal."

"It was surreal because you're in a city where people are just wandering around buying groceries, having their kids with them, and the military is entering into their village. It is very sick -- these people live with this every day. Then you see 5 year old kids throwing rocks at their cars, and it's not like it's going to do anything, and then you have guys from the IDF shooting them with live ammunition. To be living this every day? This is very tough."

"In the United States people are very apathetic & without a clue as to what's actually happening in the Middle East. What we are repeatedly told by the media is this impression that the Israelis are the 'good guys,' and that Palestinians are the 'bad guys.' Especially Arafat – he was viewed as a monster, and by default, the Palestinian struggle garnered an implied aura of terrorism..."

"I need to say that, luckily for us – even though the media is useless because it's not meant to inform but to misinform people – I believe that in the UK at least, in general in Europe, there are a lot of people actually supporting the Palestinian struggle. At its most basic it's a humanitarian struggle. We've had maybe 40,000 people demonstrating in London; there are a lot of organizations abroad. There are a lot of actions being taken against Israel so I need to say the context in Europe, in the UK it is a little bit differently then the way you're painting it in America. There is much more awareness."

"The Arab Spring, which is just really gaining momentum now – this past week the Israeli's mowed down a bunch of protestors staging a demonstration outside The Wall

but on the Syrian end. But they were working under that Cairo-styled banner... Also, we don't have Al Jazeera in The States – it's implied through the corporate media that you are a bad person if you watch it, that they only show videos of American soldiers being decapitated, that they are in cahoots with al Qaeda, et cetera."

"You have to take it into context – every country is different, and there are different reasons why every population is uprising against their particular tyrannies. If you're talking especially about the incident that happened – the Palestinians entering the borders from the Syrian border, the Israeli reaction is interesting because it's the first time the Palestinians actually entered the border in a long time. If you look at what they're were doing, it is completely innocent. They just want to show that it is still their land. And, of course, the end result from that side is just bullets, bullets, bullets & bullets & bullets & bullets -- just killing people. It shows this criminal use of violence & how the government solves its situations. Fattah and Hamas, they are trying to create a united front between the two of them to get recognition of the Palestinian State from the United Nations. The vote is going to be happening really soon. Even though I want to remain positive, I don't think it's going to happen. There are too many things at play & Israel is going to be doing a lot of lobbying to prevent the UN from recognizing the Palestinians. Even if it happens, it will not bring the borders back to 1967 like America, other nations are proposing."

*[**Note: At the time of writing, the Palestinians have no choice but to request a UN vote in September 2011. This vote is to ratify a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood. If approved, Palestine would then be a fellow member of the United Nation whose territory would include all of the West Bank, Gaza & East Jerusalem. Therefore making the Israeli occupation a 'legitimately' criminal occupation. However, Barack Obama has already signaled that he will veto any such resolution on behalf of the power invested unto him by the people of The United States of America. At partition in 1947, Israel was allotted 55% of Palestine. The Jewish state now controls 78%...]*

"Do you have a question for me about America, something you don't understand..."

"Sometimes I don't understand American culture in general. I find it so focused on Christianity – and you all fall on Democrats & Republicans, like there is no alternative. I'm not even talking about an alternative to the whole system, I'm just talking about an alternative to the Republicans & Democrats. It's amazing how America is a country with so many people, so many bands saying all things, so many people are aware & know what's going on, but they still cannot form a unified front to tackle the system..."

***** (Day VIII): "Vive Gay PARIS!!!"***

Thursday morning & I wake up in the sort of place that 15 year old punk rock kids have wet dreams about. It's called "The Deathdrop" – a squat that was formerly a tavern but could never muster much business, being hidden from public view in an area coagulated with small industrial factories. About 20 crusties live here now & throw gigs out the basement – most recently the held a secret gig with DOOM...

The mid-level floor is caked in posters & silkscreen flags, windowless & illuminated by strings of Christmas lights. The top floor is the living area with a huge industrial sized kitchen

where we all ate a vegan feast late at night. This is another hookup, thanks to Keef, basically. He'd recommended I talk to an Italian guy named Enzo from a band called GRIND THE ENEMY, but when I called earlier in the week he was unavailable. Just so happens he lives here & I'll interview him shortly, but right now he's appearing in court after being subpoenaed over an associates' legal transgression...

I'm alone here, hammering away on a community laptop. When I look deeper into it, all of my contacts for France are scattered throughout the country. In Paris all I really have are a few black metal guys, a more "Ozzfest Territory" sort of metal band called ASHKA, a prog-death metal act dubbed Underflesh & an NSK operative who I'm thrilled about meeting, for LAIBACH's only responsibility as the engineers of human souls is to: *"remain irresponsible,"* for LAIBACH *"cannot concern [itself] with the fulfillment of other people's expectations. We believe that in art [all] morality is nonsense, in practice it is immoral, [and] in people it is a sickness..."*

Enzo shows back up, this tall & muscular Italian guy with long black dreadlocks & a penchant for broken English. He feels kind of silly in the shirt & tie he had to slap on for court, so he switches to more comfortable crust gear, makes us some vegan lunch & we head into it...

"You just came back from the court & mentioned it was very 1984..."

"It's kind of like a Big Brother thing here cause there are a lot of cameras everywhere & they really control you. In fact at court this morning they were taking out all the Facebook mails & phone calls that they recorded – like hours of stuff. Fuck that..."

"The police actually used Facebook as legal evidence?"

"Yeah, the detective downloaded all the Facebook stuff – like messages, anything – the files were really big. So yeah, it's the new way to fuck people up. I was shocked when the guy said, 'Alright, this is the Facebook file.'"

"Do you think Mark Zuckerberg is directly working with Interpol & the CIA?"

"Yeah. Also, if you want to close your account, they keep everything – all your private stuff for years & years. Anytime the cops ask for stuff, they have to give it."

"Tell me about your band..."

"We started about 3 years ago. We play stenchcore influence – the band is called GRIND THE ENEMY. The lyrics are pretty simple – to give a message that is complete hate against society. Its like nothing original – just pure hate. It's not intellectual stuff – just pure, simple, hate & anger."

"Where did you grow up in Italy?"

"Southern Italy – Napoli. I've been in London 5 years now. I used to squat in Italy, since I was 16. The people in the area, they're not like mafia, but they're not really nice with punks. They see diversity as a danger – they want to take the shit out of the punks. It's not easy life, and squatting every night we'd be like fighting with them – petrol bombs & fighting, fighting & fighting. And we moved from there cause it was taking our energy, our time; we couldn't produce anything. Even to have a gig was a big risk. So we moved to North Italy, to an old squat. We took over the place, start to do gigs, anarchist stuff, meetings. We had a few bands playing there – sort of a punk picnic every year."

"Does everyone hate Berlusconi?"

"Ooooh yeah. The punk scene for sure -- he's a fucking twat man."

"I have this idea for this book to go to Preddipio, which is the birthplace of

Mussolini, because that's where his crypt is. I've heard it's like this Old World Fascist town where people still salute you with 'A'Noi!' There's supposedly a volunteer guard forever on duty protecting Benito's crypt 24-7, 365 days a year. I just kind of want to go up to him and ask why."

"There's still places in Italy where old people say, 'Oh when Mussolini was in power, it was the best time.' It's like, when do you die? Old creep."

"Tell me more about the difficulties in squatting Italy..."

"To squat in Italy is pretty hard. You always have to have a barricade because anytime the police can come crush the place & arrest you. There was a nice squat in Naples but its not there anymore because the communists & the mafia took control of the place. The mafia people, they came in & kicked us out with guns..."

"What does anarchism mean to you?"

"I don't consider myself anarchist, to be honest. Less or more, I don't try to be a part of this society. Anarchism is a big thing – when I was young I used to tend to be more 'perfect anarchist' but this is wrong too. When you say, 'I cannot do this, this is not right, this is not what an anarchist would do' -- I found that to put stuff in front of you, in front of other people. I don't think that is right. I like to feel free to drink a Coca-Cola if I just want to. For me anarchism is just respect people, try to live together -- simple. If you come in my house & smash my house & say, 'this is freedom, this is anarchy.' I say, 'NO -- you are a fucking idiot.'"

"Do you have a question for me about America?"

"When people come back from America, they're always complaining about how they've been treated. Like punks -- not complaining -- but saying, 'We had an amazing show but in the end we've been left out the venue.' And they gave us maybe good money, but they were left by themselves. They didn't know where to go, where to eat, where to fucking sleep, you know. And I just ask myself why? What's wrong with these people? They invited the bands to play. For me, when we organize a tour or anything, we make sure -- I make sure -- that the band feels welcome. You have to guarantee at least a place to sleep & food. I don't know why Americans cannot do that..."

As I make my way to the end of The Tube, I cannot help but notice in the most hyper-exaggerated sense the omnipresence of CCTV. When you decide to compartmentalize such awareness in the back of your head, it's easy to dismiss Echelon peering through every crack of cement about you; everywhere the ominous black lens, recording your every move...

A manic rush now for Pacal, my rideshare to Paris. Tube after Tube, hitting a bad switchover, having to turn around on another train – crazed text messages from him to be at the prescribed airplane terminal or he'll leave me behind. But the phone dies beneath these tunnels disconnected from the reach of satellite's...

Closer, closer to the deadline – inching towards the abandonment my hard-won £30 ride into France..... *Up the elevators, down through escalators... Darting past sluggish tourists bumbling in my path... Sweating, sweating, panting & beading... !!BAM!!* – made it. Two minutes to the chagrin of time...

As I stand atop the parking garage, green army coat shielding me from the light summer breeze, I can view all of London in the distance like a concrete abstraction. Shining sun, rolling

lakes & fields of the countryside... The future never so bountiful...

Goodbye sweet London, one day I shall return into your crescent arms... Onward comes Pascal & his little Toyota, his backseat packed of fellow travelers... Just one man vs. FORTRESS EUROPE & 1600+ hours to go...

“...dans l'étreinte amoureuse de la France, je voyage désormais...”

FORTRESS



EUROPE

PROLOGUE :: THE BIG SHINY PRISON VOL. II

::PROLOGUE::

(I)

“Art stands against history, withstands history which has been the history of oppression, for art subjects reality to laws other than the established ones: to the laws of Form which creates a different reality – negation of the established one even where art depicts the established reality... But in its struggle with history, art subjects itself to history: history enters the definition of art and enters into the distinction between art & pseudo-art. Thus it happens that what was once art becomes pseudo-art. Previous forms, styles and qualities, previous modes of protest and refusal cannot be recaptured in or against a different society.”

--Herbert Marcuse

(II)

“And maybe its treacherous old age coming on, threatening the worst. Not much music left inside us for life to dance to. Our youth has gone to the ends of the earth to die in the silence of the truth. And where, I ask you, can a sane man escape to, when he hasn’t enough madness left inside him? The truth is an endless death agony. The truth is death. You have to choose: death or lies. I’ve never been able to kill myself.”

--Celine

PORTLANDIA

(-- march twenty sixth // two thousand eleven --)

And thus it begins -- once again, all over again, just as it should – hung-over & with a brutal case of the shits outside a Starbucks in Portland, Oregon...

I'm about to wheel across town & hang with Rotting Christ from Greece, one of the most preeminent black metal bands from their respective country, as well as a brutal no-nonsense death metal band from Poland called HATE. Melechesh will be there as well, the first real-deal extreme metal band from Jerusalem. Abigail Williams & Lecherous Nocturne, it is rumored, will be mulling around as well...

I've been in PDX nearly a year -- the Northwest for three, give or take – an experience summed up as an unspeakable rollercoaster of false starts & dramatic anticlimaxes. Like all the other ragged transplants that have escaped to this "Green DC," I'm but another one of the vague, tragic lemmings blindly seeking the superficial dream of the 90's...

If you've never lived here, none of this will make sense... Once upon a time, in the year of 1999, another Detroit refugee returned to our native land. Having inhabited Seattle for a year, she explained best she knew how – still, nothing resonated. She pleaded with me to leave Detroit at once, claiming that I was the only one from our old reality that could make "The Cut" – an ominous reality all transplants know too well, bitterly or joyously... Alas, I was young – 18 years old – and needed to dismember the plotlines of my youth... 7 gruesome, long years passed before I actually made The Emerald City. Then I understood...

I had a taste of Seattle & its boundless promise – but only the very last gasp, that mechanical jerk before total suffocation. Summer 2008 I rode high on the final roar of that elusive & widely misunderstood "Grunge Inertia" (a term used only for vaguely perceiving minds – and one that is instantly laughable to every Seattleite). In reality, the Seattleverse has dick to do with Nirvana & everything to do with an ingrained cultural resistance & the ever-continual counterculture exodus there. That last summer, in 2008, before the dam finally broke – the city was on fire. Seattle was among the few territories poised to ransack the entire United States on every level – musically, artistically, politically. It was a glorious beacon of purist example...

Then AIG exploded, shrapnel-slicing the planetary economic sphere. Wall Street fell, and within days I was unemployed. Within two months, I was essentially homeless & every magazine I ever wrote for withered into nothingness like the extinction of the dinosaurs...

And as the cold froze to record temps & the mortgages began foreclosing & the Union's were being defeated & the budgets were crashing & unemployment was running out the Seattleites

acted as all Americans did in sensing the budding catastrophe. While they pretended everything was peachy keen on the surface they moved in a flanking conspiracy of self-denial, silently cannibalizing each other, growing greedier, more fearful, more desperate. Thousands began pouring onto the streets, transplants bailing on the city for hometown ground. It was trickling away, but the screws hadn't totally come undone yet...

** Jump to now. Portland is Seattle with missing teeth & a bad case of the shakes. If Seattle represents the end of something, then this is where the mutated backwash flows -- dirtier, dingier & harder-edged. Portland is a veritable nation-state within the perimeters of a city: "*The People's Republic of Cascadia*" -- or "*Cascadia*" for short, the oft ubiquitous term amongst the fringe. Whereas Seattle is more the New York of this "Northwest Axis," Portland is a neighborhood-centric cocktail -- something between Ann Arbor & Berkeley (at least in SE PDX). Downtown, however, is a freakish collision of Detroit, Manhattan & Alex Proyas' *Dark City*...

The naked bicycle races stretching for miles of flesh, the endless film festivals with full bar service, a culture divorced from automobile slavery & the greatest public transportation system in the nation. Hundreds of house venues, info-shops, street-vendors & street performers, DIY health care, legal household pot crops & urban farms with cawing roosters, public outreach programs so well organized it makes a tragic joke of any other shit-hole in the US of A...

...but the cold has arrived; the sickness is in. The great promise has devolved into an empty hog-pen of intoxication. As the doomed lurch the shadows, the young ones light up the neon stretch. The rich ones, the beautiful ones press on -- 50 square miles of drunk people being drunk, falling over themselves -- and so many nut-hugging jeans & Borat 'staches it burns out the irises...

Freak Mecca has crumbled substantially, rendering itself a near impenetrable clique of omnipresent, nihilistic flakiness. For every attempted transplant showing up with nothing but \$100 life savings, there are 5 more hipsters already planted that stroll right on by, ignoring them completely: "*Tough shit buddy*," their eyes read, "*go back to Kansas*."

In one year I've seen at least 2,000 soul-seeking travelers repelled. And not just Kerouac-brained explorers -- I'm talking entire families of the freshly homeless; people that worked full-time factory jobs & mortgages, marriages, children in places like Arkansas, Iowa, Connecticut. By official figures, the market is now experiencing 60,000 home foreclosures per month.

Some refuse to leave & starve on the streets. Others give in & shuffle off to who knows where. Some fall apart and turn to massive junkies. And some, like me, get lucky. By "lucky" I mean a minimum wage job at 20 hours per week. And that was only after 700 resumes & walking every inch of this city, block by block, for three months straight. Being a famous metal journalist means nothing in the United States anymore, not even to Carl's Jr.

Well, I'm done. After 12 solid months of living like a dog, I'm ready to leave this place for the sake of doing something phenomenally insane. In two months I'll be taking the cheapest one-way plane ticket to Europe and getting dumped off smack-dab in the middle of The Old World with nothing more than a backpack of survivalist doom. I will then, as before, use every hustler trick in the book to make my way across the continent – all while unearthing the deepest fringe undercurrents in the European counterculture...

And maybe, just maybe, I won't have to come back. Maybe some gorgeous Scandinavian honey with flowing blonde locks & a Triple D bust will marry me for a green card. Maybe I'll ditch out once & for all & dodge that lethal FUCK-U-SHIMA creeping towards the coast. Maybe I'll be absent when the billion gallons of Corexit-laced Neurotoxic oil sludge thaws & rises from the Gulf Floor. Maybe I'll be stretched out on an Italian mountainside when the Tea Party descends on Washington DC Cairo-style to demand the reinstatement of pre-existing medical conditions...

* * *

It's Saturday March 26th, 2011 – the future *The Jetsons* envisioned, sort of -- and still there is a lunatic on the street ranting gibberish about hellfire, blasphemy, totalitarian Christ. This one – this pot-bellied trailer hick – is sporting a hoodie & white hat that reads "FEAR GOD." He's got Westboro-style protest signs about damnation, real tacky & shameless. And he's shouting face to face with an enraged Moloch (of Melechesh) who's reiterating: "*Fuck you! Fuck you! I'm from JerUSAlem!*"

I'm dodging traffic in drizzling rain, hustling towards the crowd of metalheads surrounding the inbred buffoon. They're egging him on, laughing hard; every band from the tour has at least one member watching. I walk into the chaos, this heated debate. Moloch darts off exasperated like he's really, really trying hard not to knock this guy unconscious -- but *you* know that *he* knows that he is a better human & cannot do so as to set an example for said retard to later comprehend.

***Record: "I don't understand, all this sin around & you want to talk to me, the street preacher... Rip that stupid thing out of your lip -- you never got whooped by your dad... It's happening right now on this sidewalk -- oh Jesus is here & he's gonna judge the wicked!! He's gonna judge you & your sin!! He's gonna judge the heathens &... We're supposed to judge!! Did you read the marquee -- we're supposed to judge!!... You don't go to conventional church do you? You go to that homosexual church -- careful, be careful -- careful with some of those homos..."*

After a futile attempt to make the preacher take my "*Lord of the Black Sheep*" promo, even demanding that he burn or pee on it a little, I make it to the tour bus where I meet the fellows. Adam Sinner from HATE & Sakis Tolis from Rotting Christ are on one side, a bunch of guys I can't distinguish are everywhere. It's like a clown-car of metal. Vikki, the tour managers asks my response to the street maniac: "*I think it's a perfect example... of why we do what we do...*"

* * * * *

The interior of the Hawthorne Theatre is dimly lit – high ceiling, red curtains draping down the lengthy stage -- & Sakis Tolis is grinning at me with mad energy, a high-octane aura that could only be cultivated in the perimeters of Europe. When I think of Henry Miller's "*Colossus of Maroussi*," I'd bet the house the man would be the perfect actor for the film rendition...

Rotting Christ are a big deal in Greece & an even bigger deal on the international stage. 11 albums in, they've toured relentlessly for years on end. Starting as a grindcore act in 1987, they soon launched into the emerging black metal wave of the early 90's. They nearly signed to Euronymous' Deathlike Silence label, but Mr. Aarseth found his tragic fate in the rampage of Varg Vikernes & the rest is dread history.

By 1996 Rotting Christ signed to the burgeoning roster of Century Media, becoming one of the main bands on the label. 10 years of heavy promotion later they wound up on Season of Mist, having solidified an international touring history with monster names in extreme metal like My Dying Bride, Tiamat, Finntroll, Agathodaimon, Malevolent Creation, Vader, Krisiun, Deicide, Old Man's Child, Behemoth & Nile...

They've also enraged a host of Christian groups & conservative personalities. In November '99 during the USA Presidential Primaries for Republican nomination, candidate Gary Bauer accused the band of a litany of heinous articles. And in May 2005 Dave Mustaine actually had Rotting Christ kicked off a concert bill that Megadeth was playing because their name was offensive to his newly Born Again sensibilities – something that was a massive shock to the worldwide metal community, and which Mustaine never recovered from in terms of respect...

Nearly 25 years in, Rotting Christ are one of the longest running bands in black metal – and they've never grown stale. *AEALO*, the band's latest album, was released on February 15, 2010 – easily the groups most symphonic & atmospheric ...

"Well is this your first time here in Portland?"

"Is my third time here, but this is the first time we saw something like this."

"I don't know if the street preacher is coming directly at you, or just heavy metal in general..."

Yes, yes... try to correct my English ok, because I'm not that fluent..."

"No problem... Well you're the first interview in this new book -- I guess start off by telling me about this new tour..."

"It's doing very well. In the first week we were a little bit hectic, but no, things are getting better -- more & more come to the show. We are about 15 shows into this tour. It's a very small tour, but everyone is satisfied – except for some people out here on the street. We just saw the first protest against our name. But that's good, ok..."

"What's the strangest thing you've seen in America so far?"

"Actually this is our fourth time in America. It's not that strange because everyone watches American movies back in Europe so we know more or less what's going on. But the strange thing here is that everyone is about the money. That maybe scares me a little bit... Everyone is about the money. No one does it for free or good purpose, for the hell of it or something. That's really what scares me here."

"Do you think the DIY, no money mentality is bigger in Europe?"

"Yup, ok, everyone needs money. But here in the USA, its very strict and everyone's doing it for money. That does not mean someone is a bad person or good person, but that means, how can I say... It's what you are taught in the school, you know? But I really enjoy America – I love America actually – because the mentality of the people."

"Well the band started as a grindcore act back in 1987 – I was wondering if you'd ever be interested in reverting to grind on a future album."

"No, no -- I like grindcore, but everything took off at the right point. Back then I was feeling more into grindcore so I did play this music. Right now I feel more heavy metal, more atmospheric music. It all depends on the period of time."

"People here don't have a really clear conception about the scene in Greece..."

"We have a big scene – people are really into metal music. I think in general the Europe scene is very strong, metal is very strong. It's even stronger than here. When European bands play here, they don't pull a lot of people. In Europe we pull much more people -- metal is an everyday life. You see a lot of metal kids on the streets, blah blah blah, so I think it's quite strong and we are very glad to be representing the Greek scene."

"Tell me about your new record"

"We just had a new album come out, this just happened last year -- this is album number 11. Its still metal with a well established rotting Christ sound, but on the other hand we put some ethnic elements. We put some ancient Greek inspired music on our last album, so this is a different thing. And I think people react very positive. Some people think that this is by far our best album so it makes me really happy, really proud as a composer."

"Lyrically and thematically, what kind of topics do you discuss?"

"The whole concept is about battle. About the feelings a warrior has during the battle. This is a feeling that everyone has in their every day life."

"I've been watching various news items about riots in Greece, economic turmoil, massive protests. I'm just curious your comment on the situation..."

"...We messed up. Greece, we messed up, you know. I think everyone is very dissatisfied, this economical system destroyed the country. And everyone is very aggressive about this. We have protests every day, we have bombs. Now Greece is like a battlefield. You might wake up tomorrow and see our money gone. That's the thing about this, you know. There is no insurance now – things are very difficult back there. But of course that does not mean that Greece will disappear, because as a nation we've been existing more then 3000 years..."

"Have you ever read 'The Colossus of Maroussi' by Henry Miller?"

"No, but Maroussi is the area which I live. It's a suburb..."

"If I come to Greece what are the main cities that I want to go to?"

"You should definitely go to the south, to see all the ancient monuments, you should go to the north to see all the Macedonian monuments. And you must have some days off in the ?? isolated islands just to enjoy the sun & nice beaches. The sea there is very smooth, very calm unlike the ocean here. You can stay on the island doing nothing, it's a very nice area. Greece is very nice to go, so I wish some day you go there."

"Here's a random one – I read a lot of World War II history, world history in general – is General Metaxas considered a war hero by the Grecian people?"

"I don't know if its hero – some people consider him a hero, but some as a dictator. But

he's a hero by saying no to these Nazi's battles in 1940. Always Greece is like this – we never surrender...”

“What is the overall message of Rotting Christ?”

“Keeping the underground spirit alive. That's the most important message that we wish to spread to the people. We are metal, we play dark music, but the most important thing for me is just to be yourself. I'm a fan, I go to shows, I buy albums. This is the message we like to pass to people – there is no difference between the musicians & the people that come to the show.”

“I'm looking for a weird story now, something strange that happened to you & when you tell people they think you're a pathological liar – it can be about anything – UFO's, ghosts, bizarre rituals...”

“One time after touring for two years in a row, I start to have illusions. I don't know why. I used to take some drugs ok, but a little bit. When I was in Mexico, for instance, I thought I was seeing UFO's, stuff like that. I don't know why. But I was very tired, I did some medical treatment and now I'm ok. Because sometimes when you're one year on the road, you get tired a lot, really tired, playing shows every day. Sometimes, you know, you drink a lot. But now I quit everything. I don't drink, I don't take any drugs, I don't smoke anything in order to be strong for the self.”

“What do you think of Manowar?”

“I love them. They are one of my favorite bands because this is metal and I am a metal fan. Sometimes I don't like their attitude but I love Manowar, come on. I put it in my MP3 player and listen to this every night before I go to bed man...”

* * *

Adam Sinner is comfortably relaxed in one of the black quasi-fold out chairs in the venue, while varied metal plays over the loudspeakers now that doors are 20 minutes away. This individual is the vocalist/guitarist of HATE, one of the most lethal death metal bands in Poland today & complete w/ corpse-paint, warrior gear, Satanic overtones & industrialized undertones wrapped in a caustic slab of multi-style death metal...

Formed in Warsaw in 1990, it was only after 3 self-released efforts before signing to Novum Vox Mortiis & later the famed Polish label Metal Mind Productions. The subsequent years would find HATE dropping a new album on a new label every few years, including Mercenary Musik (in the States), Dwell Records, Blackened Records, & finally Listenable Records where they are currently. HATE's new record *Erebos* is the one they now tour for, a monstrous slab of leviathan girth...

“So is this your first tour in the United States?”

“No, no, the second time actually. There's a nice, friendly atmosphere on the bus with Rotting Christ and Melechesh. The shows are really, really good. We have seen a growing interest in the band definitely, compared to the first tour we did with Hypocrisy last year. So there's a progress for sure and this time we are in America to promote our new album *Erebos*...”

“The first time I heard HATE was Cain's Way back in 2002, that was in the Mercenary Musik days. You're on Listenable now. Tell me about your new album, how it

differs from your past works & what you're progressing towards...

"Talking about the music, how it's evolved -- we started from traditional death metal, brutal death metal; a mixture of American influenced death with some European roots, thrash bands like Kreator or Destruction. But in 2005 there was a big change in the bands style -- we started using industrial influences, samples. Also the music was enriched with some black metal, thrash metal. The industrial & ambient stuff in our music is very important. It makes us different from the rest of the Polish death metal scene, also it gives our music some dirty character on live shows. On the American version of *Erebos* there are some bonus track that go even further in this direction -- remixed in dark ambient form by a French artist called Melecta -- quite well known in Europe for his industrial attempts. I think it's something experimental, something fresh when it comes to extreme metal."

"Obviously you have a thread of Satanism in your music as well..."

"When it comes to the lyrics, in ideology -- yeah we were very, might I say, 'declared satanic band' in the beginning. It hasn't changed that much. We're still into Satanism, or mysticism, but we don't express it in so much of a blatant way. I mean, it's more, you know... We are grown ups now. So we look at these things from a more grown up perspective. So those topics, that ideology, it's still an important part of the contents of the lyrics, but its not expressed in this open way. We've been more into mysticism, say Luciferian stuff, then plain Satanism. That's why we don't use inverted crosses or pentagrams, which are too obvious -- and very often misinterpreted & used by everybody around. That's why we're trying to put it in some other way & to show other aspects of these ideologies."

"Tell me about the Polish scene -- what am I walking into? Is Warsaw the number one city?"

"The Polish metal scene is present in many different cities -- it's all over the country, lots of extreme metal bands. The scene is really, really strong; there are hundreds of bands. Some will call it the 'Polish death metal phenomenon.' I don't believe that there's just one polish death metal style... On the other hand there might be something in common for all those bands, but it's more the sound then the riffs. All of us use the same studios, the same sound engineers -- sometimes even the same equipment in the studio... If you want to know more about the Polish scene, you should interview all the main bands -- especially VADER, because it all started from them, back in the 80's even, when they started to make their name internationally. All the other bands, mine also, are following VADER's footsteps. They were the first band from the other side of The Iron Curtain, and they were a great success at the time. They were proof that we could do something."

"Coming from Europe, how do you feel about cultural absurdity -- I mean in America, specifically, the odd things you've seen that would never happen elsewhere..."

"Today we had a great example of absurdity, those guys protesting outside the club, protesting against satanic bands. It's a kind of protest that's full of contradictions. If they are soldiers of Christ they shouldn't be so angry, they shouldn't hate other people. But they openly hate us. It's just stupid -- it's something you wouldn't see in Europe anywhere. It's a surprise that in Portland we have such a protest. It should be in the South States rather, Texas or... It shows that America is built on capitalism and bible. I understood it today seeing this. Those people were really serious, they were really angry -- they didn't act. So they must've been brainwashed

to the point when they really believe in this shit & they speak openly in the street in such a dynamic manner about it... America – people are really open here. Here in America I can see many people willing to speak openly about love of things. In Europe, most countries, especially in the North, people are more to themselves. Not straight-forward, not outgoing... It's a different culture, in this way, that people are more kind here in America. Also, the way that metal community is organized here is something completely different from Europe, because here you can meet young people & also people that are elderly, you know, like 50 years old. It's something unheard of in Europe -- there the crowd is 20-something-year-olds. But here it's a metal culture. In Europe, people who are 25 are taking up some serious stuff for life -- they don't go to the concert. 30 is the breaking year – you cannot really meet people over 30 at metal shows. So it's a kind of lifestyle & it ends at about 30. That's it. “

“So are you a total rarity? You're about 32 right?”

“35. “

“So are you the last of your old friends that grew up & moved onto other stuff?”

“Yeah, definitely. Most my friends, former metal fans, crazy metal fans, these people are now business men sitting in the offices. Sometimes they look with some envy, they're all a bit jealous of my career because they are stuck. They don't go to the venue for metal shows because they don't belong there anymore. They would feel strange, they would feel awkward, jumping around with all those youngsters there.”

“How old were you when you made that stand?”

“I never asked myself this question – it was always obvious to me that I would continue doing this. And it's not because of metal, but because the creativity. It's drive – inner drive, something that you cannot get rid of.”

“You grew up in Poland when it was still Iron Curtain. Now that that's all done with, do the older population in Poland still embrace the ideals of communism or do they feel it was a bad thing altogether? Do they even want to think about it anymore, or is there strong support a more moderate socialism? “

“You know there are still people in Poland who long for communism, long for that period. And its because capitalism is difficult. You need to get to work, you need to learn something. I remember life in the 70's and 80's in Poland and I remember that people were perfectly happy, even though there was nothing in the shops & some products were not available, people were in a way one big community. There weren't big differences in the society, everybody had almost the same. Of course there were tiny group of privileged guys connected to the Communist Party, but all the other people were like equal. It really worked this way. And people lived with sport, maybe some Polish TV, films, stuff like that -- they were one community living the same things. It ended quite abruptly, violently I mean, and the new situation was a shock for many people... It's changing now for the better. More & more people have become accepting of the situation, being perfectly benefited after all. But I remember the first 10 years after the transition, it was a great shock. And from a perspective of a metal musician, it changed in a good way. You could travel freely -- no Iron Curtain, no divisions. No borders in Europe, you know. I can go shopping in Germany. Nobody would've guessed this 20 years ago.”

“When all is said and done, what is the message of HATE?”

“HATE is a symbolic name -- it means reaction, lets say opposition, against all

captivating systems that suppress human powers. Religion is the first thing that comes to mind, but also politics, civilization. So it means freedom from all this, all this shit, and what we do is try to get across a message that is full of metaphors. It's not so obvious -- the lyrics are metaphors on the condition of the human in general. It's not based on any mythology anymore. Even though we use the word Erebus from Greek mythology, it's just a metaphor. Erebus here means the evil side of human being, these evil aspects that exist in each of us. What is important is to make this chaos, this evil part, be beneficial -- make it work for you, make the most of it in a creative way because it's a great power. If it works for you, you can do anything. It's not about killing people. It's rather about being, I wouldn't like to say 'superhuman' because that has some connotations, but to become a better personality. Become a person that can realize his or her goals in life. And at the same time be free, totally free in mind."

"You've been all over Europe playing with all sorts of these hardcore Satanic bands, these guys into mysticism & the occult. In your opinion, who are the 'real deal' living this stuff 100% all the time? Who are the total freaks?"

"You know, there are different ways of perceiving this magical side... We've been touring with lots of bands -- Norwegian bands like Carpathian Forest, we've had meetings with Gorgoroth. Played that famous show actually -- we supported them while recording our DVD *Litanies of Satan*. We've had lots of experiences with other bands you may call 'satanic' or 'magical', using this ideology... We lead quite normal lives & this is the way that keeps us sane. But those guys, for example, those black metal crazy bands from Norway, were living in chaos in their normal lives. What we saw touring with them was really strange because they were up to everything, absolutely, you know. Those guys seem to be completely lost. And this is the way they 'worship Satan,' they say this, at least, you know, by being in chaos all the time -- by destroying themselves also, if necessary. So there are very different perceptions of what Satanism is, what magic is; how to open to it, how to use it. It's a long story, simply... If you ask other bands this question as you're asking me, you will see how different it is. The band Shining for example, you know Mayhem -- all those bands are completely different from bands like us..."

* * *

Some time later, and Abigail Williams is deep into their set -- an atmospheric, melodic blackened doom saturated in an armada of sonic-warping guitar pedals. They are blistering, titanic...

The guys in Melechesh are hanging in the back, looking onward, All night they've been like these mysterious shadow people, silently floating the venue & emanating this intense, secret vibe. It sounds corny, but I can only think of ancient Pharaoh's -- the ones with the lotus flower vials around their necks filled with raw DMT... The Melechesh people are their own mystery, & though I'd like to chat with them, they are obviously in their own world & getting ready to hammer the audience. Besides, they are in the first book, & if you want to read about them you know where to look...

I sneak out the back door, bypassing security, and make it to Hohenstein from Lecherous Nocturne. We smoke a little grass hidden between the tour busses & banter the usual. This is their first national tour, the making of their *Myth Manifest* (as the new record is entitled). They hail from South Carolina & like most American bands, Lecherous Nocturne exudes the

prevailing attitude amongst my fellow countrymen – do or die & DIY: *“[The band message] is question everything, reject everything that’s fed to you, be it religion or politics – anything that’s being shoved down your throats. Totally reject it -- & not only that but lash out against it, rant about it...”*

Hohenstein raps the usual formalities then gives a great soliloquy regarding their recent Detroit excursion: *“A few nights ago in Detroit, we stopped at a gas station -- my guitar player & I, we went down a block to get pizza -- the guy ran & locked the door. So we saw a McDonalds across the street & walked through the drive thru. Two minutes later 3 cops swarmed in, got out – ‘The dominos guy said you guys were jerking on the door, trying to get in.’ We’re like, ‘No dude, we didn’t even get 20 foot to the door.’ So they’re like, ‘Oh, you guys in a band?’ One of the guys was an ex-NARC & a metalhead with all sorts of tattoos. So he told his cop buddies to give us a ride to the store where our van was parked. We were in the back of the squad car, so he pulled in & blocked the van off like he was gonna fucking bust us & shit. The guy got out and said, ‘You know these guys? It’s gonna cost you \$500 to get them out the back of the car!’ Then he busted out laughing, got a cd and...”*

* * * * *

We alone now? Ok, ok... Just one second, before you wander off...

If you are just now stepping into the maelstrom, then this book probably won’t make much sense. If you are oblivious to the underground, then nothing will make sense. Which is fine, quite frankly, because “FORTRESS EUROPE” disregards such courtesy.

Foreshadowing is overdone & retreads are a drag, but it’s important to comprehend that this book is a sequel... Some time ago, I was desperately unhappy. 25 years of Detroit had become enough. One night, not thinking the matter over too clearly, I dispatched a press release declaring a “living book” entitled “THE BIG SHINY PRISON.” I threw everything in a bag & hopped a Greyhound for California, determined to make my way through every territory possible -- to cover all aspects of the American Underground & regurgitate the journey through my own twisted aesthetics...

293 days, 30,000 miles, 35 states, 2 national tours, 50 hours of interviews & 606+ hours on Greyhounds later, I somehow completed this objective... It took another 8 months to finish the manuscript, and another year of rejection before I dropped it online as a Free PDF. The biggest news services in the underground then picked it up, RSS Feeds shot all over the planet & the download count just kept going & going... and the emails kept coming, the mad offers & karmic craziness – the resonance has been continual...

So here we are again -- *one man, one vision, no budget* -- ready to lunge headfirst into an array of dicey situations, bad noise, street freaks & total uncertainty...

Whereas “THE BIG SHINY PRISON” set out to educate & illuminate, “FORTRESS EUROPE”

is for the real trolls. It is therefore expected that the reader already possesses a considerable knowledge (*or basic understanding*) of the slang & tribes of the counterculture.

Secondly, "FORTRESS EUROPE" is a book of action. Unlike its predecessor which shot deep into personal narrative, philosophy, sociology, politics, etc – I'm generally going to keep my big mouth shut & let it flow. Everything major I wanted to say about America & the underground at large I already did – & *what's the point of forced rhetoric anyway?*

One month left & the confirmations are in. Just a waiting game until Deutschland, Belgium, Netherlands, UK, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Italy, Denmark, Slovenia + Czech...

...& black coffee, moonshine, what have you, w/ Gorgoroth, Finntroll, Korpiklaani, Discharge, Bethlehem, Agathocles, Deinonychus, MORTIIS, Stahlhammer, Beherit, ANTAEUS, Horna, Master, Pigsty, Corpus Christii, Battlelore, Funeral Winds, Enochian Crescent, Ingurgitating Oblivion, Squash Bowels, Deranged, Primordial, ANATA & Wolfbrigade,...

...the only trouble left is actually getting to them...

-Dr. Ryan Bartek 4.30.11

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"FORTRESS EUROPE" is the third book by Ryan Bartek, preceded by "THE BIG SHINY PRISON" & his debut anthology "THE SILENT BURNING." The author has been published in a host of magazines/newspapers including Metal Maniacs, PIT Magazine, HAILS & HORNS, among others.

Bartek is a veteran guitarist of metal/punk bands including SASQUATCH AGNOSTIC & A.K.A. MABUS. The author performs spoken word (*as Ryan Bartek*) & tours under the acoustic/anti-folk alias JACK CASSADY.

Having glimpsed the future & again been cast into the hopeless, futile purgatory that is The United States, the author is seeking every available avenue towards citizenship, residency, or legitimate working visa to any country in the European Union. If anyone can assist, contact Bartek (via) bigshinyprison@gmail.com

Download the author's entire music discography & book collection 100% FREE @
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