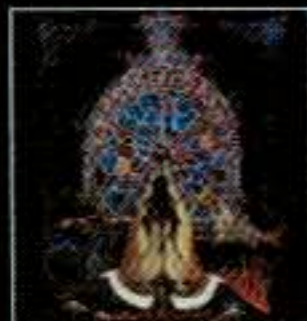


AURAL ASSAULTS

REISSUE ROW

Blessed Death Kill Or Be Killed Metal Mind



My first and only live experience with New Jersey's Blessed Death happened some 20 years ago at one of the monthly metal festivals that used to be held in Toronto at the old Masonic Temple. This is my story (the details of which may be sketchy and altered in a haze of whatever I've been doing the past 20 years): Blessed Death played melodic thrash. Their singer could hit notes in the stratosphere and a couple of them had a big and burly, but friendly, biker image going for them. I think it was cold and snowy outside. I believe Death Angel was headlining. A buddy and I were standing up at one of the far ends of the balcony that surrounded the stage in a sort of three-sided square shape. This was the area from which many quasi-suicidal metal dudes would dive into the crowd below when they felt the heat of inspiration. From our vantage point, where the stage pushed out a few feet from the back wall of the balcony above, my acquaintance and I were essentially parallel with the backline of amps and where the drummer was stationed. Blessed Death played a rocking set and were climaxing with a hail of strummed noise, feedback, arms raised to the metal gods and all that, when someone scurried behind the amps and pulled out a Rickenbacker, which I could see had no pickups and it's back hollowed out. Said individual begins to smash it to bits to the approving roar of Toronto's metal community. In hindsight, this story appears to have a few holes in it (but at the same time, I've seen more than a few bands pull the old, "I'm smashing my guitar in an uncontrollable rage and love of metal," when it's actually a piece of shit that's been sitting in someone's basement next to the furnace for three years), but that's how I recall the events of that evening.

Either way, the Metal Mind reissue factory keeps chugging along, snagging the rights to albums long out of print, forgotten classics or, as in the case of Blessed Death, albums/bands that were lacking in the profile that was commensurate with their ability. They may not have been on par with Testament, Kreator and Slayer, as the liner notes claim, but a decent band they were. *Kill Or Be Killed*, originally released in 1985, was a raw and aggressive slice of how metal was played by the exuberant youth of the day. The sound exemplifies the '80s production style: Huge kick drums, warm bass, skin-shredding guitars and prominent vocals. Mixed and mashed into *Kill Or Be Killed* was technical thrash that had the band playing like a well-oiled machine, stopping and starting on killer riffs with unbelievable precision. Also comprising their sound was a healthy nod to the driving influence of Motörhead and Venom. On top of that were the shredding leads of Nick Fiorentino and Larry Portelli's obvious attempts at matching King Diamond's range. Check out "Melt Down" and especially "Omen Of Fate" to see how ridiculously high into the clouds his pipes could reach and check this out for an idea of all the awesome metal that was brewing underneath the big names. Then, get pissed at all the shitty record companies from way back when that would sign bands before realizing they were at a loss as to what to do once the albums were actually recorded.

A couple of amusing side notes: Blessed Death was probably the only band to feature identical twins (drummer Chris and bassist Kevin Powelson) and the song "Omen Of Fate" chronicles the events surrounding the band getting into a car crash and how a copy of Mercyful Fate's *Don't Break The Oath* wouldn't stop playing on the tape deck, even after the car had apparently had its ignition turned off and battery disabled. Looks like there may be more than one of us who might need the facts of a Blessed Death-related incident double-checked. [www.blesseddeath.com] — Kevin Stewart-Panko

Bongzilla Stash & Methods For Attaining Extreme Altitudes Relapse



If you're ever hanging out with somebody and they say something along the lines of, "I don't like Bongzilla," you pretty much know right then and there that, no matter what other good this person has brought to the world — I don't care how many homeless people they've made sandwiches for — their head is up their ass. All sense of impartiality aside, Bongzilla flat out rule. If you can't get into endless riff repetition, lazy songwriting, cottonmouth scream vocals and pure audio crust, you and I have nothing further to say to each other.

Stash & Methods, as the name suggests, combines the first Relapse EP (*Methods*) and the first Relapse full-length (*Stash*) into one collection that presents Bongzilla in their most rudimentary form — you know, before they got all refined and shit. Yeah right.

All that early-to-mid-'90s southern-style stoner molasses metal culminated with Bongzilla, and what a vicious, hateful end to the century they were. After a couple splits with the likes of Meatjack and Cavity, they issued *Hemp For Victory*, laying the groundwork for a decade to come of marijuana advocacy in its most brutal form. Their sound is sandpaper for the ears, and their focus, stoned as it is, is unwavering. These guys worship The Riff and The Leaf, everything else is inconsequential.

If you missed these records the first time around and picked up Bongzilla (as I did, I can admit it) with *Apogee* in 2001, you'll be amazed that *Stash* is made up of a staggering nine songs! To date, they've yet to hit that number again, and if the songs are shorter, they're even more basic, but barebones though they may be, they lack absolutely none of that trademark Bongzilla charm. [www.myspace.com/bongzilla420] — JJ Koczan

Ratos de Porão Brasil Anarkophobia Just Another Crime In Massacreland Feijoada Acidente? - International Metal Mind/Roadrunner



Let's face it, if it weren't for Sepultura breaking in North America with *Beneath The Remains*, and to a much lesser extent, *Schizophrenia*, how many of us would have ever heard of Ratos de Porão? I know the first time I ever heard the name was via the Roadrunner/Sepultura connection, after Roadrunner signed them looking for further successes from South America. That's where the following totally irrelevant, but funny, sad and true story comes in: I used to do a 'zine with a former friend/partner. When Sepultura first toured North America and played Toronto on the *Beneath The Remains* tour, we were granted an in-person interview with Max Cavalera. We were escorted onto the band's tour bus where we sat, stoked, across from the frontman, who was also quite stoked to be answering questions from the Canadian "press" in his then-heavily-accented Portuguese. After the official line of questions were completed, we chatted: About his life in Brazil versus our life in Canada and his impressions of North America (also how he was dealing with the cold). He even whipped out a huge mock up of some prospective artwork for future Sepultura merch usage. My former partner, who on the best of days could be considered a dick and a complete fuckwad every other day, suddenly went into a bipolar rant about Sepultura not bringing RDP to North America to open for them. Max was taken aback by the accusations and claims that Sepultura were sell-outs, label lackeys and blah, blah, blah. Needless to say things got very uncomfortable very quickly, especially for the dude who didn't really speak English, and things dissolved pretty quickly, including my partnership with this guy. Later, in the venue, Max approached me to ask where the lavatory was and express to me in broken English, "your friend... he's kind of... fucked?"

Had Sepultura not "sold out," RDP would have been touring these parts on the heels of *Brasil*, their first international release in 1989 and fourth full-length. The album, and the three subsequent Roadrunner releases have been reissued by (wait for it) Metal Mind. *Brasil* is possibly the band at their most ferocious and diverse — they take the crossover template, speed it up, slow it down, add epic orchestration and an environ-politico message, all in the course of the first song, "Amazonia Never More." They do likewise on subsequent tunes, sounding like D.R.I. crossed with Poison Idea and early Nuclear Assault with a few comedic touches (the turntable bit in "AIDS, Pop Repression," the handclaps in "Traitor" and the semi-serious sentiment of "Drink 'Til You Die") taking the edge of an album that pointedly discusses topics like vivisection, the folly of war, police brutality, corruption, drug abuse and general poor outlooks for the future. Spot the Municipal Waste comparisons! Three bonus tracks, recorded live in Brazil in '92, round out the disc.

Anarkophobia followed a year after *Brasil* and is a far thrashier proposition than its predecessor, reflecting the band's time spent recording and touring in Europe. In fact, lead track "Counting The Dead" could have come from any Exodus album of the time and the rest of the record is resplendent in skank beats, gang-vox, Bay Area galloping, rapid-fire riffs and fluid, screaming solos. Not to mention the fact that the songs are usually twice as long as any of those on *Brasil*. Bonuses include live tracks from '92 and 2000.

1993's *Just Another Crime In Massacreland* saw the band go through some lineup turmoil with the resulting sound lying somewhere between the two previous albums. You can hear the thrash influenced guitars restrained by a more punk drumming style. You can also hear the lack of focus and complete absence of stand-out tunes. Three demo tracks comprise the bonus section.

Feijoada Acidente? - International is one-half of a covers collection. Here, the band covered bands that were influential to their development. They did two versions — one of bands from their homeland, which only ever came out in Brazil, and this version which originally came out in 1995 and consists of covers of American, Scandinavian, UK and European punk and hardcore bands with three tracks from the Brazilian version tacked on as a bonus. Included are killer renditions of tunes from Radio Birdman, Minor Threat, Poison Idea, Rezillos, GBH, Shitlickers, Anti-Cimex and Rattus making for a good disc to throw on when your buddies are over and the beer is flowing. [www.ratos.com.br] — Kevin Stewart-Panko