DESCENT MAGAZINE
(1994-1999)

Notes on the issues in reverse chronological order

by Stephen O'Malley

DESCENT MAGAZINE was a fanzine published between 1994-1999 by Stephen O'Malley, many issues were in collaboration with Tyler Davis (The Ajna Offensive). In total five volumes were produced over that period.

V

The Death Issue. Fifth, and final, issue of DESCENT MAGAZINE (fanzine), originally published in 1999 with the collaboration between Stephen O'Malley and Tyler Davis, with contributions from Spider, Runhild Gammelsæter, Alexandre Heine, Kadmon, JC Smith, Taint and Markus Wolff.

Penultimate and ultimately mercurial form of this project. Smaller square/widescreen spread format, spot colors on cover… decent layout. The magazine continues to focus on the black metal but heavily walks amongst the "esoteric & obscure microcosm transmissions" as stated on the cover.

Interviews with: Angelcorpse, Blood Axis, Bethlehem, Brocas Helm, Coil, Control Resistance, Darkthrone, Der Blutharsch, Destroyer 666, Dream Into Dust, Enslaved, Ernte, Eyehategod, Genocide Organ, Stephen Kasner, Marduk, Mayhem, Orplid, Pentacle, Psywarfare, Boyd Rice, Tiermes, Turbund Stermwerk, Valefor… and hundreds of bitter and hateful reviews. The ultimate coup and probably the grail interview for Tyler and I was the SLEEP feature. We still worship at the altar of this band... more to say than many of the others featured. There was a time, once upon a time.

The magazine was properly printed offset. 1000 copies were produced. Aesthetically and atmospherically very influenced by the LOKI Foundation and TESCO Organization labels, looking in retrospect.

When I look at this well worn scan I am proud and consider that the project was completed in a noble way, and a great result of the strong collaboration between Tyler and myself. I decided to kill the magazine (and stop writing about music in other publications) to remove the literal criticism of music from my life, and in order to find my own way musically… and to try to make a life properly in NYC.

The project of significance immediately following this was KHANATE. SUNN O))) had primordially started between issue IV and V. Tyler focused strongly on AJNA and the growth was immediate and important for us both in all respects, if difficult.

IV

The personal frame around the publication of this cannot be understated.
In retrospect it was the most transitional period of my life to that point.
And the first of several such angular transitions which have structured my personal and creative life since.

1) Moved to UK (leaving Seattle for the first time, breaking up BURNING WITCH [yeah, that's the real reason], leaving friends and family for the possibilities... of what I cannot recall.)
2) First "art director job", at Misanthropy Records (thanks and apologies to Tiziana Stupia for that opportunity). How this managed to continue/spiral into the opportunities and careers since is one of the mysteries of my life.
3) First European travels. Meeting many people/correspondents for the first time. The fantasy fueling the interest in black metal begins to evaporate. Quickly.

In some ways, looking at this issue again now, the tremendous flaws are blatant. The flame was beginning to be extinguished by the winds of life. Those painted with negativity and bitterness in our reaction to the hundreds of music submissions of the third issue were simply left out of this one (see reviews introduction). I'm surprised of the amount of reviews which still managed to escape that cut, and the negativity which followed. A flood of desperation in the music.

Tyler and I were no longer collaborating on the construction in a room together. So the paths forward around the magazine started to change, became more individualized. This belies the tremendous amount of time, energy and effort which was put into the creation of this issue however. Tyler did an incredible amount of work, and was more or less navigating the vehicle on this one, I was simply the pilot.

Personally, the passion certainly had certainly begun to wane for the music we covered, although paradoxically we had some of the best features, and certainly moments inside (ABRUPTUM rorschach test may be the highlight of the entire series in some ways, AIN SOPH, Attila Csihar, many difficult to arrange interviews). The magazine's popularity was just over it's crest (third issue), we printed 1000 copies but this is the issue you would probably be able to find, physically, the easiest, now. Perhaps it reflected the underground current we were on in a whole?

Burroughs died that year. IntraDESCENT Sabbath worship was as high as ever.

Tyler and I were trying to do something more, yet the autodidactic approach to design and publishing smothered it's potential. It's ambition wasn't met, this was the evidence. I personally wasn't educated in these matters, unprepared. Yet there is a striving for aesthetic principle, albeit without guidance or strong direction. The possibilities after this issue would either be ballooning it into a business enterprise (a discussion... yet we were also uneducated in business beyond black market mailorder), continue dumping money in a hole of a hobby, or to try and move to a creative piece... which I think is how we settled on the fifth issue.

And then it ended.

Perhaps the most telling element is the Serrano image used on the cover, 10 years after it's creation. There was a fuss around an exhibition somewhere of that piece in 1997, and it's notice fell into our lap. Contemporary art was now entering into the perspective (easily appealing through this piece). It began to bring much more possible perspectives ... at least to me. We also sprung for spot metallic color, a design move which has cursed many of my clients in the 15 years since.

Interviews with Abruptum, Aeturnus, Ain Soph, Allegory Chapel Ltd., Atrax Morgue, Beyond Dawn, Trevor Brown, Con-Dom, Attila Csihar, Darkstyle, Dødheimsgard, Gorgoroth, Grey Wolves, KDNR, Laibach, The Moon Lay Hidden Beneath A Cloud, Opeth, Pan.Thy.Monium, Pazuzu, Plecid, Sshe Retina Stimulants, Sutcliffe Jugend, Waldteufel, Label Spotlight: Old Europa Café, Malicious Records, L.O.K.I. Foundation, Tesco.

III

Third issue of DESCENT MAGAZINE (fanzine), originally published in 1996 with the collaboration between Stephen O'Malley and Tyler Davis, and with contributions by Runhild Gammelsæter, Bard "Faust" Eithun and others.

Magazine continues to focus primarily on the black metal being released at the time, although with issue editorial began branching out to noise, post-industrial, World Serpent, ambient and even music-related visual art.

Interviews with: Blood Axis, Monumentum, Cradle of Filth, Emperor, Brighter Death Now, Satyricon, Ved Buens Ende, Death In June, Dissection, Allerseelen, Sol Invictus, Gehenna (NOR), MZ.412, Coven, Evoken, Smell & Quim, Trial of The Bow (ex-DISEMBOWELMENT), Kari Rueslatten, Taint, Tor Lundsvall, ATWA (Charles Manson, Lynette Fromme & Sandra Good), plus hundreds of slanderous and praise-filled reviews.

Layout hugely inspired by Roger Karmanik / Cold Meat Industry design of the time, albeit with a naïve touch of junior typography and hard to read in many places. 1500 copies of this "tome" were printed.

II

Second issue of DESCENT MAGAZINE (fanzine), originally published in 1995 with the collaboration between Stephen O'Malley and Runhild Gammelsæter, Tyler Davis, Antoinette Flynn, Nebel and Tania Steine.

Magazine continues to focus primarily on the black metal being released at the time, specifically the Norwegian and Greek scenes, with occasional forays into black metal related ambient music (an article titles "Ritual.Ambient.Sound") and feature with the Black Metal related artist (at the time) Tania Steine, also a member of Aghast. The highlight in this issue was a huge interview with the legendary Quorthon of Bathory done by fax around the time of the "Blood on Ice" album.

Interviews with: Bathory, Darkthrone, Enslaved, Ulver, Thorns, Abigail, Mystifier, Thou Art Lord, Primordial, Sabbat, Satyricon, Fleurety, Typhon, Hades, Unpure, Metalion (of Slayer Magazine), Necromantia, Mortiis, Equimanthorn, Darkness Enshroud, Aghast. Additionally, included scores of enthusiastic album and demo reviews.

Layout and design was an improvement to the debut issue, although still quite a naïve experiment with QuarkXpress by a beginner to junior level designer. The magazine was web printed on newsprint, the cheapest option available, using paper plates. 1000 copies were printed.

I

The debut issue of DESCENT MAGAZINE, created in 1993 and published May 1994.

Interviews with Burzum, Emperor, Accursed, Beyond Dawn, Solemn, In The Woods…, Necrophobic, Sigh, Bestial Warlust, Manes, Savior, Mangled, Nagual Mag., Immolation, an article on Gorgoroth, article on heathenism in classical music, USA black metal scene, and many reviews.

A handmade/computer generated layout shows the determination to get these ideas onto paper, and is a classic format of the time which we have all but lost.

Coming from the enthusiastic and obsessive mind of a 19 year old metalhead, who'd spent his years in the north Seattle suburbs reflective the ...all considering... incredible the amount off access that the underground offered back then. This opened my geocultural viewpoint and led to many paths, in it's own way, including nearly 20 years of art direction work. The issue originally had interviews penned with EARTH, MORBID ANGEL, CATHEDRAL and others but were all abandoned as the black metal influence overwhelmingly diseased my open curiosity of the time. Only print is real.