



Brother Bartholomew's Best Album of 2009:

Winner: Fen – The Malediction Fields

Runner-Up: Maudlin of the Well – Part the Second

Above all, I am a proghead. Believe it or not, in certain circles, I am known as the Duke of Prog. Some of my favorite bands include: early-Genesis, Yes, King Crimson, Premiata Fornieria Marconi, and other 70's era prog pioneers. So why, over all of the progressive rock albums released in 2009, would I choose a post-black metal album as my favorite? Because this album is not only proggy, but also more emotional and epic than anything I've heard this year.

In my mind, a key component to great music is the degree in which the sound creates a 'vibe' for the listener. By 'vibe', I mean the manner in which the music conveys a visual picture and a physical sensation manifested entirely through the atmosphere. Where the artist intentionally seeks to take the listener on a mental journey; an album that exemplifies this is *Perdition City* by Ulver. With *The Malediction Fields*, Fen produces a vibe of ancient myths, rain-swept fields, and eternal solitude that absorbed me entirely. The emotional opener, "The Exile's Journey" establishes a sense of sadness that pervades the

album, allowing the listener to adopt a feeling of detachment and consequently enabling the descent into Fen's dark soundscapes. "A Witness to the Passing of Aeons", the following track, introduces the concept of seeking the forgotten gods that rule this storm-laden world, thus beginning the voyage that encompasses the remaining tracks in the album.

As the journey progresses and the listener gets closer to the confrontation with the gods, the album gets increasingly better. "Colossal Voids" starts this trend with beautiful, synth-soaked ambience spliced with brutal moments, perfectly capturing the forlorn journey. After the enjoyable, "As Buried Spirits Stir", Fen unleashes the final three and best tracks on the album. "The Warren" is a building, primarily instrumental song that climaxes into one of the most epic explosions I've heard. In "Lashed by Storm", the vibe of a maelstrom enveloping the exile as he struggles to reach the gods is physically felt; this is one of my favorites off of the album. Finally, "Bereft" concludes the album with a sense of godlessness that adequately concludes the journey on a melancholic yet up-lifting resolution.

All in all, *The Malediction Fields* by Fen is my top album of 2009 because of its immense and emotional vibe. The images of rain-soaked plains, the sensation of ancient sorrow, and the metaphorical expression of spiritual revelation through nature are impeccable and vast. With heavy use of synths, ethereal guitars, and a powerful rawness, Fen has managed to create a glorious and captivating journey through the twisted forest of existence.

- Aaron

Brewtality: As Black As Black Metal



Ahh Beer, the perfect side dish to metal and what a better place to talk about beer than the University of Wisconsin. We definitely take pride in our beer and we drink A LOT of it. The problem is most of the beer we drink usually consists of shitty Keystone or Milwaukee's "Best." By the way, if anybody can explain to me why it's even called Milwaukee's Best, feel free to email me. Anyways, I'm here to show you that it's actually worth spending that little extra money to buy yourself something worthwhile to drink that doesn't leave you cringing with bad taste.

Guinness 250



Now, I like my beer like I like my metal: nice and black and you can't get much darker than the Irish staple that is Guinness. 2009 marks the 250th Anniversary of Guinness and to celebrate this very special occasion they offered an anniversary beer simply named Guinness 250. Unfortunately they only offered it during the past summer of 09'. As soon as I heard about this limited edition Guinness, I knew I had to get my hands on some.



When I picked up a glass of Guinness 250 it glowed with a very deep red tone, almost black, which was very similar to its Guinness Draught brethren. The head consisted of Carbon dioxide, instead of the normal Nitrogen within Guinness Draught, giving it a lighter feel and taste. When I took a sip I was overwhelmed with a sweet, malty taste with many chocolate and coffee undertones. The aftertaste was delightfully sweet with no traces of that left-over alcoholic bitterness taste you usually get from beer. I could also taste trace amounts of hops which gave the beer a nice finished earthy texture. In comparison, Guinness 250 was lighter (only 5% alc. by vol.) and sweeter than Guinness draught making it quite unique. If you haven't tried this beer you really missed out. Luckily there's another way to gain that little extra malty flavor in your Guinness:

I introduce to you the Irish Black and Tan: one part Smithwicks, one part Guinness draught. To make it all you need to do is fill your glass half-way with Smithwicks Irish Ale. Then you slowly pour the Guinness Draught over an upside spoon over your glass after scooping out any initial foam. Try it once and it will blow your mind, and you'll impress your friends!! Its ultra malty and you can't even taste the alcohol. On top of that it goes down very smooth.



Email me with comments/questions and any beer you want me to review.

-John Garsombke (garsombke@wisc.edu)