

society has created an atmosphere where all moral and ethical limits have been destroyed. Now that things have gone so far that it has produced Black Metal, it is time to draw some lines. The other has been that Black Metal is the result of all other symbols of rebellion having been used up. Almost every form of shocking behavior will only make your parents say, "Well, we did that when we were young too." So, to get a shock effect, you have to go much further in your symbolism. Personally, I think these explanations are a bit simplistic.

A LOT OF THIS HAS FUNCTIONED ON A MYTHOLOGICAL LEVEL, AS WELL.

I think Vikernes is interesting in that he has been able to create a myth around himself, a myth that has made other people try to emulate his actions. I don't think he is very interesting as a person.

HE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SET HIMSELF UP AS A SYMBOL FOR SOMETHING THAT IS FAR GREATER THAN HIMSELF, AND ALMOST EVERYTHING THAT NORWEGIAN SOCIETY FINDS ABHORRENT: SATANISM, RACISM, NAZISM, MURDER, BURNING SACRED OBJECTS, ETC.

I am of the opinion that most people see Vikernes as a rather pathetic figure—someone with delusions of grandeur who is only able to function within this self-created image.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Kjetil Wiedswang is a Norwegian journalist who is also very skeptical of the way the media handled the Satanic hysteria that was imported to Norway in the early 1990s. He also argues that sensationalist media coverage conceivably made Satanism look glamorous and far more important than it really was, thereby attracting people to it:

There is obviously an interaction between the media and people who do things. This is especially clear in the case of terrorism. In many cases the whole point of the terrorist act is to get media coverage—if nobody wrote about it, there wouldn't be a point in doing it.

It is hard to prove that people were attracted to the Black Metal scene because of Satanic scare headlines, especially so because the models for how people are affected by the media get more and more complicated each time they are revised. One no longer believes that people automatically emulate whatever they see in movies and read in books, but still, the idea that media has some level of influence over people seems reasonable.

Wiedswang realizes the dilemma inherent to news coverage of sensational activities, especially those which are based on mere hearsay. As he explains:

Journalists cannot be forced to always take into account the consequences of their stories when they write, because the alternative to an unrestricted press—censorship—would be much worse. The problem with the Satanism coverage in the '90s wasn't that the newspapers were writing about it, it was the way they were writing about it. They should have had a much better guard against urban legends slipping into their material, especially since the big Satanic scares in England and the U.S. were so recent.

As a journalist, you can never really know, and this was the case with the Satanic stories too. People do a lot of weird things. But the stories, and the way they were presented, should've smacked too much of the story of the "Evil Brotherhood" for a good journalist. The myth of the outwardly respectable, even upstanding, citizens that go out at night to do terrible things to children has been around for thousands of years and has been levelled at Christians, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, heretics, Freemasons, and lots of other groups. It was then recycled by horror writers, who fictionalized the material. It now seems to be influencing reality again. One account of "ritual abuse" I have read seems to have been lifted directly from *Rosemary's Baby*, one of the great horror classics.

Another issue is that people who present these kind of "victim" stories maybe should be protected from themselves. One such story that was printed concerned a woman, an obvious mental case, who described having had a forced abortion in Oslo in the '60s. The atrocity took place in an open back yard centrally located in Oslo, as she was surrounded by men in black robes. But when people started checking the date, it turned out that this coincided with a bombing spree in which a mysterious bomber left grenades with tripwires in public places. As a result, the city was in a state of panic, with everyone looking out for suspicious activity. So it doesn't seem very credible.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BÅRD ERTHUN

HOW SERIOUS WAS THE SATANISM FOR YOU?

For a few people it was bloody serious, but to a lot of them it was all a big hype. I had been interested in Satanism but there are other things as well. Basically, I don't give a shit.

DIDN'T YOU TRY TO CONTACT THE O.T.O.?

Yes, that's true. I contacted them once, just to check out what it was. But I doubt it was anything for me. They are beyond this good/evil shit, I like that, but it becomes a little too obscure for me.

SIMEN MIDGAARD HAS A THEORY THAT SENSATIONALISTIC NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ABOUT THE O.T.O. INFLUENCED THE BLACK METAL SCENE.

That might be true. I remember in the late '80s there was much writing about this in the Norwegian newspapers, about secret cults and sacrifices. I thought that

people might have been influenced by this, because it creates a very mysterious atmosphere and people want to be the ones who the papers are writing about.

THE *KERRANG!* ARTICLE DID THE SAME THING.

After this issue was released the other guys got really enthusiastic about it, because it meant that we got a lot of attention.

IT SEEMS TO ME *KERRANG!* CREATED A LOT OF THE PROBLEM, WITH KIDS IN ENGLAND BEING INSPIRED TO COMMIT CRIMES AFTER THAT FIRST ARTICLE.

That's true. Actually this happened in Norway as well, because after our arrests, and the media mentioning this, we saw there were many kids attracted to the scene. Most of the churches that are burned today are done by kids who got into it after our arrests. You could say that the media is making all this so big.

HOW CONNECTED DO YOU STILL FEEL TO EVERYTHING?

I'm part of the underground scene which existed when I was free. I'm not part of the one that exists now.



In the end of October, 1997, Willy Kobbhaug was charged with exposing himself to a 15-year-old, and therefore underage, neighboring girl. He had been standing in his own garden while the girl's parents videotaped what was going on. The 52-year-old Kobbhaug confessed to the affair, and was suspended from his position. Ironically, Kobbhaug lives in Kløfta, the same town where Bård "Faust" is incarcerated.

In the years that passed since the Satanic scare in the media, Kobbhaug had built up a considerable reputation as an expert on sexual abuse, both in Norway and abroad. In a strange twist, the police confiscated around ten firearms in a closet in his house. These guns could be linked to criminal activities; one was stolen in Oslo, and another was stolen from the Kripos headquarters in 1977.

The police claim to be able to document that Kobbhaug exposed himself to the teenage girl on five or six occasions. The documentation is exceptionally good on the last occasion, the act having been captured on videotape. Some debate was sparked when his attorney speculated in the media that it was his work with abused children which may have turned him on to such activities. This caused an outcry from other policemen, who felt that these speculations stigmatized them as well.

Kobbhaug is also charged with a separate case of indecent exposure against another even younger girl in 1995. These cases have triggered a series of assertions

from people in his neighborhood alleging that Kobbhaug exposed himself on other occasions, with some of the incidents dating as far back as twenty years. If that is true, then it is hard to take seriously the explanation that Kobbhaug's behavior was caused by trauma at work since these cases then would predate his involvement in this type of crime.

If convicted, Kobbhaug will probably get off with a moderate fine. But whether Kobbhaug is guilty or not, it seems reasonable to think that he has his own demons to fight against.



THE HIGH PRIEST SPEAKS

In uncovering the expressions of Satanism in Black Metal, evidence reveals two quite distinct viewpoints. Many of those involved have also shifted their outlook over time from one to the other, as they gained insight and maturity. The crude Satanism is found in the caricatures of "Devil worship," black magic, and occultism presented by bands like Venom and Bathory, which is still perpetuated by the lower-brow echelon of music groups and fans. This is the ideology that may have been actively fostered and unwittingly encouraged by the media hysteria about Satanic cults and ritual sacrifices which entered Norwegian headlines in the nascent days of Black Metal.

There is a stark contrast between these views and the comments of musicians like Ihsahn or the members of Ulver. It is possible they may have started out in the "Devil worship" camp, but if so they have progressed far beyond those views. The ideas they express now are quite in line with the "official" Satanic doctrines as promulgated by Anton Szandor LaVey, the notorious founder and High Priest of the Church of Satan, who died in October, 1997.

There have only been a handful of Metal groups with direct ties to LaVey's church over the years (King Diamond being one of the more outspoken), although in recent times this has begun to change. LaVey was himself a musician, specializing in lost or obscure songs of ages past, but he often mentioned a personal distaste for Rock and other modern music in interviews. This might have alienated some musicians—who otherwise exemplify LaVey's philosophy—from any public allegiance with the Church of Satan. In reality, LaVey understood fully why a genre like Black Metal has appeal for youth, though he may not have had much interest in the cacophony of the music itself.

As Ihsahn mentions, members of the Scandinavian Black Metal crowd attacked LaVey's philosophy in the past, although this was more common a few years ago. The standard reason for their dislike of the Church of Satan was its alleged "humanist" values. This seems to have been rooted primarily in ignorance, and a desire to draw attention for themselves as being more extreme than the recognized "official

Satanists." The Black Metalers are also quite mistaken if they believe LaVey is merely a humanist. Even a cursory study of LaVey's actual writings will uncover his unabashed misanthropy and derisive scorn for the follies of humankind.

To understand LaVey's genuine opinions—both regarding his definition of Satanism, as well as his views on music such as Black Metal—we spoke with him directly. The following comments are compiled from interviews done with LaVey and his Secretary/Biographer Blanche Barton in 1994 and 1996. They form a fitting conclusion for our analysis of Satanism, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of Black Metal. LaVey dispels many erroneous notions about Satanism which have arisen in the wake of events in Norway and elsewhere, but by the same token his conclusions and predictions paint an ominous future role for music to pave the way toward a Satanic society.

ANTON SZANDOR LAVEY AND BLANCHE BARTON

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT BLACK METAL AND HOW SOME OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED MAY HAVE MISREPRESENTED SATANISM?

LAVEY: I don't know to what extent they misrepresent Satanism, since I only hear a limited amount of news about them. But as far the philosophy of genuine Satanism is concerned, all I did was write a book that explains it primitively. If someone wants to understand Satanism, they can get the book through a friend, or track a copy down themselves—it's been available for almost thirty years now!—or find a spokesman of the Church of Satan to enlighten them. But really you need the book, it's a primer which codifies contemporary Satanism. Many of the so-called Black Metal "Satanists" appear to me as essentially Christians—they're defining Satanism by Christian standards.

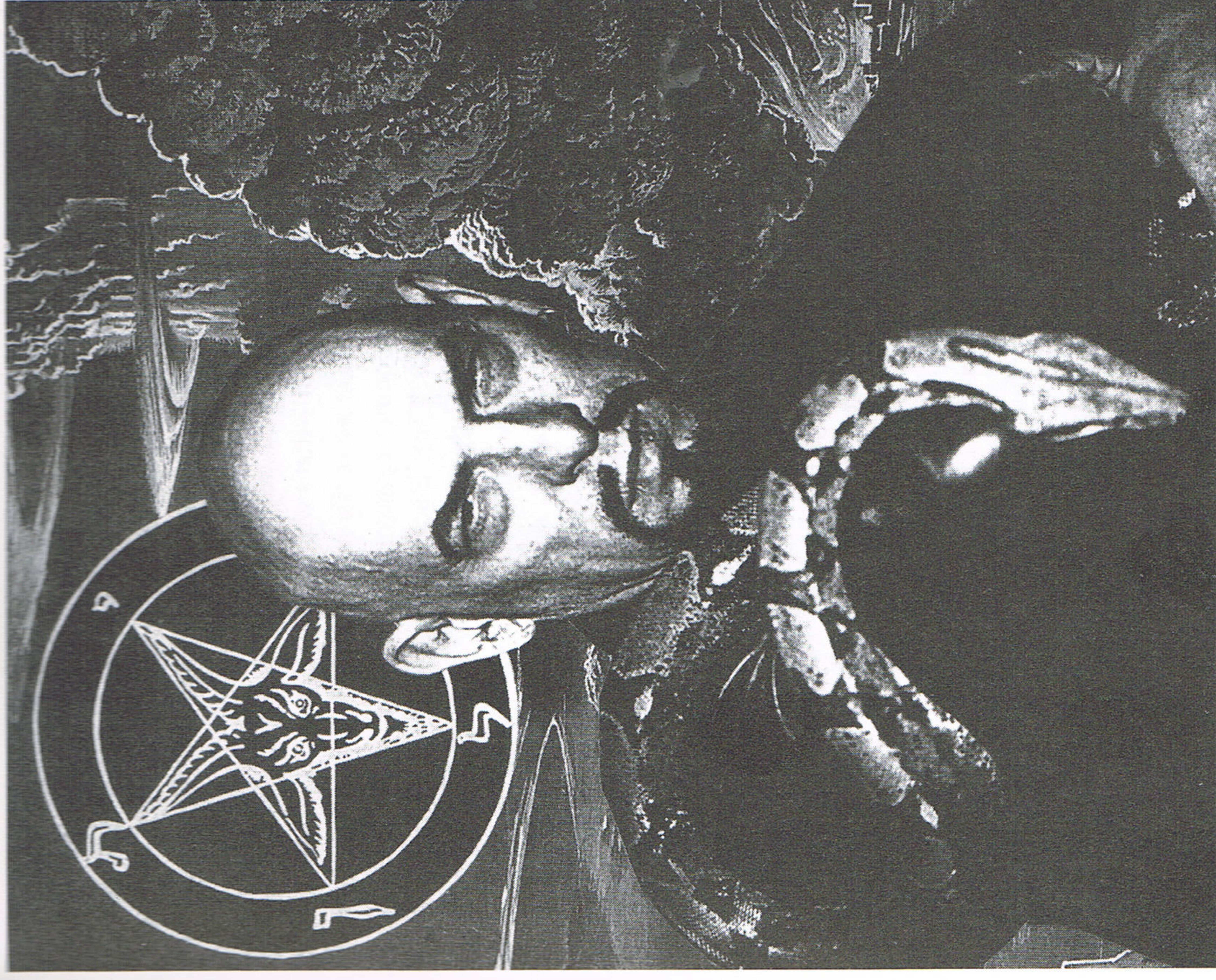
BARTON: They buy into the Christian definition of Satanism which Doctor LaVey smashed in 1966.

LAVEY: That was the first time it had been demonstrated in such a way. A lot of people had tried to give it exposure, as Devil's advocates—writers like Twain and Nietzsche—but none had codified it as a religion, a belief system.

HOW MUCH WAS YOUR INTERPRETATION OF SATANISM INFLUENCED BY THE ZEITGEIST OF THE '60s?

LAVEY: The hippies lit a fire under me, because it was so close at hand, the last straw. Everyone was trying to get me to drop acid and join in. Push came to shove and I decided there had to be an alternative.

They were championing "Jesus Christ Superstar," love and peace, while exalting the lowest classes of humanity. I interpreted it as the last burp, the last days of



COLLAGE OF ANTON LAVEY BY PETER H. GILMORE

Christianity. I didn't do anything consciously, it just developed. But I saw there were enough people out there to marshal it into something that was to become the Church of Satan, and the tracts I was writing at the time evolved into the *Satanic Bible*.

HOW DID YOU FORMULATE THE IDEAS THAT BECAME THE TENETS OF SATANISM?

LAVEY: In the case of the "Nine Satanic Statements," it took me twenty minutes to write them out. I was listening to Chopin being played in the next room

and I was so moved I just wrote them out on a pad of paper lying next to me. The crux of the philosophy of Satanism can be found in the "Satanic Rules of the Earth," "Pentagonal Revisionism," and the "Nine Satanic Sins," of which of course "stupidity" is tantamount, closely followed by "pretentiousness." Often pretentiousness comes in the form of so-called "independent thinkers" that have a knee-jerk reaction to any association with us.

As far as Satanists are concerned, taking the way things are and taking what suits you best and dwelling on it—that's what it is all about. Religion should be about what's most important in your life and recognizing that. For example, today I just wrote something about my favorite cars. Satanism is above all concerned with earthly indulgence. These Black Metal guys want to concentrate on death and destroying themselves—there's nothing self-indulgent about that!

BARTON: For some people Satanism is their life, their fetish, but the real Satanists *use and apply it* to what they enjoy.

LA VÉY: It sounds like there's a lot of stupid people in Norway too, like any country. But the intelligent people are capable of responding if they receive the right information—again, it's all about communication. We get more mail from Russia than ever, now that the Soviet Union is gone. They've been under atheist control for so long and the new religious "freedom" is pushing bullshit they can't swallow. They almost yearn for the good old days of Soviet atheism... like "the South will rise again!"

WOULD YOU CONCEDE THE BLACK METAL CROWD JUST REPRESENT A DIFFERENT BRAND OF SATANISM?

LA VÉY: That's not the way it's intended, but they're entitled to their own opinions. But if they say theirs is the *right* way, then they are acting even more like Christians.

BARTON: You have to keep all this in perspective—there simply was no legitimate, codified form of Satanism before the Church of Satan was formed.

LA VÉY: Generally when one these "self-styled Satanists" actually finds out what the Church of Satan is all about, they change over and ally themselves with us. A lot of them are kids and they like the name Satan just as they might be attracted to a swastika and the colors red and black. The whole thing can be summed up by Occam's Razor. Communication is the key. They simply don't have the proper medium to find out what Satanism is all about.

HAS TELEVISION SENSATIONALISM DONE A LOT TO SPREAD FALSE CONCEPTIONS ABOUT SATANISM?

LA VÉY: Well, if you see one of these tabloid talkshows, they'll have someone on who's screaming about their kids being sacrificed, going on for twenty minutes about it, and one of our people will have forty seconds of airtime to counter that. Now, if a representative of the Church of Satan had just one entire hour on national TV to say what we want to say, Christianity would be finished. But as it is you've got academics on the one hand who dismiss us, and then the hysterics on the other who claim we're taking over everything.

MANY FEAR A STRONG CONNECTION BETWEEN SATANISM AND SOME FORMS OF FASCISM. IS THERE ANY TRUTH TO THIS?

BARTON: It's an unholy alliance. Many different types of such people have made contact with us in the past. The anti-Christian strength of National Socialist Germany is part of the appeal to Satanists—the drama, the lighting, the choreography with which they moved millions of people. However, the Satanic attitude is that people should be judged by their own merit—in every race there are leaders and followers. Satanists are the "Others," who will push the pendulum in the direction it needs to go to reset the balance—depending on circumstances, this could be toward fascism or in the opposite direction. Satanism is a very brutal, realistic way of looking at things sometimes. Let it stand or fall on its own merit as Doctor LaVey wrote it.

LA VÉY: Aesthetics more than anything else are the common ground between Satanism and fascism. The aesthetics of National Socialism and Satanism dovetail.

BARTON: They were aware of pomp, drama, fear...

LA VÉY: The aesthetics of Satanism are those of National Socialism. There's the power of romance and drama. The National Socialists had that drama, coupled with the romance of overcoming such incredible odds. Satan is a standard to fight under, you're flying the colors. I believe in Satanism as colors you're fighting under. *Esprit d'Corps*. Mayakovsky did a beautiful poem about reactions to a Soviet passport—you know you represent something that's feared. There's awe, it's controversial, like the SS experienced when going into a cabaret—everyone shuts up. There's something magical about the concept—frightening evil and taking pride in being that. It's a hard act to follow, in a sense that *calm self-recognition of one's own nature* is the ultimate evil.

BARTON: In every culture there's the Prometheus figure—that's essential in the human spirit. Those who are on the borderlands, the magicians.

LA VÉY: I get gut reactions to the stupid bravado of assholes. It's fear—they're threatened. I realize it's wonderful, that I should upset them that much.

ARE HATRED OR ANGER IMPORTANT EMOTIONS TO A SATANIST?

BARTON: Satanists have the posture of true anger against a god that allows tragedy. We would stand in eternal defiance to such a "god."

LA VEX: I can empathize with Varg Vikernes burning a church down. People's prejudices get the best of them—I'll plead guilty to feeling that way at times. There are a lot of people whose greatest purpose is for target practice—moving targets.

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO BLACK METAL TYPES WHO WOULD ACCUSE YOU OF FORSAKING ANY REAL OCCULTISM OR "BLACK MAGIC" IN YOUR PHILOSOPHY OF SATANISM?

LA VEX: The Church of Satan acknowledges the potential of ritual magic and its practice, but there is also something else besides this. These people obsessed with occultism—who I call "occultniks"—can't conceive of pragmatism being hand-in-hand with magic. We're too practical for people who are looking for "the key." This is where these types are missing the boat. There's no rationalism, no grounding. We are the ones wielding the power—Satan has become ruler of the earth. Our image of Satan demands not worship but skepticism and rational inquiry.

In our personal practice of Satanism, there is no limit to the supernatural you can put into it. You can do anything you want. Some can consider their performance on stage a ritual—a very powerful one—for whatever purpose. I advocate that. An emotionally-charged Rock concert performed by dedicated Satanists is today's rally, ritual, and call to arms.

BARTON: The occultniks want supernaturalism to be their fetish. We certainly believe in elements of the supernatural. We're tapping into these forces everyday.

FROM SOME OF YOUR WRITINGS IT APPEARS THAT YOU'RE NOT TOO FOND OF THE ROCK AND ROLL GENRE. WHY IS THAT?

LA VEX: First you need to tell me what it is. How can someone say, "I don't like Rock and Roll", because *what is it?* It's never been defined. There's so much that's fallen under that general heading, but I guess it then evolved into what we have now, which I've described as being like a linear metronome, i.e., music without *music*. They've just run out of ideas, really.

IS ROCK, AS IT STANDS TODAY, A HOPELESS FORM AS FAR AS YOU'RE CONCERNED?

LA VEX: The biggest point I'm stressing is that kids are being born into a default situation where there are no good alternatives. They don't know about any

other form of music *besides* Rock. All music for young people emanates from that particular culture. But I would say it's not hopeless because it does still have impact to those who don't know about any other form of music.

IN WHAT WAY?

LA VEX: I believe it's really the visuals that are what matters now. Not MTV images but rather the record sleeves. There's a visual identification. Just like if it were Nazi-oriented music and the artwork has a swastika on the jacket, if it's Satanic there's going to be Satanic imagery on the package. And you can clearly see a tendency toward the Satanic, especially within the Heavy Metal genre of Rock. That creates a strong differentiation between something like Black Metal and other Rock music, and it's an alternative for these kids. They're going to opt for the Satanic whether it's the lyrics or the visuals; they want to tap into that option. That's what matters. So kids who don't know anything besides Rock music can still gain strength and motivation from Black Metal, Death Metal, and so forth.

THE CHURCH OF SATAN DOESN'T DISCOURAGE THESE PEOPLE FROM JOINING?

LA VEX: No, not at all. From our correspondence we know there are a lot of people who are stimulated by this kind of music and after that they want to explore Satanism more seriously, as a philosophy.

In a strong sense the enemy, Christianity, has created a Frankenstein monster by drawing so much attention to this music, because the kids will go for the dark stuff every time! There are entire fanzines dedicated to Satanic Black Metal, exclusively. It follows that if the market is moving towards Satanic Rock then you'll have two camps emerging—those who are just stimulated and then those who decide they want to pursue the ideas we're promoting. Just as there are those who will raise the sign of the horns at a Metal concert not knowing why they're doing it, there are many who do it and *understand*...

SOME MUSIC GROUPS HAVE OPENLY ENDORSED THE CHURCH OF SATAN. ARE THEY REACHING AN AUDIENCE THAT'S POTENTIALLY VALUABLE TO YOU?

LA VEX: The majority of their audience are not just numbskulls, and the reason they go for these bands is because they're the *real thing*. There's a whole camp who want that. We hear every day from people who are only devoted to the groups who *practice what they preach*.

BARTON: And these letters are so fervent... they want the music to be more blasphemous, more violent against Christianity, with no compromise and no holding back. You could say the music is almost an updated version of the "Horst

Wessel Lied" for them—it's providing that sort of motivation and focus. So many kids write and say, "I got into Satanism because of this music—it makes me feel powerful."

LA VEX: It's the sound of the world for them. That's their threshold—if they don't go anywhere with it then it's just noise but if they go to the next step... these are their tools. What else do they have to work with? Pride is a part of it too; they don't want to be ostracized from their colleagues.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS THAT MAKE A PIECE OF MUSIC SATANIC?

LA VEX: The key element of Satanic music can be revealed in the question, will it appeal to you on an individual rather than herd basis? It's evocative, emotionally charged. It evokes something which wasn't previously hyped and it's done without forcing the cards. There's no group or collective identity which it merely confers on the listener. It shouldn't be a secondary device to tap into an identity associated with the music. Satanic music stands on its own merit without one knowing who wrote it or where and when it came from. Simplistically speaking, it's the kind of music you can walk away whistling or humming—thematic.

WHY IS THE SATANIC MUSIC YOU'RE DEFINING DANGEROUS?

LA VEX: Because Satanic music will cause introspection and get someone to think, and even worse—to *feel*. The more they think and feel the more dangerous they are to a system dependent on consumerism and mass conformity.

MOST KIDS WOULD PROBABLY TELL YOU THE ONLY SATANIC MUSIC IS HEAVY METAL, OR BLACK METAL.

LA VEX: This is the real horror of it all: they're listening to something akin to a jet blasting off and are motivated by what it *says*, spelled out loud and clear. They're moved by it, and they're truly militant. Now comes the real threat: supposing we drop the megaton bomb, and they hear—and listen to—music hyped as Satanic that has the sound of Wagner or Liszt or Beethoven? Suppose they're bombarded with that kind of stirring sound, packaged as Satanic music? That will be like putting guns in the savages' hands, like giving them AK-47's! It's just like what Hitler did—he came along during the Weimar Republic, which was producing the most *banal* music. When you hear this sort of thing [*La Vex begins playing a 1920's era march on his organ, bubbly and monotonous. Without warning he transforms it into the opening lines of the "Horst Wessel Lied," electrifying the room.*] Now that's pretty heady stuff after that first bit! That's a demonstration of what I'm getting at.

DESCRIBE HOW THIS PROCESS WILL HAPPEN IN REAL LIFE.

LA VEX: Picture an assembly of kids—who aren't under the influence of any mind-numbing drugs—who've listened to a whole evening of Black Metal and then hear a roll on some kettle drums and trumpet fanfare. It'll be like that scene in *Samson*, or in *Cabaret*, with thousands of right arms going up into the air. God help the Christians then!

These kids are being primed right now with the Satanic Metal and when that moment comes and they hear the sounds of drums and trumpets it will be like an epiphany, a religious experience. The time is right. It's approaching D-Day and the apocalypse is at hand. They've created a musical mood that's made the homogenized din, this wash of omnipresent sound, so that any drastic violent change in the format is going to have impact that's unbelievable—it'll drop 'em in their tracks. It doesn't take much—it's just the right timing. It's happening right around them and they don't even know it. Like the flock of birds all flying out of the trees at the sound of the first thunderclap of a storm, it's going to happen at one given moment.



SELLING SATAN

One of the most remarkable features of consumer society is its ability to turn any kind of rebellious expression into a commodity. This is especially prominent and predictable in regard to youth culture. In the period of vociferous musical protest in the Sixties, one of the major record labels ran an advertising campaign that proudly proclaimed "all the revolutionaries are on CBS." This trend has continued ever since, and each time a youthful attempt is made to construct an angry identity or voice a radical opinion, there is a huge commercial apparatus already positioned to pick up, mass-produce, shrink-wrap, and sell that very same angst back to other youngsters.

It would only be a matter of time before this happened to Black Metal, especially since the early bands like Venom had already demonstrated that such rebelliousness could easily be turned into hard cash. When the Black Metal underground became manifest toward the end of the Eighties, the black-clad musicians increasingly excelled at low-budget marketing, eventually using the shock value of their criminal acts as PR for their records. As a result, Black Metal turned into a thriving cottage industry with a monumentally high public profile. It was inevitable that larger record companies would wake up and smell the money.

The biggest success story in Norwegian Black Metal—measured in chart positions, magazine coverage, and gaudy magazine posters—is Dimmu Borgir, a

Invitert til Spellemann-showet

Vil bruke
blod og
likminke

Black
Metal-bandet
Dimmu Borgir
er invitert
til å opptre
på Spellemann-
prisen den 19. februar. - En
spesialt for å få
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budskap, kommenter
er bandet.

AV NACHLOSET
Om invitasjonen til det store
Spellemann-prisen, som er
Norges største musikkpris, og
hvordan den kan bli en
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PHOTOGRAPH: Black Metal-bandet Dimmu Borgir er invitert til å opptre på Spellemann-prisen den 19. februar. - En spesialt for å få budskap, kommenter er bandet.

NORWEGIAN HEADLINE: "INVITED TO THE
SPELLEMANNSPRIS [NORWEGIAN GRAMMY AWARDS]
SHOW: WANT TO USE BLOOD AND CORPSEPAINT"

bloody), so that different media could pick the version most suited to their audience. In other words, it seemed as if Dimmu Borgir wanted to be provocative enough to make the kids think they were cool, but not so provocative that the kids couldn't get their parents to buy them the album for Christmas.

Walking a tightrope between credibility and commercial success, Dimmu Borgir are the pathfinders for an growing trend in which the leading figures of the Black Metal scene concentrate on making a living from music instead rather than plotting to burn churches. This is easy to understand. Most of the veterans of the scene have grown older (and, presumably, wiser), running up increasingly larger bills in the process.

Asbjørn Slettemark is the editor of the Norwegian music business weekly *Faro-Journalen*, which counts the Scandinavian correspondent for *Billboard* magazine among its staff.

ASBJØRN SLETTE-MARK

HOW POPULAR IS NORWEGIAN BLACK METAL?

Two or three years ago it was on the verge of becoming really, really big, and the international press was interested in Black Metal. If there had been more

band which boasts of six-figure CD sales on the German label Nuclear Blast. Dimmu Borgir were not part of the initial waves of Norwegian Black Metal, and therefore they have neither blood nor soot on their hands. But they have been very adept at capitalizing on the shocking image of their predecessors in the genre, while at the same time carefully distancing themselves from the worst excesses so as not to lose record sales or gigs. A typical example can be seen in the promo pictures of Dimmu Borgir engaging in the mock sacrifice of a virgin—pictures that were produced in versions ranging from “softcore” (less

gore) to “hardcore” (very

bloody), so that different media could pick the version most suited to their audience. In other words, it seemed as if Dimmu Borgir wanted to be provocative enough to make the kids think they were cool, but not so provocative that the kids couldn't get their parents to buy them the album for Christmas.

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Two or three years ago it was on the verge of becoming really, really big, and the international press was interested in Black Metal. If there had been more

bands like Dimmu Borgir and The Kovenant that could have made it big in the mainstream, Black Metal could have been another example of an underground that stepped up to the major league. But strong forces in the scene suddenly became very introverted and reverted to an older, harder style of Black Metal.

Three years ago you would be signed if you were a Black Metal band from Norway, because the record companies knew that a Norwegian release would sell at least 5,000 copies. Of course, that led to a lot of Norwegian rubbish being released on German and Dutch labels. The audience proved faithful, and probably will be so for a while longer. But today it is quality that counts, and it is the veterans that sell.

HOW MUCH DO THEY SELL?

For a while, it was popular among Black Metal bands to brag about sales figures. People have stopped doing that now. There is a handful of bands that sell well, about 10,000 to 20,000 copies of each release. But sales figures are hard to confirm, because labels tend to exaggerate; and on the other hand, many of the retailers for Black Metal records don't register their sales.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BIGGER LABELS SUCH AS NUCLEAR BLAST START SIGNING BANDS LIKE DIMMU BORGIR?

It is my impression that Nuclear Blast realized their stable of Death Metal and Speed Metal artists were starting to lag behind. It seems to me like they picked Dimmu Borgir more or less by chance, because the records that got them the contract weren't really that special. But Dimmu Borgir were still developing as a band, and they were willing to do the image and magazine poster thing. It wouldn't be possible to sell a more established band like Mayhem or Darkthrone the same way. I guess Dimmu Borgir have the good old Pop Star ambition, the standing in front of the mirror singing into the toothbrush thing.

In Europe, there is a marked divide between those that are into mainstream metal like Korn and Metallica, and the Black Metal audience. If you can bridge that chasm then you can triple your sales figures. And this is what Dimmu Borgir tried to do. For example, they were promoted toward the mainstream press, something that almost never happens to Black Metal bands.



The level of promotion was largely what separated Dimmu Borgir from their colleagues and competitors in the scene. With a professional record company behind them they were aggressively marketed. Record shops were provided with generous amounts of promotional material and eye-catching posters. The only things missing are the glossy cardboard display-stands for the store aisles.

Compared to the multinational record companies, Nuclear Blast Records is like a hot dog stand. But the German label has its home base in the world's biggest market for heavy metal, and is serious enough to have an American distribution deal with Warner Records. And Nuclear Blast know how to "move units," in record business parlance. The Marketing Director of Nuclear Blast, Yorck Eysel, says Dimmu Borgir has sold 150,000 copies of their last album and 400,000 discs in all during the time they have been with his label. These numbers are repeated like a mantra by everyone that works with the band, but should be taken with a pinch of salt, as exaggerating sales figures is the oldest trick in the book for vinyl and CD pushers. They know that it is easier to sell you a record that has been in the charts than one which has only been coveted by a few obsessive collectors. Even if the sales figures might be inflated, Dimmu Borgir has sold an impressive amount of records, and Eysel thinks that is due to the band's merit.

YORCK EYSEL

HAVE YOU HAD ANY SPECIFIC MARKETING STRATEGY FOR THAT BAND?
HOW DO YOU SELL A BLACK METAL BAND TO A WIDER AUDIENCE?

You cannot call the promotional and public relations work, or the marketing, a "strategy." We just work with the tools that we get from the band, for example the photos and the artwork, or the video, and finally the music, the records. The promotion and marketing can only be as effective as these tools are in getting the interest of people, but again, it is ultimately the music or the current album that determines whether people will buy it or not, or whether the press will love the album or not.

With the last studio album it was also the print media that gave the band a lot of lead stories, making them more popular than before. What I want to say is that the simple question is not an easy one to answer, and you cannot reduce the success of a band just to the marketing—it is much more complicated.

DO YOU FEEL THAT THE "SHOCK VALUE" BLACK METAL MUSIC USED TO HAVE
BECAUSE OF THE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR HAS HELPED TO SELL DIMMU BORGIR
RECORDS OR TO GIVE THE BAND CREDIBILITY?

As far as I know the band was never involved in making bullshit comments to the press where they claimed responsibility for anything stupid and brutal.

In Poland, where a Black Metal fan did commit a murder, or in Sweden, where Dissection was actually involved in a murder, it did not help to sell records at all. In those places we had no increase of sales and we won't use those facts for any kind of slogan on advertisements. It would simply be ridiculous.



BLACKLISTING

Arvid Skancke-Knudsen was the editor of Norway's leading Rock magazine, *Rock Furore*, when the Black Metal wave first hit the small, but active Norwegian music scene. He is regarded as a senior music writer, and has a long track record following the developments of various strands of Norwegian Rock culture.

Skancke-Knudsen explains that at first he saw Black Metal as an exciting new stylistic development in Rock music, and recruited writers from the scene for his magazine in an attempt to give it accurate coverage. Later, he felt compelled to withdraw from contact with the scene after some of the leading figures made statements in the media that gave a distinctly racist impression. One must assume that the crimes which ensued didn't make Skancke-Knudsen any more keen to deal with Black Metal, and his attitude was shared by many others who were writing about music at the time.

As the subculture grew more extreme, the music press withdrew and the crime journalists took over. The Norwegian mainstream media found a milieu that would say and do things to justify any headline. Interestingly, during Varg Vikernes's trial a Burzum album was reviewed in the news section of *Dagbladet*, one of Norway's most important tabloids; this was at a time when his band was being treated with contempt by the Rock press.

As the sensationalist accounts of Black Metal excesses led to fame and brisk sales for the bands abroad (at least by Norway's standards, since Pop music there generally has been difficult to export and the Metal bands regularly outsell the "commercial" Norwegian bands), the press would eventually have to acknowledge that the Black Metal scene was primarily about music. Thus Sigurd Wongraven of Satyricon, who had earlier starred in a *Rock Furore* exposé about racism in Black Metal, later received the full Rock star treatment in mainstream tabloid *Dagbladet* for a two-page article which focussed on the fact that Wongraven liked Italian designer clothes. Black Metal had become popular enough, and house-trained enough, for the mainstream press to dispense with the barge pole when touching it, even if the specters of racism and Satanism still surfaced often enough to make the bands seem somewhat scary.

SMOLDERING PR STUNTS

Ketil Sveen, a co-founder of the record label and distributor Voices of Wonder, was one of the first people to sell Norwegian Black Metal records on a bigger scale. He ended his cooperation with Burzum after Varg Vikernes stated that he was a National Socialist. Today there is a racism clause in the contracts which prospective artists have to sign in order to work with Voices of Wonder.

HOW MUCH DID THE SHOCK EFFECT
HELP THE SALES OF BLACK METAL?

Black Metal sold long before the church fires and murders came along around 1993. Øystein Aarseth had been doing this since the mid-'80s, and the first Mayhem record came out five years before anything criminal emerged from the scene. On the other hand, the fact that this was in the news the world over probably made people aware of Black Metal. We sell Black Metal in 25 countries—there's not a lot of other music that we get out to so many.

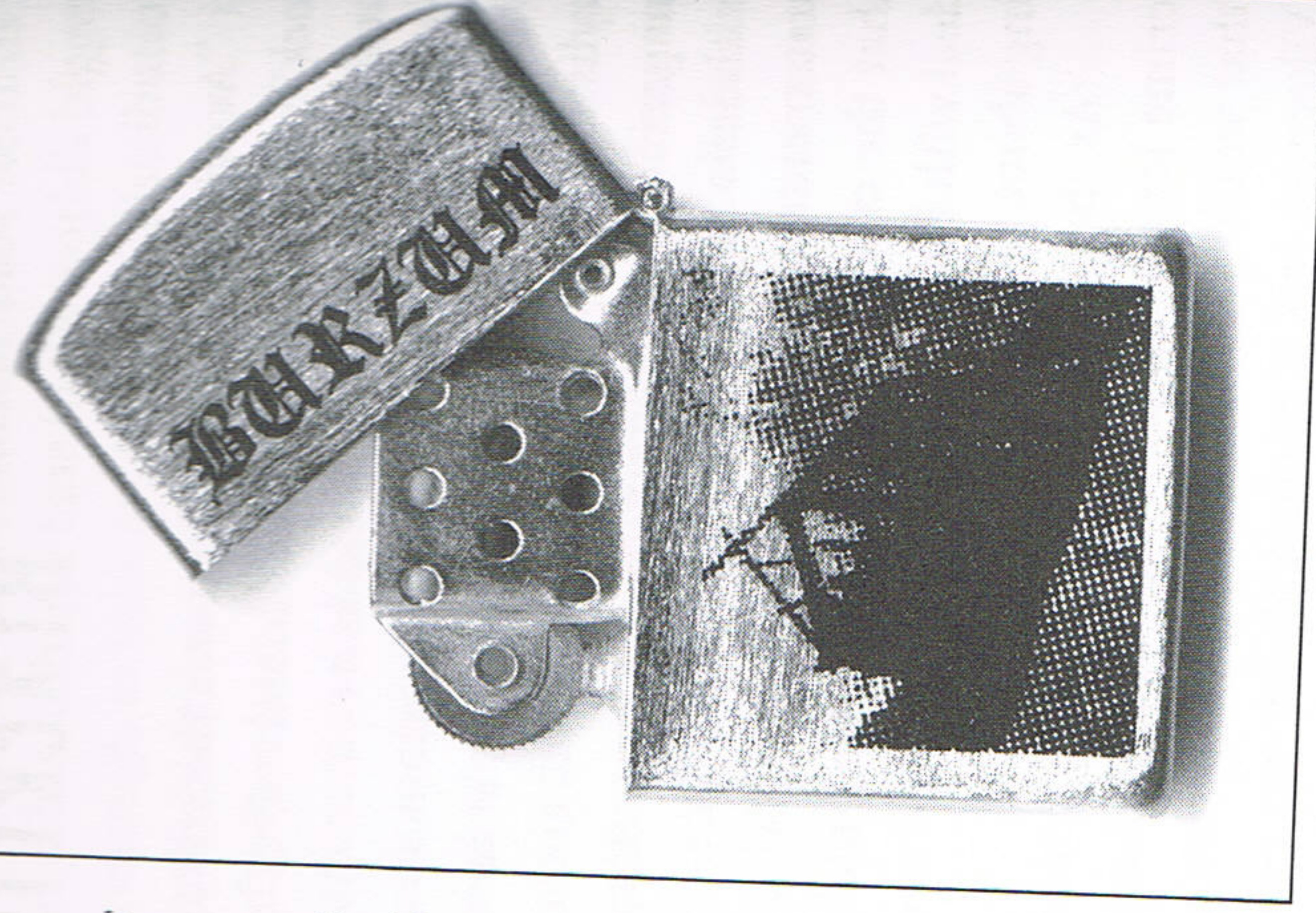
NOW THAT SOME BLACK METAL

BANDS HAVE REACHED A CERTAIN STATURE, WILL THERE BE A POINT WHEN REAL
MAJOR LABELS START TO SNIFF THEM OUT?

I think that might happen, but not if you are talking about the first generation of bands, like Burzum or Dark Throne. But with the new generation of bands I certainly think it is possible. I heard recently that the French division of Polygram was interested in The Kovenant.

VOICES OF WONDER ALSO MADE THE INFAMOUS PROMOTIONAL LIGHTERS
FOR BURZUM'S ASKE ALBUM WITH THE IMAGE OF THE SMOLDERING RUINS OF
FANTOFT STAVE CHURCH.

I've done a few stupid things in my life, and that lighter was one of the stupidest. In my defense I want to say that none of us suspected Vikernes had really done anything like that [burning churches]. We figured that if he was crazy enough to torch a church he would not be crazy enough to go around bragging about it. So the lighter was supposed to be a take on all the exposure he got in the media. Under the circumstances at the time I thought [making the lighter] was okay; in retrospect I would prefer not to have done it.



GERMANY DESERVES SPECIAL TREATMENT... I LOVE GERMANY AND THE GERMAN FOLK...
THERE IS NO PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO HAVE BEEN TREATED MORE UNJUST THAN THE
GERMAN FOLK; THE LEAST I CAN DO IS TO SHOW ... BURZUM FAVORS DEUTSCHLAND
TO THE REST OF THE WORLD. RISE DEUTSCHLAND, TAKE BACK YOUR GLORY.

WOTAN IS WITH US.

—VARG VIKERNES'



FUROR TEUTONICUS

IN THE FALL OF 1994, THE UBIQUITOUS GERMAN WEEKLY *DER SPIEGEL*, THAT country's left-leaning equivalent of *Time* magazine, published an article in its national pages under the "Youth" subsection. "Infernus and Sacrificial Blood,"² the headline screamed. In the center of the page the reader encounters an illustration from the fanzine *Infernus*—an image of corpses in battle gear juxtaposed with a xeroxed picture of an SS ceremony from the Third Reich. A statement adjacent to the pictures is also legible:

The pope himself should be raped by thirty Satanist sisters and I also would like to desecrate his lovely asshole. There is no punishment cruel enough to let him suffer for his mistakes and lies but I guess it would be nice to shred him.³

Welcome to the world of German Black Metal. Less well known than its Norwegian counterpart, the German scene remains genuinely underground, an obscure exit off the darkened *Autobahn* of extreme Rock. That changed briefly following the night of April 29, 1993, however, when the members of the Black Metal band Absurd followed the example set by Bård Eithun and Varg Vikernes and replaced thought with crime. The exploits of Absurd lacked the grand drama and notoriety which surrounded the "Grishnackh-Euronymous affair" later that year, but the violence was just as intense. They demonstrated that while fewer in number, the Teutonic wing of Black Metal was willing to live up to its Nordic cousin in terms of making a point without fear of the consequences—be they derision or prison time.