

## Mystic Force Man Vs. Machine Siegen

Formed in the mid-'80s, Mystic Force didn't really come into its own until the early 90s, by which time metal was plunging towards its commercial and critical nadir in the United States. That didn't stop the Baltimore-based band from releasing two excellent albums and a couple EPs on the German label Rising Sun, but aside from a mediocre track on *Metal Massacre XI*, Mystic Force hasn't seen anything in the way of a U.S. release until now. While Siegen Records has an excellent track record in terms of quality (having released great disks by Digital Ruin, Mayadome, and the godly Twilight Kingdom), they're still a small label without global distribution. That's a damn shame, because *Man Vs. Machine* is one of the very best progressive metal albums I have heard in years.

Mystic Force has always had a slightly proggy edge, but its earlier releases fell more squarely in the power metal arena. For *Man Vs. Machine* the band has brought in a new vocalist, which is something of a mixed blessing. On one hand, I miss the unique vocals of Bobby Hicks, but on the other hand, newcomer William Wren brings an aggression and edge to the band's sound that Bobby could never have captured. Musically, *Man Vs. Machine* is what Queensrÿche's *Rage For Order* might have sounded like if it were written for the year 2000. Yes, it's *that* good. The album opens with its weakest track, the too-aggro "Idiosyncrasy," but after an awkward intro, even that song turns into something good, and it's actually one of the most technically advanced songs on the disc. "Identical Strangers" is where the album really gets going, but as good as it is, it can hardly compare to the title track, which is almost unbelievably good. It's full of crazy riffing and dazzling playing, but it's grounded by memorable songwriting and catchy (but *not* singalong-style) choruses. The vocal melodies stick in your head like parasites, and that's how you know this isn't mere power metal. The song showcases all of the players, but, as on most of the album, the real musical star is drummer Chris Lembach. The guy is downright amazing—he brings a jazzy precision to the table without sacrificing the metallic power this music requires. That said, you can expect some truly mindboggling string work from guitarist Rich Davis and bassist Keith Menser. The whole album is produced to perfection as well; this is one of the best sounding metal discs I've heard in a long time.

I've always liked Mystic Force, but many people in the past have relegated the band to the second tier. With *Man Vs. Machine*, Mystic Force has undeniably thrust itself to the forefront of today's metal scene, if gauged purely on the musical level. Ignore this release at your own peril.—Matt Johnsen



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www.pauldianno.com, "Paul and everybody within the organization would like to offer a sincere apology to everybody looking forward to seeing the shows. Paul is extremely upset and annoyed and we are currently looking at ways to make it up to the U.S. fans"...**Lock Up** has replaced vocalist Peter Tägtren with ex-At The Gates vocalist Tomas Lindberg (also in The Great Deceiver). The band hopes to tour South America at the end of September, possibly recording some of the shows for a live mini-album which is due out in January. The mini-album will also include covers of songs by Terrorizer and Impaled Nazarene. Meanwhile, the band continues to write songs for its next full-length album.

Former Anthrax guitarist **Dan Spitz** recently appeared on the Christian Broadcasting Network to discuss his newfound faith and his personal low points following his departure from the group in the early '90s. "I had the stereo in my car taken out. I didn't play guitar. I didn't listen to any form of music whatsoever," Dan revealed. "I had a disgust for music." He went on to state that he couldn't say with certainty when he started feeling this way, but added, "I was fed up with the life I was leading for 12 years. The playing became a job. I lost the love, but there was more to the story. When I picked up a guitar, it literally burned my hands. I was suffering with depression and my wife left me. A lot of stuff went on, and suicide was in my mind every day." Eventually, Dan decided to take control of his life, and began to look for a way to initiate a time of change. "I started reading a bible that my grandfather had given me. I read it four times and it just hit me. I started going to bible studies and then confessed. From there, the Holy Spirit started to rip through me and change everything. It's unbelievable. He brought me down...from people who surrounded me, took care of me, who fed me on the road, the platinum albums, the three Grammy nominations, wife, kids, the mansion—you name it. It went from there to nothing, zero, zip, everything was gone and ripped out from under me. I was sleeping on the couch. But with a snap of His finger, if you follow His path, He could bring it all back. Things fall out of the sky in ways you've never seen before, you could never imagine in your wildest dreams."

## ELEGY

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musicians, isn't forgotten. *Consortium II: Continuum* is well beyond the planning stages, as several of the participants have either submitted songs, or are in the process of writing them. Parry himself has six tunes in waiting, including one called "Collidescope," should the other contributions prove unsuitable. "Thom Youngblood [of Kamelot] wrote 'Poetic Justice' and Jan Bijlsma [ex-Vengeance] wrote two. I asked him to write one in a Queensrÿche style and there's another I want to have John Myung from Dream Theater play on. It needs someone who can handle the bass the way he does." The vocalist seeks to expand the lineup, to make it even more international. "I want it to have more Americans, since most of us are from Europe. I've tried to have Chris Caffery involved since early '99. Jack Frost called and said he'd like to play on it, but he's so busy with Metalium and Seven Witches, it's down to timing. One of Jan's songs reminds me of Rainbow, so I'd like to get their old keyboard player, David Rosenthal, who I played with 12 years ago, but haven't talked to him since." He pauses, then says, "I want everyone to be more involved this time around, writing, and not just playing my stuff."

## EXTOL

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into the scene and they hang out a lot at this place called Elm Street, which is a [pub] where all the metalheads hang out.

"We get a lot of respect [in the Norwegian metal scene]," Chris ponders. "We've had really good reviews in the biggest metal magazines in Norway. Like Asgeir [Mickelson] from Spiral Architect. Because of his reviews [in *Scream*], a lot of people respect us. You always see a few Satanists in black metal who hate Christians, but I think people are more relaxed [now]."

So it's settled. Christian or not, Extol deserves to have its rightful place amongst the metal elite acknowledged. But just as the band's credibility seems locked in stone, a glance at the drummer's personal thanks list in *Undeceived* reveals that dreaded name.

"Yes, David is a very big Stryper fan," Chris concedes with a bit of a chuckle.

Ah well, at least they dig Death and Believer a helluva, er, heckuva lot more, right? So let's hear the rallying cry for Extol, the *metal* band.