

# STAGE FRIGHT

EDITED BY HANNAH MAY KILROY

CARCASS



## 70,000 TONS OF METAL

MIAMI, FLORIDA — COSTA MAYA, MEXICO

### DAY ONE

Excitement is on the faces of hundreds of metal fans as they exit their taxis at the Port of Miami and gaze up, eyes agog, at the monstrous, fourteen-story Majesty Of The Seas, which will be their home for the next four days. 40 bands, playing from ten in the morning until five in the morning, loads of glorious Caribbean sun, a port stop in Mexico and a never-ending supply of alcohol await these metalheads who have travelled from 61 different countries to be here. A quick, comfortable check-in, a walk up the gangway, the first of many buffet meals and several beers later, everyone is raring for this booze cruise to go.

Getting things running smoothly on Day One is always a difficult task as there are so many intangibles that can go wrong with three different stages on the ship, including the Pool Deck Stage, which is built over the course of six hours after the ship leaves the port at sunset. And indeed, **Soilwork's** opening set in the 1,200 capacity Chorus Line

Theatre is pushed back, but the fans hardly seem to mind as the Swedes play a spirited set to a packed room.

**Overkill** follow them and kick the cruise into high gear, as their set plows through a bevy of classic New Jersey thrash faves including 'Wrecking Crew', 'Fuck You', and the timeless 'Hello From The Gutter'. Meanwhile, directly above the Theatre in the cozier Spectrum Lounge, **Cynic** play an immaculate, taut-sounding set of their distinct progressive metal, which is quickly soured by Paul Masvidal's tone-deaf singing. *So close.*

NWOBHM greats **Raven** proceed to tear the Spectrum apart, bassist John Gallagher hitting the high notes as effortlessly as he did 30 years ago. German symphonic band **Xandria** boast a girl who can really sing, but their reliance on backing tracks renders their live set sterile, with us getting more distracted by a girl in a hot dog costume than the band. We're probably hungry. We go grab a slice from the 24-hour pizza place, head to the Theatre

and see **Obituary** absolutely annihilate, their organic-sounding death metal shaming the artificial sounds of Xandria. Our eyes land on hot dog girl, who clearly got sick of Xandria too, bouncing around happily.

### DAY TWO

All grogginess is washed away as soon as you see what awaits you outside. Conditions so perfect you could weep. Cloudless 30 degree weather, nothing but blue sea and blue sky as far as the eye can see.





DARK TRANQUILITY



Remarkably, no wind on the pool deck, save for a wonderful breeze that instantly cools the sweat on your brow. And to the delight of those susceptible to seasickness, no detectable motion whatsoever.

The fact is, the ship is hurtling as fast as it can, all four engines running all-out – as opposed to the usual three – to make its port date in Costa Maya. But on this morning you can hardly tell, enjoying breakfast as German old-timers **Poltergeist** play to a sparse group in front of the pool stage, most people more concerned with securing deck chair spots for the afternoon. Back in the Spectrum, which will serve as a cool respite from the blazing sun this day, **Freedom Call** deliver a fun, exuberant blast of happy power metal to a small collection of fans who jump around in unabashed, nerdy glee to the galloping 'Land Of Light'.

Tuesday afternoons on the pool deck are the best times for band performances on this cruise because *everyone's* outside and loving life, and this year's afternoon acts are curious choices. Finns **Swallow The Sun** – what delicious irony – look out of place playing melancholy doom in the noon sunshine, but they do a fantastic job, despite singer Mikko Kotamäki clearly not wanting to be there at all. **Bonfire** – more German geezer-pleasers – play a surprisingly good set of '80s material. The charming Liv Kristine leads **Leaves' Eyes** through some typically garish yet graceful symphonic metal as the wind picks up, while **The Church Of Pungent Stench** bring some death metal ugliness, not to mention a little humour, to the late afternoon.

The evening brings on the heavyweights. **Death Angel** play a scorching set of new tracks and old favourites like 'Mistress Of Pain' to a packed Spectrum. Meanwhile, Israeli progressive metal greats **Orphaned Land** perform an immaculate sounding set in the Theatre, Kobi Farhi looking the prophet in his robe and sandals, singing on such standouts as 'The Simple Man' and 'Norra El Norra'. Despite having Soilwork's Dirk Verbeuren as an emergency replacement for drummer Frost, **Satyricon** stride onto the Theatre Stage and conquer with a stirring, flamboyant set highlighted by 'Now, Diabolical' and 'The Pentagram Burns'. **Fear Factory** play a Pool Deck set that consists of the 'Demanufacture' album, while **Carcass**, easily the biggest draw on the entire cruise, wow a beyond-capacity Theatre with a ferocious set that mines their storied career.

## DAY THREE

Just across the border from Belize, the cruise port Costa Maya awaits, the jungle-lined coast inching nearer as the Majesty slowly pulls in alongside a Carnival ship, its elderly passengers staring from balconies at the whooping headbangers on the ship that's 50 feet away. The Majesty unloads with black-shirted tourists, and we need to decompress, taking a two-dollar cab to the village of Mahahual and camping at a beach bar for the day. Far removed from the tacky port, it's sublime.

A queue of joyfully sloshed slowpokes snake down the

pier at 5.30pm, delaying the ship's departure, as **Obituary** kick off the night's Pool Stage sets with another typically impressive showing, 'Slowly We Rot' gurgling out of the PA as the sun sets behind the Mexico landscape. The perfect end to a perfect afternoon, but little does anyone know this would be the last time we'd see the sun for the next 36 hours.

**Orphaned Land** are next at the pool and kick into a gorgeous performance as the breeze starts to chill, the classy melodies of 'Sapari' and 'Our Own Messiah' resonating. **Satyricon** sound even tighter by the pool than the previous night, benefiting from a full day of rehearsals with Verbeuren, 'The Infinity Of Time And Space' bringing the set to a stirring climax. **Carcass** wash out the ugly taste of **Haggard's** kitchen sink metal with a sensational poolside performance, carting out the same classics as the night before, but in a different order to keep things lively. **Dark Tranquillity** benefit from the more controlled setting in the theatre, and plow through a tremendous set centered primarily on their latest album 'Construct'.

## DAY FOUR

Heavy turbulence kicks in in the wee hours, the ship riding massive waves, soaring up and plummeting down with force, testing the mettle of more than 2,000 metal stomachs. What greets everyone in the morning is a torrential rainstorm few have ever seen before. Zero visibility, nothing but grim greyness and a veritable wall of rain, the ship's foghorn blaring over the piped-in metal tunes in the restaurants.

The entire day is chaos. All afternoon outdoor performances are moved indoors as equipment is frantically moved from one end of the ship to another and organisers work to keep things running smoothly. It's impossible to go outside without being drenched in seconds, so everyone stays indoors, bars become congested and smoke-filled. Cabin fever sets in and tepid sets by **Keep Of Kalessin** and **Xandria** don't help. Only the energetic death/thrash of Dutch upstarts **Izegrim** salvages a dismal afternoon.

The wind and rain continues, so there's no choice but to dismantle the Pool Stage for safety's sake and move everything indoors, and it's controlled chaos as the crew scrambles to reschedule the rest of the night, the Theatre housing ten sets instead of five. **Raven** are as brilliant as ever, going over hugely in the packed Theatre. **Death To All**, featuring the 'Human'-era supporting cast of Paul Masvidal, Steve DiGiorgio and Sean Reinert, are sensational, performing Death classics with power and verve, highlighted by a wonderful video tribute to Chuck Schuldiner before

climaxing with 'Pull The Plug'. Alan Averill leads **Twilight Of The Gods** through a selection of thunderous covers of Bathory's 'Home Of Once Brave' and 'Blood Fire Death'. **Symphony X** tear through an intricate set to adoring prog/power metal fans, while **Overkill** bring an ultra-professional, high-energy show at two in the morning.

After a trying day for everyone, spirits are up, faces beaming, a far cry from the beleaguered expressions on those trudging exhaustedly through the Miami airport the next morning. A slightly stranger journey than usual, but with a new ship confirmed for 2015 – the gargantuan Liberty Of The Seas – not to mention a whopping and bold 60 bands instead of 40, it's tempting enough to start planning a return trip.

Words: **Adrien Begrand** Pics: **Monika Deviat**



DEATH ANGEL