

Stepping inside the creative mind of your seventeen-year-old self. On the Noutheim album *From The Ashes*.

This album was a thought that had been growing on me for a while. I was a teenager in the nineties, when the internet was not yet available, meaning I had a lot of time to pursue activities and interests that didn't involve a screen. Like writing songs, and writing every note down in a notebook snatched from a math class at school. Had I not done that, this album would definitely not have been made.

Noutheim began as a two-person band called Nutricia, after a Dutch company that made a favorite drink of ours, Chocomel (which is still around in the Netherlands, albeit without the Nutricia name). Anecdotally, one of the first things I did once I got internet access was to write to them to naively mention that "hey, we stole your company name for our band, hope that's ok", which, surprisingly, it was. They sent us a huge Chocomel flag, a few decks of cards, and offered to sponsor us with a big can of Chocomel to have behind us on stage (which might have been my suggestion, I can't remember) if we ever got that far. Which we didn't. In fact, we dropped the Nutricia name after a while, going for the more mysterious name Noutheim, meaning, roughly, Nuthouse (based on a bad mix of false Dutch and... Norwegian?). In those late nineties, we wrote a number of songs for the band, one Metallica rip-off after another. The songs were written by myself, by Thomas who was the other constant member of the band, or by us together. And many of



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them went into my little notebook, detailing every riff, note by note. Some other songs were never transcribed, but remain somewhat clear in my memory. Other songs have left me completely.

The band ended after we finished school and I moved away to another town. After some time, we found ourselves in the same town again, and started writing new songs, which were recorded (although they did not turn out very good and remain hidden in my archives). Around 2010, another attempt at restarting the band was made, which was by far the most mature and well-sounding reincarnation of it. This constellation recorded an EP (*Then Gravity Kicks In*) and an album (*The Horrid After*, finished in 2015, after the final break-up). These are both available on Spotify.

The idea to record those first songs lingered in my mind for years. I had several of them there, neatly written down, and the equipment to record them properly. One day I just went for it. I purchased a competent drum software to be able to program decent metal drums, and recorded pretty much everything myself, since Thomas lives too far off. I did however put him on a train to come down for a few days, and he recorded solos for two songs, *The Slave* and *Vampire Desires*.

My idea with the project was to stay true to the songs and the kids who wrote them, and therefore record them as they were originally written, no matter how embarrassing they were. Mostly, that's also what I ended up doing, with a few exceptions. The first and main change I did was to play the songs tuned down from E to B, which makes them a shitload heavier, and more to my current taste. This I did for most of the songs, while some were retained in the original tuning, either because they didn't work tuned down, or to provide some variation (since almost every song was written in E).

Two songs were more substantially altered. The song I changed most was *The Gate*, which initially felt like every other song on the record, where I simply had to choose between skipping it or changing it in order to not play the same riffs over again. The basic form of the song was retained and most of the notes, although I changed the riffs by spreading the notes over two octaves, speeding everything up and adding blastbeats to the drums (it was never performed with drums, and I think I barely knew about blastbeats back then). *Forlorn* had a very boring intro

and middle section which needed some elaboration to make it interesting. The chord structure is the same, but I have added some melodies to the riffs and a banjo!

Minor changes were made also to other songs. For one song, *Freepass to Hell*, I rewrote two lines of lyrics. This could perhaps qualify as censorship, but they were just a bit too silly. *The New Air* had a few lines of lyrics cut out by accident I discovered when I was to sing it that the second and third verses were too short. Being a repetitive song, this was probably an improvement. On *Reach*, I cut the third verse because the song was a bit too long to stay interesting. *Obligation* had an intro cut out, which was similar to the outro which was kept. The outro is actually taken directly from a cassette demo we did back then, which is the only original nineties recording on the album, and probably the only bearable minute on that demo. (There is a photo from when we recorded it where our music teacher who helped us looks completely miserable; was I to meet him now I would offer my deepest apologies for putting him through that experience.) *Ronin* had a new section inserted which I don't really know where it came from, but it improved the song somewhat, so it stayed.

Apart from these alterations, the songs are pretty much as they were written. I have tried to stay true to the creative intentions we had back then. I wanted them to sound as fucking metal as I could make them, and I think my teenage self would have approved. A couple of more songs could have been on this record, but either because some riffs were forgotten or because they simply

could not be played decently (maybe because they were written without drums), they had to go.

I resisted the urge to write new lyrics. The themes of the songs range from embarrassing to acceptable, but I wanted them to reflect my teenage self. Some I can still stand for, although I would have worded them differently now. All in all, the lyrics represent the urges and problems of an outsider teen in rural Sweden in the nineties. There's bound to be some cultural value to that.

In the embarrassing category we find songs like *Forlorn*, which is actually about not having a girlfriend, but written a bit broader to reflect the theme of social exclusion. I was seventeen. I thought I would be alone all my life, and I just wanted some company and understanding, preferably female. *The Gate* also belongs to the embarrassing category, being a ridiculous lyric based on an equally ridiculous horror movie. *Freepass to Hell*, *The Slave* and a few others also qualify here, as do *Ronin*, which is based on the comic-book character Usagi Yojimbo, a samurai rabbit, which I loved at the time. *Aversion* circles around a summer job that I hated, where I spent a bit too much time behind a factory clearing grass and weeds, and the occasional snake (the intro to the song is a weaving machine, which is the kind of machines I had to endure in the factory, although this is not the same machine I wish I had recorded it). *Down the River*, which was the first song we wrote for the band, is a comedy song about a man running into a talking crocodile who ends up eating him. Some songs have

lyrics that doesn't mean much at all, such as *Lord Life* and *Vampire Desires*.

Among those with themes relatable today are the anti-war songs. *The Rising From the Ashes* is based on the experience of military drafting, which I hated, and to this day think is a horrendous idea. I've always been a pacifist and will stay one. *Dead Soldier* is a silly song, but there is a true pacifist heart in there. *Obligation* is about saying no to norms and authorities. While the lyrics are a bit naïve, the theme corresponds to my later sociological training, which includes the identification of, critique of, and in some respect, resistance to norms and social orders. *Reach* has a similar theme, but against religion. *The New Air* is an anti-bourgeoisie and class struggle lyric which I can only applaud that I wrote as a teenager, although it isn't very poetic.

Fourteen songs, one hour, as metal as we could write them back then and back there. Recorded more than twenty years later by a man who remembers that kid who wanted so much to get on stage in front of a roaring crowd to play these songs. This is pretty much as they would have sounded, if I could have played them as they sounded in my head.

/ Christian Ståhl

