

Moonspell - Alpha Noir & Omega White (2012)

Written by bluesever

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Alpha Noir: 01. *Axis Mundi* (4:57) 02. *Licknthrope* (3:49) 03. *Versus* (4:39) 04. *Alpha Noir* (4:30) 05. *En Nome Do Medo* (4:27) 06. *Opera Carne* (3:53) 07. *Love Is Blashemy* (4:31) 08. *Grandstand* (4:54) 09. *Sine Missione* (4:57) Omega White: 01. *Whiteomega* (4:21) 02. *White Skies* (3:35) 03. *Fireseason* (4:29) 04. *New Tears Eve* (4:46) 05. *Herodisiac* (4:47) 06. *Incantatrix* (4:40) 07. *Sacrificial* (4:11) 08. *A Greater Darkness* (7:25)

Fernando Ribeiro - Vocals Pedro Paixao - Guitars, Keyboards Ricardo Amorim - Guitars Aires Pereira - Bass Miguel Gaspar – Drums

Moonspell drop the goth and every other extraneous influence in favor of a no-frills blackened metal approach that should surprise longtime critics while forcing their fan base to accept a slightly linear listening experience.

Moonspell have never been known as a traditional metal band. There's no doubt that they've almost always maintained a metal element in their sound, but it has never been the sole influence. Over the course of twenty years and multiple albums they've dabbled with world music, rock, goth, electronics, industrial and more while integrating a varying level of metal as well. Even over the past few albums, as they have slowly moved towards a streamlined black metal sound, it has only seemed 'streamlined' in relation to their previous works. That is why Alpha Noir is such a surprise. With the release of Alpha Noir Moonspell have literally stripped their sound down to its core elements. The deep goth vocals that have almost always been a large facet of the band's sound comprise no more than thirty seconds of the entire album, and the keyboards have been relegated to a very subtle support role. This is in addition to a noticeable absence of female vocals, electronics and industrial elements. What we're left with is an album that derives its power almost entirely from thrashy, blackened riffs and visceral growls – and it works very well.

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Alpha Noir opens with an undercurrent of feedback and rolling percussion before introducing the first blackened riff and Fernando's guttural growls, and it is quite possibly one of the darkest, heaviest things that they have ever recorded. As it turns out, the opening section is also the song's chorus and it's the first major clue that this is going to be a different kind of album for the band. Unlike previous releases, Alpha Noir is an album that is focused on delivering powerful riffs and vocals while ignoring all the extraneous influences of old. This, as it turns out, is a double-edged sword that lends the album its greatest assets but also its most glaring weakness. On the plus-side, this is definitely an interesting change of pace for the band that features some of Fernando's strongest vocals and some of the band's best riffs, but sometimes it feels as if there just isn't enough diversity. The songs all seem to be derived from the same general style, tones and tempos and it makes for an album that can feel just a bit too homogenous at times. The lack of diversity really is a minor complaint, though, as individual tracks are all very solid and memorable – it's only over the course of the album that things might begin to feel slightly tedious.

Moonspell's surprising decision to create an album full of streamlined blackened metal has turned out to be both good and bad. Overall, they've succeeded in creating a powerfully dark collection of metal songs that will be excellent in a live setting, but it has also led to a distinct lack of diversity (something that almost never occurred on previous releases). Despite the lack of variety, Alpha Noir still works very well due to the excellently crafted riffs and a top-notch vocal performance that has Fernando doing everything from guttural death growls to pitchy black metal rasps. In all actuality, Alpha Noir will probably be harder for longtime fans to accept than the casual listener because, to the former, the album will feel like it is 'missing' something while the latter will take it for what it is: a solid collection of no-frills metal that pulls from the darker realms of the genre. ---Trey Spencer, sputnikmusic.com

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