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& HELLRAISERS**

Norway's Deadly
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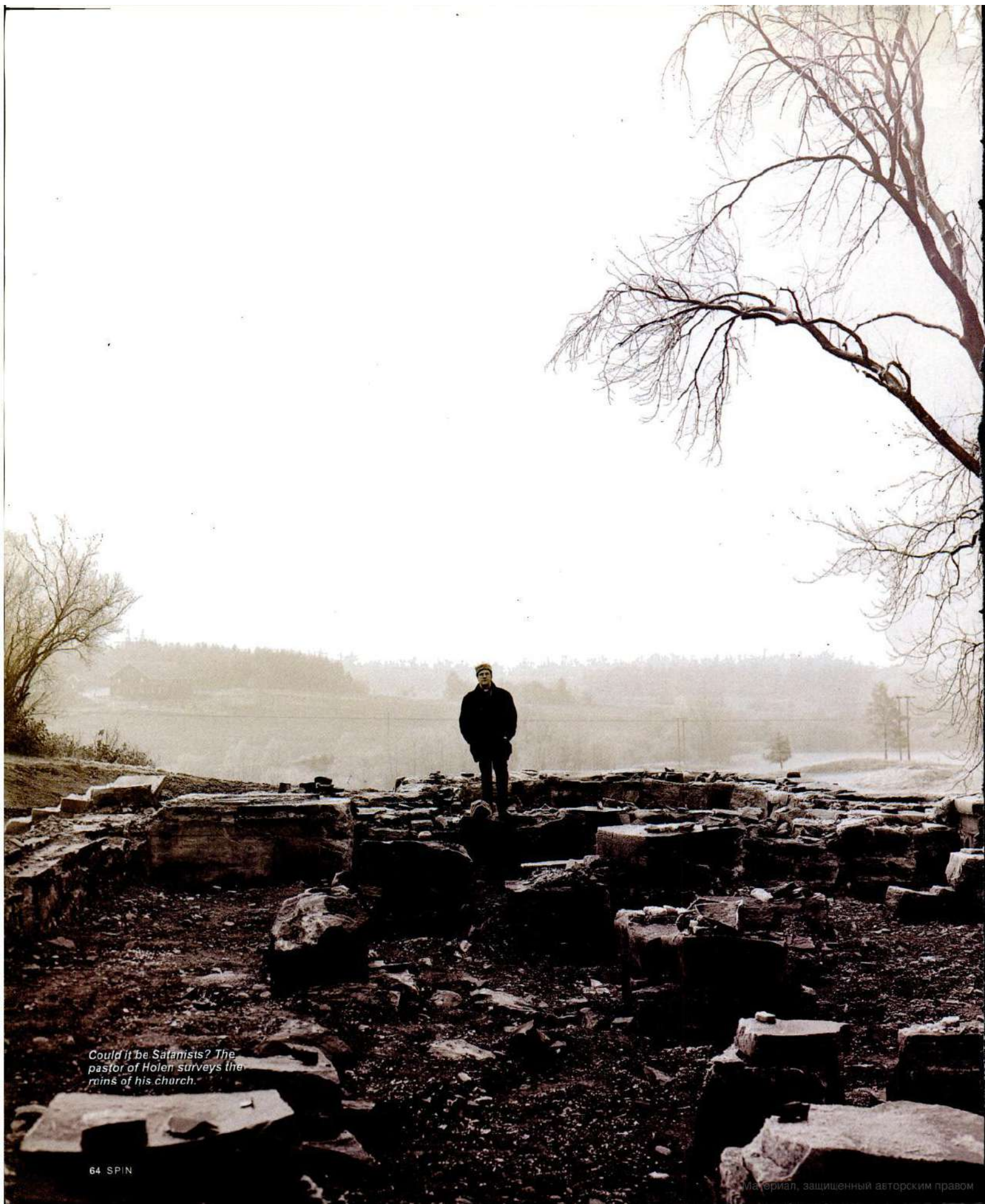
Norway's neo-Vikings are on a quest to end Christ's reign on Earth. Along the way, they're burning medieval churches, slaughtering their rivals, and playing black metal till the dark gods return. **Darcey Steinke** goes to Hell and back. **Photographs by Christian Witkin.**

The sky is blanketed by swollen, gray clouds. Under this leaden bell jar, an hour outside Oslo in the Norwegian countryside, lie the remains of Hølen Church—just the pink granite foundation and several piles of charred pine. Among the fire's ruin, burnt pages from hymnals fly around, chaotic as brown moths. Blacksmith-forged

nails lie mingled with the femurs and tibiae of ministers buried a hundred years ago beneath the church's floorboards. Burned to the ground last May, Hølen is the most recent catastrophe in Norway's ongoing national disaster: 22 churches, some dating from medieval times, destroyed by arson over the last four years.



Ihsahn, the lead singer of Emperor, keeps a severed raven's head on the wall of his house.



Could it be Satanists? The pastor of Hølen surveys the ruins of his church.

A little, white-haired man kneels at his wife's gravestone, one of the many that surround the site where the church once stood. He's weeding the daisies and begonias as he prepares to leave behind some cut roses in a mayonnaise jar. When I ask who did this to his church, he shakes his head and speaks in heavily accented English. "The Satanists," he says wearily.

To the unsuspecting visitor, Norway is a fairy-tale land of wooden gingerbread houses, lace curtains flapping out of windows, blue glass bottles on the sills. Fir trees line the fjords, and just about everyone is blond, high-cheekboned, and cruelly beautiful. Oslo, Norway's capital, is overrun with pastel apartment buildings, and gift shops selling troll dolls, replica Viking pendants, and Norwegian reindeer sweaters.

In a stone building downtown, a lone, neatly dressed junkie out front leans into a nod, the only clue that one of hell's many chambers looms six flights above. The band Mayhem used to practice here, in a room framed by a puke-stained carpet below and swastika flags tacked up overhead. Viking swords and inverted crosses hang from the walls. Hellhammer, the only surviving member of Mayhem, Norway's first black-metal band, pushes videos of *Nosferatu* and *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* out of the way so he can sink down into a black vinyl couch.

Norwegian black metal was born in the late '80s, the product of an unholy union between death-metal churn and Viking bloodlust. It melds speed metal's thrashing guitars with an ambient subtext that shows up in everything from darkly symphonic synth lines to medieval lute solos. The vocalists tend to sound like the poor little possessed girl in *The Exorcist*, screeching and gurgling lyrics about evil powers, Satan, the nighttime woods, trolls, and Norse gods. Back then, the members of Mayhem lived together in the Devil's house—black, with two lofty towers—in a tiny town called Krakstad. "People there were very superstitious," Hellhammer recalls, smiling. "When we went into a shop, all the old ladies would run out. In Sunday school they told the children that our house belonged to the Devil."

Mayhem didn't do much to dispel that notion. Onstage, the lead singer, Dead, wore clothes that he'd buried in the ground until they were rotten and filled with bugs. He was a tall, extremely skinny young man with skin so white it was nearly blue. Even during rehearsals, Dead wore his "corpse paint"—white-and-black makeup inspired by the plague. When he was performing, Dead inhaled from a plastic bag holding a decayed raven. "He needed to get the stench of death before every song," Hellhammer explains.

Dead, appropriately enough, was the first to die. In 1991 he committed suicide with a shotgun blast to the head. "It didn't really surprise me," says Hellhammer. "He was a strange guy, always talking about Carpathian castles and the Pophyrians and how this life is only a dream." His suicide note read, simply, "Excuse all the blood." Hellhammer and Euronymous, Mayhem's guitarist, found Dead dead—legs akimbo, his brain tissue and blood splattered on the walls and sheets. Euronymous didn't seem to mind



Hellhammer was a member of Norway's first black-metal band.

small labels like Head Not Found and Euronymous's own Deathlike Silence.

Euronymous was the fat spider in the black-metal web, more interested in being evil than depressed like Dead. He told Hellhammer he had no feelings; pain, he said, was the same as pleasure for him. In corpse paint, Euronymous resembled a demonic mesh of Divine and Bela Lugosi—stout, with long black hair, a pointy devil's beard, and a mustache waxed so the

Euronymous made a stew—ham, frozen vegetables, paprika, and pieces of Dead's brain.

the mess at all. In fact, says Hellhammer, "he took pieces of the brain and made a stew. He put in ham, frozen vegetables, and paprika. He'd always said he wanted to eat flesh, so he figured this was an easy way."

Hellhammer is dressed in the official black-metal uniform: boots, jeans, a leather jacket, all black. A Thor's-hammer pendant and a pentagram dangle around his neck, but he's more the playful puck than the dark master. He reassures me that he didn't eat any of the wicked stew—"I would have puked." A heartbeat later, he sheepishly admits that he did make a necklace for himself out of skull fragments he found between Dead's bloody sheets.

Black metal wasn't always so black. In the early '80s, British bands like Venom considered themselves a musical component of the horror entertainment industry, and they played out their role as Satan's cheerleaders with an appropriate sense of camp. But something happened when black metal crossed the North Sea. For Norwegian black-metal bands, it's more than just a stage act: They are committed Satanists fighting to get Christianity out of Norway, and to bring back ancient pagan ways. They advocate the revival of ancient Viking practices, for instance, and engaging in blood feuds and revenge killings. Other bands quickly joined Mayhem on the black-metal scene, including Darkthrone, Immortal, Enslaved, Burzum, and Emperor. Each has put out several records on

tips curled around like a pig's tail. His interest in chemicals led him to build an elaborate laboratory in the basement of the black house, filled with beakers and glass distilling tubes, Bunsen burners and vaporous acids. He usually went around in a black cape, but in the lab he wore a white scientist's coat, with gold buttons and a high collar. He spent hours down there laughing maniacally and mixing illegal chemicals together. An explosion once caused one of his potions to spill onto his hand. "It flamed up like a torch," Hellhammer remembers. "Even underwater it just kept burning."

In the early '90s, Euronymous also owned Hell, a record store in Oslo that served as the Batcave for the black-metal movement. Members of the self-proclaimed Inner Circle crashed on mattresses in the basement, moist and dark like a dungeon. Parties at Hell were legendary: huge, chaotic, candlelit affairs, where devotees wore corpse paint, black capes, and replicas of Viking gear. Many cut themselves with knives and broken bottles; particularly inspired groups would go out to desecrate graveyards, knock down stones, and spray-paint pentagrams and the number 666. Hellhammer remembers people shooting guns into the shop walls; one guy hammered a nail into his own skull. Euronymous would beat himself with a bullwhip, causing blood to soak through his shirt in crimson stripes.

From his base at Hell, Euronymous became a leader of the scene. He often expressed hope that black metal would incite young people to



violence; conceiving methods of torture, he held lengthy lectures on how the pain would scare the victims. "It was an exciting period," says Samoth, the guitarist for Emperor. "We all hung out and talked about our hatred for Christianity and how to get the Viking religion back." All of the Inner Circle despised Christianity's glorification of weakness, its sympathy for the sick and the needy. So the Circle devised the idea of setting fire to the pride and joy of Norway—its beloved wooden churches. That would remind the people of Norway that they were all still the children of Odin.

Fantoft Church was built by Nordic wood craftsmen in the early medieval era. On its elaborately carved columns, the scaly tails of dragons interlocked with snakes and fleshy vines. It stood strong from the 12th century until it burned to the ground on June 6, 1992.

Another fire claimed Holmenkollen Chapel, the church King Harald V and the royal family attended. Others soon followed. In September, Samoth proudly "joined history by burning down a church." His black-metal colleague Count Grishnackh, who had already participated in the fires at Holmenkollen and Fantoft, went with him to incinerate Skjold Church in Rogaland. Samoth describes the experience as being almost holy. "There was a small door under the altar where we poured in several gallons of gasoline, threw a match, then ran back to the car." The pair drove all night to get back to Oslo and Hell. "There was a strange feeling in the car," Samoth tells me in his soft voice, his long, dark hair almost obscuring his features. "It was stormy, thundering and raining. We were on a narrow country road with no light except our high beams."

Count Grishnackh, the sole member of the band Burzum, has blue eyes that burn as fiercely as heat lighting; a hairline scar runs down the side of his mouth. Dressed as a Viking dandy in boots, cloaks, and Nordic breastplates and pendants, he's cold and intense, his emotions and actions based more on ideology than anything inside his heart. Grishnackh believes the Inner Circle has every right to use flames and machine guns to accomplish its ends—after all, didn't Norway's Christian forefathers destroy pagan idols and chop off the heads of heathens?

Pouring gasoline along the walls of Fantoft's tarred wood, the Count flicked several matches into the golden puddles. As he walked away, he turned, and the sight of the flames licking up toward the tower to the cross made the hair stand up on the back of his neck. He shivered.

After the Count was questioned by police—and appeared in every Norwegian newspaper in full Viking regalia—Eurononymous predicted that Grishnackh would soon do something even grander to get his face in the papers. He didn't realize he was forecasting his own death. Less than two months later, Eurononymous's body was found in his apartment. Grishnackh was charged with his murder.

The Count's presence at his trial was just as outrageous as the testimony: He wore his hair in pigtails, and laughed continuously throughout the proceedings. But the facts of the case are undeniably chilling. On August 10, 1993, the Count and Snorre, the leader of the band Blackthorn, drove six hours across Norway, from Bergen to Oslo. The Count carried a copy of a record contract, intended to be the pretext for his visit to Eurononymous's apartment.

Possible ways to kill Eurononymous had been thoroughly discussed. The Count wanted to fell Eurononymous with an ax, but then decided it would look stupid to lug an ax around a neighborhood full of apartment buildings. Another plan was to get Eurononymous to demonstrate something on his computer, then stab him in the neck while he was sitting with his back turned. The Count ended up carrying a primitive arsenal—three knives strapped to his body; an ax, a bayonet, and a baseball bat were stashed in the trunk of his car.

Eurononymous answered the door wearing only his underwear; according to the Count, he looked weak and tired. The two began to argue, and Eurononymous turned and walked toward the kitchen. The Count drew his knife and followed. Snorre was waiting on the stairs when he heard Eurononymous scream for help. The door flew open and Eurononymous ran at him, blood streaming in rivulets down his face and shoulders. An autopsy found he had suffered 23 stab wounds—two to the head, five to the neck, and 16 to the back.

On the ride back to Bergen, Grishnackh and Snorre stopped at a lake. The

Runhild is cofounder of the black-metal fanzine Descent.

Count took off his clothes and washed blood out of his hair and off his hands and face. He cleaned his knife and tied his bloody clothes around a rock, and let them sink into the water. But he was still exhausted and worried. He'd left the contract in the apartment, signed with that day's date, and he had forgotten to wear his gloves. He didn't even know if Euronymous was alive or dead.

The next day, Grishnackh was strangely emboldened. In an almost unimaginable act of hubris, he strutted into the Voices of Wonder Records office in Oslo, dressed like a Viking warrior, with breast- and arm-plates and spiked leather gloves, and showed off his knife. Meanwhile, the police rounded up and questioned more than a hundred black metalers. The scene that had always been so secretive was suddenly riddled with stool pigeons. People rattled out one another; some even called anonymously to tell what they knew. Police heard about the Inner Circle feud and soon discovered that the bloody fingerprints smearing the contract belonged to the Count.

Everyone in the black-metal community tells the same story: that they were baptized but never attended church, that their parents didn't believe in God. Required religion classes in school were "boring" and "bogus." Teachers made you memorize prayers no one believed. This attitude is nothing new; Norway's relationship with Christianity has always been ambivalent. In 995 A.D., Olaf I Tryggvason brought Christianity, along with plundered gold and silver, to Norway's shores. On gaining power he ruthlessly enforced the new faith onto the Norwegian people by burning down pagan temples and offering subjects a choice between baptism and death.

The Lutheran reformation in 1537, while not as bloody, was equally chaotic. Lutheran ministers sent up from Germany didn't speak the Norse language, and many were disreputable characters prone to disputes over tithes, embezzlement, even rape. Yet Lutheranism is a somber religion known for pietistic followers and plain altars. Its main doctrines hold that it is one's relationship to God, rather than tithes or good works, that will secure a passport into heaven. This leaves Lutherans in an existential spot, standing alone without the comfort of saints or incense before a stern Germanic God. In Norway, the Lutheran church is a part of the state—the government holds the purse strings and appoints bishops, and King Harald is its official head. Still, only three percent attend church on Sundays or consider themselves active participants.

"The Satanists are right to target the hypocrisy of Norway's spiritual life," says Trond Viggo Torgersen, Norway's commissioner for children's rights. "It's a very discouraging time in our country. Everyday life is dull and consumer-oriented. Most people would rather have a McDonald's in their community than a church." Torgersen hopes the fires will serve as a wake-up call, a plea from young people for more spiritual passion. But when I



Faust is serving a 14-year sentence for manslaughter.

She eventually left the church, fed up with its members' materialism. "All of them kept urging me to work for a big corporation, to become a yuppie."

She met Samoth, her husband, while Emperor was opening for Cradle of Filth during a European tour. A friend asked her to dress up like a dominatrix in a black-leather corset and boots. "I'd come on stage and whip the lead singer," Nebelhexa laughs. "It was loads of fun." Their romance

"We rode up the mountain to watch the church burn. It was very beautiful and exciting."

speak to Bishop Andreas Aarflot, and ask if the fires might be directed at the state church's bureaucratic temperament and lack of vitality, he responds with blunt anger. "These fires have not really affected the religious community. We do not consider them a challenge of any kind."

At the seminary in Majorstua, Professor Tormod Engelsen shakes his head. "There is something so medieval about all this—pagans versus Christians, both sides so literal in their interpretations." He believes that Norwegians want religion, but that there exists a spiritual void. "These Viking ideas of blood revenge, of maintaining honor, of meaningless violence..." The professor sits back, in front of his shelves of theology books. "You must remember that the Vikings were quite taken with Christianity. Those violent men were transformed by the message in the New Testament—the idea of humility, of forgiveness, of the overwhelming power of love."

While our tea steeps, Nebelhexa and I carry our mugs to her back porch. We sit near a big basket of drying mint leaves, not far from a rabbit pen and some chickens. Arcane, her black greyhound, settles regally beside her. Nebelhexa tells me that she has been involved with Crowleyan magic, chaos magic, even Anton LaVey's Church of Satan. "The services are like Christian services but backwards. Nude women are used as altars, and they have orgies and stomp on blessed communion wafers. It's silly, really," she adds, tucking a long red hair behind her triply pierced earlobe.

quickly flowered. At midnight on the winter solstice last year, Nebelhexa, in a long, red-velvet dress, and Samoth, in his Viking fur coat and Thor's-hammer pendant, hiked up a snowy mountain near his parents' house. Finding a spot surrounded by trees, Samoth used his ritual heathen knife to cut Nebelhexa's palm, and then she his. "We held them together and our mingled blood dripped on the white snow." They made promises to the mighty sky father and all the tree spirits, then exchanged rings that were engraved with the Norwegian words for THOR HELPS.

Nebelhexa prefers her own magic to any organized religion. She creates potions using herbs, bones, feathers, and sexual fluids, casting spells to protect her loved ones, and defending herself and them from enemies. Recently she's been collecting roots and weaving them together in an effort to hold together her relationship with her husband, who's serving a two-year sentence for arson. "Magic is closer to the body—you create your own harmony. It's not like Christianity, where you beg to some god."

When I bring up the church fires and Samoth's involvement in them, she appears embarrassed. She's anxious to impress on me that her husband was strongly influenced by Count Grishnackh. "The Count is a good talker. He would tell Samoth that by burning down churches they'd drive the Christians back to the Middle East and become kings." Another of Grishnackh's plans, she says, was to rape [King Harald's sister] Princess Astrid, get her pregnant, and take over the throne. Nebelhexa shakes her

head. "It's a very naive way of thinking but you have to excuse it, because Samoth was just 17. What can you expect from boys that don't like their society?" Arcane rises up to growl at a squirrel that's leapt up on the porch. Nebelhexa tells me how all her friends think she's crazy to get involved with a Satanist who burned down a church. "But they don't know him. They can't understand that my husband is an honorable Viking man."

The Viking Age, 800 to 1050, was a time when Norsemen terrified the European coastline: sailing up to land under cover of darkness in their wide, wooden boats, dressed in deerskin coats and high laced-up leather boots, an ax slung over each man's shoulder. Faust, drummer for Emperor and current prison inmate, has turned his Viking ideology into a philosophical framework for murder.

I'd been warned by Faust that his prison is high-security, one of the strictest in Norway, but the flowers and expansive green lawns surrounding

in a far-off galaxy in the middle of nowhere. I made human life valueless."

In August 1992, while Faust was checking out the newly completed Olympic Park at Lillehammer, a man approached him and suggested they go together into the woods. "I hadn't been drinking or anything. I just very calmly decided to end this man's life. Maybe my subconscious was telling me that because he was gay I had that right." Faust agreed and followed him into the deep forest. As the man came forward to embrace him, Faust sunk a knife into his gut and yanked up. "He was screaming 'No!' but I just went berserk stabbing him over and over. Once he was down and the light had gone out of his eyes, I kicked him to make sure he was dead. Then I walked home with a completely empty head, like a zombie."

Two days after the murder, Count Grishnackh, Euronymous, and Faust drove up to Holmenkollen Chapel, near the Olympic ski jump. It was to be a symbolic act of catharsis for Faust. At first they placed a homemade bomb onto the altar, but when that refused to detonate, they piled hymnals and

"In Norway, like the U.S., if you're weak everyone supports you. There is too much pity."

the building make it look more like a mental hospital. Like everything in Norway, the prison is clean and pretty. A cheerful female guard walks me through a metal detector; she asks politely if I'll leave my bag in a locker near a glass case displaying ceramic masks made by inmates, features twisted in combinations of anger and despair.

Faust bursts through the visiting-room door with the intensity of a fly finally let out of its glass cage, wearing camouflage, gray and white, to blend with wintertime woods. Even with his broad shoulders, Faust has the same childlike grasp on reality I noticed in Hellhammer, but he's less good-natured, more like the cruel little boys in *Lord of the Flies*.

Rocking his chair back against the cement wall, he tells how he's always been fascinated with murder, collecting books, magazines, and T-shirts relating to serial killers. When Faust moved from his small village to work at Hell, his interest in violence intensified. He began to create an entire moral universe based on the precepts of black metal. "I started thinking about macro- and micro-cosmoses and comparing human life to dust on a far-off planet

Bibles on the altar, poured gasoline over them, and lit a match. "We rode up the mountain to watch it burn. It was very beautiful and exciting—when we got back to the record store we could hardly sleep."

After his crime spree, Faust checked the papers every day, but after a few weeks there was nothing more about the murder. "As time passed," he says, "I almost forgot I was a killer." It wasn't until Euronymous's murder that Faust was fingered and picked up. He was tried and convicted of manslaughter, and is now serving a 14-year sentence. He might regret getting caught, but he shows little remorse for the murder. One should live by the sword, he decrees; society must return to a natural order based on survival by strength. He sees himself not as a criminal but as a revolutionary in exile. Faust's favorite writer, Bret Easton Ellis, exemplifies for him the truth about human beings' natural animosity to one another. "In *American Psycho* he gets it down perfectly," Faust tells me enthusiastically. "One minute you're looking at a man's clothes and the next you're sticking a knife in his eye."



Where Faust turned his black-metal murder fantasy into evil reality, Ihsahn, the lead singer of Emperor—and its only member not in jail—understands the power of metaphor. In his tailored black pants and silk shirt, his dyed hair held in a braid down his back, he's an Armani vampire. The dark prince wears eyeliner and a touch of white powder; the faint purple circles under his eyes give me the feeling that he tends to wander in the woods long after dark.

When I ask why he didn't go with Samoth and Grishnackh the night they burned down Skjold Church, he explains that he wasn't home when they looked for him but that he definitely would have joined in. Christianity, he believes, is for people who live in the desert and wear sandals. "It wastes love," he says. "In Norway, like in the U.S., if you're weak everybody supports you. There are special centers, 12-step programs. Everything is for the weak. Everything caters to people who are failures. There is too much pity."

Runhild, Ihsahn's girlfriend and cofounder of the black-metal fanzine *Descent*, agrees. "None of the Gods in Norse mythology are weak like Jesus is weak," she tells me. Runhild is studying biotechnology—notes from her morning class are written on her hand. She's wearing a long, black-silk dress and a necklace made from ravens' feet, a "love present" from an old boyfriend. She has always had a fascination with death. At 13 she wrote a school paper on burial rituals, and as a kid slept with her hands folded over her chest. Her obsession with death, she feels, comes from being fearless. "Most pop music plays on weakness, but black-metal people don't believe in sacrificing yourself for others the way Jesus did. They are strong enough to live by the sword."

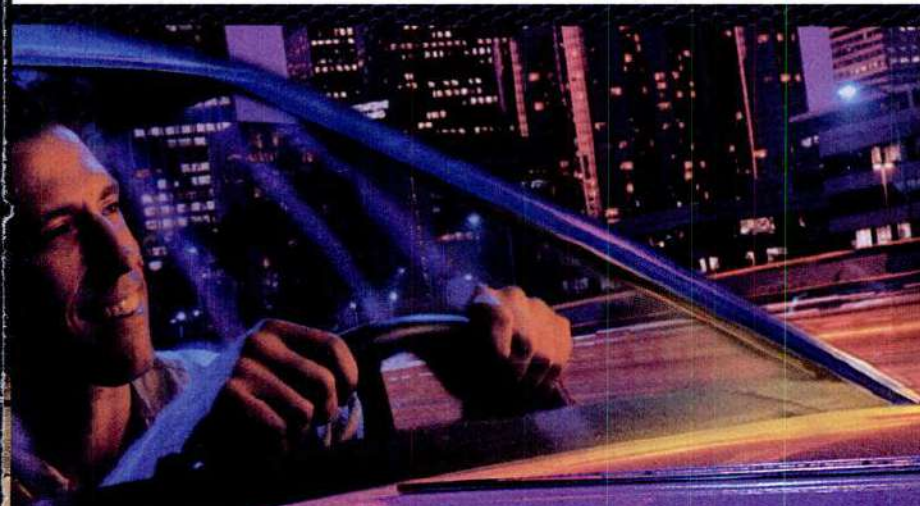
Ihsahn believes the vampire to be the perfect symbol of the Satanic. "Dracula feeds on others but feels passion for just a few," he explains. He also sees similarities between the vampire and the Viking. "The Viking went out and took what he needed, violently and with much bloodshed; he fed on others just like a vampire." As I prod Ihsahn about black metal's fascist tendencies, about the Holocaust, about how weakness is an innate quality in even the strongest human, the vampire grows testy. "Look," he says, sounding much like Lestat, wearied by weaker creatures who lack

bloodthirst and courage. "You'll never understand me because you sit in the audience at a horror movie. I'm up on the screen."

In Norwegian folklore, tongues of flame flicker up from the footprints of Viking kings. Giant brown bears make their winter lairs on church altars. Flies crawl out of the mouths of every dreamer, and fairies give babies honey cakes. Like naughty children, black metal's true believers blur the line between fantasy and reality, the seen and the unseen, play-evil and real evil. And in this superficially Christian country, where ruddy-faced blond kids glide down slopes of perfect snow against hand-painted skies, is it any wonder black metal would explode? It exposes the dark side, the deep melancholy and endless winter nights, of the Norwegian soul.

Black metal continues to stun idyllic Norway with heathen ideology and terrorist acts. Last spring, Bishop Aarflot recommended that every church in Norway post guards at its gates on June 6 at six A.M., explaining that "666 is the most important number for Satanists and that all churches would be vulnerable at this time." Churches continue to be targets for arsonists, but no one I talk to is exactly sure who is now setting the fires. "It's 13- and 14-year-old black-metal kids who live out in the middle of nowhere," Faust tells me. "I'm glad they're keeping it up. It means the torch has been passed, that the fire still burns."

Count Grishnackh, Norway's most notorious criminal, is now a media celebrity with a cult following—he receives more than a hundred fan letters a week. In a recent interview from his cell in Ila prison outside Oslo, the Count said he no longer wanted to be associated with black metal. He's now strictly a neo-Nazi, an ideology he hopes to promote through an organization called the Norwegian Heathen Front. A photograph from prison reveals that his dyed black hair has grown back to its organic Scandinavian blond, but the hypnotic blue eyes haven't changed. Son of Odin, pagan prince of the far North, the Count bides his time reading books on Nordic history and the occult. He plans to use the postal system and computer lines to influence young people before they're brainwashed by Christian society. With his guidance, he predicts, the heathen youth will bring about the new pagan era by any means necessary—Helter Skelter, Viking style. ●



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