

Heading North

STORMWARRIOR

Vkings in old Englishe

Vikings, longboats, shields, swords, helmets with horns, heading northe, snow, winter, lions of the northe, well some more cliché. What does connect all these dots? Stormwarrior does,

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Photo: Dockyard1
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Lars Ramcke's brainchild that was taken under the wings of Kai Hansen and managed to recreate that magic everyone thought was long lost. Of course I am talking of that one-of-a-kind record, 'Walls of Jericho' by Helloween. The guitar duelling between Kai Hansen and Michael Weikath, that was for us all to relive, the speed and duels with new and improved sound from Stormwarrior back in 2002, produced by the Godfather of power metal himself, Kai Hansen.

I was to talk to Lars Ramcke for the second time in my life to learn more about this relatively new band, that actually celebrates ten years since the release of their acclaimed first demo this year.

Things didn't turn out as I had expected though, the call was on time for starters, I cannot even remember when that happened

last, the other odd thing was that the voice on the line said his name was Alex, that is strange since the guy supposed to call was named Lars. I figured he had gone through a rapid name change since he didn't like his name, Lars, but I was completely wrong.

Alex, the guitarist explained to me that Lars was ill and he had to fill in for him. That was alright for me of course, in the end it was one of the more interesting interviews in a long time for me since it was a bit unexpected and those things are good.

Ten years

Ten years have passed since the first demo, ten years is what is called a decade, it is also a tenth of a century or a hundredth of a millennium, what I want to point out is that it is a fair amount of

time in a human life span. It is a long time to learn new things and find new experiences.

I wanted to learn what Lars had learned with Stormwarrior over these ten years but had to ask Alex who hasn't been in the band for that long, but he had already learnt things during his time in the lines of Lars Ramcke.

- Since I came into the band we have grown a lot in our music and integrity, Alex points out. Comparing the demo to the new there has been a big development over the years.

If I look only to the albums I see the same thing even though all the changes in line-up the band has gone through, they still seem more mature and solid today than they did before.

- There has been lots of line-up changes but now we've got to a

point where we have a solid line up, Alex explains. The most important lesson may be to have a steady line up with four or maybe five people working together and understanding one another. There's just a spark going now and that is important and we are vary happy with the line up and we all get along very well.

It is often so for a successful band you have to have a steady line-up of people who share a similar vision and are all part of the process. That is a recipe for a successful band in most cases, there are always exceptions where one man has the vision and the others only are bystanders that contribute in the studio and on stage - never in the creative process, that was what Stormwarrior in general was before, Lars Ramcke did it all and the members were shifting like some people change their underwear, but Alex

explains that it is changing, that Lars no longer is the sole contributor of the bands music. Nowadays it is more of a teamwork.

- The last two years and since Yens came along we are more as a team, Alex explains but also in the next breath points out the weight of Lars in the band. Lars was and still is the main guy but back then he didn't have help.

- He didn't have someone to co-write and help writing some lyrics, on 'Heading North' it is a teamwork Yens have written some lyrics and helped with

vocal melodies, I wrote one or two things and so on.

A Viking tale

The factor of power and perhaps a solid line-up is two major lessons the band have learned over the years, or should we say Lars? After all, Lars is the only

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one from the beginning that is still in the band, not that strange that it is he who have remained since it is his band, he was and is and will probably keep on being the main guy on this band, but he may not need to pull the same load then.

In ten years, or three, you are able to collect some memories of high points in the career and why would Stormwarrior or Alex be any different in that aspect.

- Earthshaker in '05, Alex states. We played in front of 5- or 6'000 people that were actually louder than we were on the stage.

That has to be a real experience, to play in front of a loud crowd of many heads. The band has also done a tour in Japan with Gamma Ray during the short time Alex has been a member which he also lists as one of the highlights in the Stormwarrior career. Impressive things for such a small band as Stormwarrior still is.

With all this reiterating into the past, from lost times long past and some other philosophical clichés, isn't it nice to hear about the future? Why don't we speculate a little into the coming ten years? I think we shall and this is Alex contribution first.

- I don't know, excellent answer as House would have said. I hope we will be able to continue recording albums and tour and to play all over the world. To meet metalheads from all over the world and do some good tours all over the world, that would be good.

The last part was way more interesting, but now it is time for the author to speculate a bit. Well it goes like this: 'Heading Northe' will be somewhat of a breakthrough for the band, they will get more known in their circuits and sell more records but not a major breakthrough that takes them to the top of the metal scene. But capitalising on the slight success of

this record means after a limited tour with good attendance and some well visited festival gigs, the band goes back into Hansen Studios with Kai Hansen as producer and record an album called 'A Viking Tale' - a concept album about a solitary Viking leader and his adventures, a little like *The Odyssey* but in Viking settings. This album receives stunning reviews from all magazines with a slight hold back from the Hallowed reporter who is still satisfied with his prediction coming through but he is really strict in his reviewing of an album that is close to amazing. A diverse masterpiece which produces a single that climbs high on the charts in almost every country and the album reaches gold and platinum levels almost everywhere and Stormwarrior depart on a three year world tour to build up expectations for the next and probably even more successful album which I do not care to speculate

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too much into now.

If these predictions do not come through it is the fault of the human carbon dioxide emissions that is to blame for every error on this planet, even the global warming that happens on Mars.

€ One thing I have wondered since the first release by Stormwarrior is why they use that *E* at the end of some words. Words like *northe, olde* and so forth, it have never really made any sense to me, the Vikings certainly did not speak like that - they spoke in a tongue that is quite close to the Icelandic language, more like my native tongue Swedish with an extra -ur on the end of most words. I speculated some about that, that it was like the Icelandic-Swedish language differences illustrated in English. I knew since I had met Lars in Motala that he spoke Swedish. I didn't ask him about that then, don't ask me why, I

think I forgot it plain and simple but now I had it in large print on my screen in front of me when I spoke to Alex. Now I don't need to wonder about it anymore and neither do you as soon as you have read the reply.

- Lars is into Nostalgic old English type of writing and I think it started back in the first demo and if it was oldschool there why not go oldschool all the way. Since we write much lyrics about old mythology it fits well and has become a little trademark of ours. Maybe he thought why don't we write in old English words and then it stuck and now we just have to continue. Maybe it started as a joke, I don't know, but it adds to the theme.

That is what he said and it clarifies a few things and he is also right about it adding to the theme, not completely killing it like I did in my review, I am not as skilled in that way of writing apparently.

That *E* relates to the old which is a theme of Stormwarrior, I mean that Vikings are not that prominent around here anymore but they live on in the back of our minds and in the history books and some literature. It also happens to be so that Stormwarrior is somewhat descendant of- and has some Scandinavian blood in their line-up.

- Lars is a descendant of Denmark and Yens is of course Danish so we have some connections to Scandinavia, Alex explains and as a curiosity I can say that Lars know Swedish.

- We can all identify with the Nordic mythology and culture- We all feel connected, after all Emmen was once Danish.

Sundsvall - a part of Hungary Sure and Sundsvall was once a part of Hungary, Alex made a quick joke about his area of Germany was Scandinavian once which was of course not the



case but he had me fooled since I wasn't on my toes there. Excellent joke of course, a wise and intelligent one that requires inside information in some way, which is often the way I make jokes and no one understands.

Anyways everything isn't about me and this is certainly not that, this is about Stormwarrior and their connection to their lyrical themes of Vikings and such.

- Lars started writing about mythology and culture from the north and then we stuck to it and we like it, Alex explains. We love to visit Sweden and all the different places around.

Sweden is a very nice country when looking to the landscape with its diverse nature of mountains, great forests and open fields and lakes. But it isn't all that glorious as it may seem, Swedes are not that good and skilled as they want it to look, it is loads of smoke and mirrors for the exterior viewer, that is the nation for

its people. Naturewise Sweden is amazing with stunning nature which adds to the myths that Stormwarrior write about and I agree with them, to be heading north is not such a bad idea, there is loads of sceneries to see here and that is probably why this band of Germans so much dream of Vikings and kings (we still have a king, as does Norway and Denmark).

Heading Northe

The newly released album by Stormwarrior is called 'Heading Northe' and is a more mature album than the bands prior releases, it is also an effort of a long time of hard work.

- We've been working on it for over a year, Alex explains. We started writing and pre-production in October '06. We took our time to make it perfect.

Maybe more bands ought to do that and not release an album every year. When there is more

effort put into it the end result is almost always better. There was not only due to taking their own time working that lead to the long process with the album, they also had some other engagements that prolonged the work.

- In April 2007 we started recording the drums in our own Thunderhall Studio. It was an intense time as we had some festivals to play in the summer so we had to take a break from recording at that time when we were playing Wacken and the Magic Circle. After the shows we got back in the studio, we worked hard and recorded it and then we went to Piet Sielck for the mixing. The Mastering was done by Tommy Hansen in his Jailhouse Studio in Denmark, it was in December, no January was it. It was really hard work and intensive, we worked like 24 hours a day as we had a tight schedule. Many times it was like one was exiting the studio and immediately the

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next guy just hurried in to do his part. It is quite tough to work in the Studio, completely different than rehearsing or playing live. In the studio everything has to be perfect, you don't want to look back some time later and wonder why you didn't change this and that thing.

From reading the release note from dockyard 1 I figured it was the first album Stormwarrior produced themselves but I stand corrected from Alex.

- It isn't the first, he explains. They produced 'Northern Rage' themselves and we mixed the live album by ourselves.

I do not tell him that it states in the release note that 'Northern Rage' was produced in Hansen studios although it doesn't state it was produced by someone but Stormwarrior either so I guess I was only fooled by the release note. After looking at the cover of 'Northern Rage' though I realize it was produced by Kai Hansen

and Lars Ramcke as a note for the interest club.

Producing and not producing, the band still did produce this album and then had it mastered and mixed at different locations, that is something that may change in the future when they may do everything by themselves.

- This time we did only the recording ourselves, Alex explains and then continues: Lars have studied audio engineering so maybe some time in the future we will do everything ourselves, it saves time and money. For me this was a good process, it was my first time being a part of it all, earlier I have only recorded my part and then left, now I was in on everything.

So, in the future we may see a completely self-produced, mixed and mastered album by Stormwarrior. Is this maybe why they didn't take any help from Kai Hansen with this album?

- We have done lots with him

before, and after this Helloween thing and having him as guest on stage we wanted to try something different, Alex explains after having a laugh at my (stupid) question. Kai was on tour and wasn't available either

Kai Hansen

The main emphasis on wanting to do something different was the reply from Alex. He even told me an anecdote from their tour with Gamma Ray how Kai Hansen answered a Journalist that it was time to kick Stormwarrior out, not in the literal sense since they do not live at his house or anything, but as a joke. I only reiterate this thing like this since I didn't get it word by word so instead of totally misquoting I just tell you about it in short. Still, there is no bad blood or anything like that between Kai and Stormwarrior.

- I wouldn't say that we never will work with Kai again, Alex states, after all he is like the god-



father of power metal and we are great friends. We toss each others some demos and exchanged ideas, so we may well work with him again in the future.

That is exactly what this author predicted a little earlier in this article, they will rejoin their forces again for the next album that will be the real commercial breakthrough for Stormwarrior unless of course global warming due to man's carbon dioxide emissions interfere.

'Heading Northe' is the third studio album by Stormwarrior and it exhibits according to everyone I have read including my own review, much more diversity than prior releases. It isn't as locked in the image as the prior ones was, it has more changes in tempo and melodies, clearly a more mature and diverse album than the two prior, and that is something Alex states as well.

- The songs are more diverse. There are slow songs and there

are fast songs, Alex explains quite obviously. We wanted to try and make it more diverse in speed, the previous were always fast and lacked a little in variation. The songs are more melodic now with more solos.

And so they did, the album is clearly more melodic and better according to the *Hallowed* review that is to be seen at <http://www.hallowed.se/reviews/stormwarrior.html>. Another thing that according to the same source is better is the vocals, Lars Ramckes vocals have evolved very much since the prior album.

- I am really impressed with how much Lars have evolved as a singer, Alex explains. Yens helped with backing vocals and we used more choirs and overall tried some new stuff.

At this point I state that Lars actually sounds very much alike Kai Hansen, his idol or at least inspiration. Alex agrees with me, this is what he said (approx.):

- Yes a little, I don't think that is something intentional, I think it just sneaked in, but maybe it is a little trace of inspiration.

Holy Cross and ending

We are all affected by our inspirations, so if Lars has the voice for it it would be odd if he didn't sound a little like Kai Hansen rather than the other way around.

At this time we get into the spot where we assess a little if the end result was as desired, we check with Alex about what he thinks of the album, what he is most proud of and if there was something to be done differently and it is fairly safe to say that he is quite proud of what he has accomplished.

- For me it is my first studio album with Stormwarrior so I am proud of it all, Alex states and I think I can hear a hint of pride in his voice. For me personally it is the moment in the solo of *Holy Cross*, that was a very special feeling for me. That is a moment I

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am feeling proud of. For the band it is that we worked so close for such a long time. It is a good thing when all members say that it is our strongest album so far, and everyone had some part in its making, something that is their own part.

Talk of pride and satisfaction can never be done without asking about the favourite song and as it happens I've not had that many reluctant to tell me that in the latest interviews I've made. Kind of strange that some are so frank about it, they usually don't want to tell at all. Alex did make a slight reservation with the classic starting statement that most use.

- It changes every day but I think *Holy Cross* and *Remember the Oathe* is the ones I like the best for the moment.

Alex then moves on to tell that as it is their own record he gets a tighter bond to all songs than perhaps a listener may get.

The section of the new record

got bigger than expected and there is still one part left, the one about the touring that this idiotic reporter always seem to ask about. There is yet no tour planned to promote this album, but I am sure it probably will be one, the tours are after all the best way to promote a record.

- We have several festivals planned for this year, Alex explains. The first one is in Greece, it will be the first time we play there.

And the one in Greece is not alone, there are several locations where festivals are held and Stormwarrior will visit their fair deal of locations during this summer.

- In May we will go to Hungary, in June we still hope to play at the Sweden Rock Festival, but that is nothing that it confirmed but we hope to be playing there. Then in July we will again play with Manowar at Magic Circle, they liked us so much that they invited us to come and play with them again. We will play in Ger-

many at the Dragonslayer festival in October. Those are only festivals and we hope for a proper tour since that is the best way to promote the album. That may take a while, the album is just released and the promotion machinery is just beginning to work.

Yes, we will see if they get the machinery to work and book a proper tour for Stormwarrior, that is according to predictions going to happen, the wheels of the promotion guys just seem a tad slow when it comes to this band.

Well, we end it there, we leave Stormwarrior for now, hopefully with some new insights about this, unique, band from Germany who likes Vikings and Nordic mythologies and sings about it. Maybe they'll visit Sweden, in that case make sure to be there.

Stormwarrior's new album 'Heading Northe' is in stores already, we have a review of this album in the review part of the website, be sure to check it out. Dir.K