

## = The Blackening =

The Blackening is the sixth album by American heavy metal band Machine Head . Released on March 27 , 2007 in the U.S. , The Blackening sold 16 @,@ 000 units in its first week , and became Machine Head 's second highest charting release at number 54 on the Billboard 200 , and charted in the Top 20 throughout many countries in the rest of the world . The Blackening has been certified silver by the BPI for sales in the UK in excess of 60 @,@ 000 copies .

The album 's first single " Aesthetics of Hate " , is a retaliation to an article written by William Grim for the website Iconoclast . Titled " Aesthetics Of Hate : R.I.P. Dimebag Abbott , & Good Riddance " , the article praised the murder of guitarist Dimebag Darrell . Machine Head frontman Robb Flynn said the song was written as a " fuck you " to Grim and tribute to Dimebag . The song received a Grammy Award nomination for " Best Metal Performance " at the 50th Grammy Awards . The text in the mirror of the album 's cover reads " the mirror which flatters not . " The song " Beautiful Mourning " has been featured as a playable song in the video game Guitar Hero : Metallica .

## = = Background = =

The inaugural song written for Machine Head 's follow up to their 2003 release Through the Ashes of Empires was entitled " Godfather 4 " . This was in reference to a guitar riff in the song which vocalist Robert Flynn felt had " a Godfather type vibe " . The song was shelved , although the riff resurfaced in a b @-@ side . " Slanderous " was the first song finished that was in the final track listing . By February 2005 , Machine Head had penned rough versions of " Beautiful Mourning " and " Aesthetics of Hate " .

## = = Recording = =

A November 2005 demo contained thirteen songs , which included rough versions of " Aesthetics of Hate " and " Halo " . " Aesthetics of Hate " contained what Flynn described as a " totally fucking lame " Angel of Death " rip off . I hated it every time we played it so I was glad to see that part go ! " In mid August 2006 , Machine Head announced that the title of their sixth studio effort would be The Blackening . Flynn and drummer Dave McClain spent August 18 and 19 jamming together , fine tuning songs chosen for the album and performing pre @-@ production . Phil Demmel resumed lead guitar duties and Adam Duce returned as bassist .

Machine Head entered Sharkbite Studios in Oakland , California on August 21 to begin recording The Blackening , with Flynn assuming production duties for the second time . From twenty six written songs , the selection was whittled down to eight . McClain completed the drum tracks to six of the eight tracks on August 25 , followed by the remaining two the next day . Tracking concluded on November 16 , 2006 .

The band was surprised at the length of " A Farewell to Arms " and " Clenching the Fists of Dissent " running over ten minutes , and wondered if their fans would " be able to get their heads around " what the band was doing . Record company Roadrunner Records hesitated the band 's decision to open the album with a ten and a half minute song ( " Clenching the Fists of Dissent " ) , and asked the band questions similar to " Are you sure you don 't want to get into something a little more direct ? " The band disregarded the comment and believed the song set the tone musically for the remainder of the album .

Flynn said " Clenching the Fists of Dissent " and " Wolves " were the most difficult songs to construct . For " Clenching " , he attributed the difficulty to the amount of tracks ; the introduction of the song has 90 , including multiple three @-@ part harmony with two guitars , 20 tracks of snare drum , four tracks of kick drum , and military marching cymbals . The song continues with five electric guitars , three acoustic guitars and two bass guitars . Flynn also described the song " Wolves " as difficult because " it 's all got to be super tight ; there were so many riffs that had to be just locked on down picking " . Mark Keaton provided audio engineering , and Colin Richardson mixed the record in London .

Flynn believes the band was naive about the length of songs , and was unconcerned if they would be suitable for radio or MTV , as the band purposely did not want to receive airplay . " Now I Lay Thee Down " has a chorus Flynn describes as " poppy " and added " fucked up lyrics " about one person killing another , and then committing suicide . This was to make the song not suitable for airplay as the band wanted to make a " dark epic record " .

= = Lyrical themes = =

Lyrical themes explored on The Blackening include love , war , organized religion , anger in society and Machine Head 's " winner take all " spirit . The album 's first single , " Aesthetics of Hate " , is a retaliation that captures the band 's anger towards an article written by William Grim for the conservative web site Iconoclast . Titled " Aesthetics of Hate : R.I.P. Dimebag Abbott , & Good Riddance " , the article praised the murder of Dimebag Darrell by Nathan Gale , while Darrell was performing with Damageplan on December 8 , 2004 . Grim wrote Darrell was " an ignorant , barbaric , untalented possessor of a guitar " who looks " more simian than human " and is " part of a generation that has confused sputum with art and involuntary reflex actions with emotion " . After reading the article , Flynn was furious and wrote the song to send a message to Grim implying " fuck you " , and pay tribute to Dimebag . He created a post on the band 's message board soon after the event describing his friendship with Dimebag .

" What would YOU know about love or values ? What would YOU know about giving to the world ? All that you know is teaching prejudice , and your heart is as black as the ' ignorant , filthy , and hideously ugly , heavy metal fans ' you try and paint in your twisted , fictitious ramblings . It 's because of people like YOU , that there are Nathan Gale 's in this world , NOT the Dimebags and metal musicians who work to unite people through music " .

The songs " Clenching the Fists of Dissent " , " A Farewell to Arms " ( probably a reference to Ernest Hemingway 's novel of the same title A Farewell to Arms , which is set during the first World War ) , and " Halo " deal with politics , the war in Iraq and organized religion , respectively . The band wrote the lyrics about the Iraq war after conducting research and found that " a lot of stuff does not add up " , according to Flynn , which angered the band . Machine Head 's debut album , Burn My Eyes , featured a similar song titled " A Thousand Lies " which dealt with the Gulf War . " Slanderous " deals with hate that still exists throughout society and " Wolves " addresses the band 's competitive " winner takes all " spirit . " Now I Lay Thee Down " features a Romeo and Juliet @-@ esque love story about one person killing another person , and then killing themselves . The song relates to the William Shakespeare play , Romeo & Juliet , where at the end of the story , two lovers kill themselves because they assume that their lover is dead . The original lyrics to the chorus of the song were considered " poppy " by Flynn and his band @-@ mates so they intentionally changed them into the lyrics they are now so they wouldn 't get radio play .

= = Reception = =

The Blackening received critical acclaim . Blabbermouth.net reviewer Don Kaye awarded the album an almost perfect score of 9 @. @ 5 out of 10 , saying : " one of the purest , finest , most powerful expressions of modern heavy metal released " . Kaye praised the guitar work of Flynn and Demmel on the tracks " Beautiful Mourning " and " Aesthetics of Hate " , and thought the band members surpassed their musical ability in an " intense and dynamic way " .

Thom Jurek of Allmusic described the album as " an over the top rage and pummelfest with all the qualities that earned the group its enormous fan base by touring and recording " and that the thrash metal element " rivals Slayer at their best " . Rock Sound magazine reviewer Eleanor Goodman awarded the album 9 out of 10 , praising the first two minutes of the opening song , " Clenching the Fists of Dissent " , as " a full @-@ on old @-@ skool thrash attack " .

" Aesthetics of Hate " received a Grammy Award nomination for " Best Metal Performance " at the 50th Grammy Awards , which took place on February 12 , 2008 . Though heavily favored , they controversially lost to eventual winners Slayer who had won the previous year for the same album .

Other nominees in the category were King Diamond , Shadows Fall , and As I Lay Dying . At the fifth annual Metal Hammer Golden Gods Awards and at the Kerrang ! Awards in 2007 , The Blackening won best album over albums by Slayer and Lamb of God .

Three years after the release of The Blackening , Machine Head wrapped their touring cycle for the album , finishing in Sydney , Australia on 28 March . In February 2010 , The Blackening was awarded the Album of the Decade award from Metal Hammer . On October 8 , 2011 , the album was voted Roadrunner Records " Album of the Century " in a poll .

= = Chart performance = =

The Blackening was leaked on to the Internet two weeks before its release by an American journalist who received an advanced copy . Demmel thought it unfortunate , but that it created a " pre @-@ buzz " , as did Flynn who thought the buzz was nothing like the band had before ; " There ? s internet street buzz vs. record company hype and if the hype matches up to the street buzz , then you ? re seeing a lot of bands selling a lot of records in the first week " . The Blackening became Machine Head 's highest charting release in the United States , where it entered the Top Rock albums at No. 9 , and the Billboard 200 at No. 54 ( their highest charting and first week ever ) , with sales of almost 16 @,@ 000 copies . This improved on the band 's 2004 release , Through the Ashes of Empires , which sold 12 @,@ 000 units in its first week , and entered the Billboard 200 at No. 88 .

The album did exceptionally well overseas where it entered the Mainstream Top 20 in the German and Belgium charts at No. 12 , No. 14 in Australia , No. 16 in the United Kingdom and No. 19 in Sweden . Charting positions below the Top 20 consisted of Ireland at No. 23 , No. 29 in the Netherlands , No. 34 in France and No. 55 in Italy . The Blackening sold more copies in two weeks than Through the Ashes of Empires sold in three years .

= = Cover art and special edition = =

The artwork for The Blackening was designed by Robb Flynn , longtime Machine Head collaborator Paul Brown , and Deanna Alcorn . Based on a metal carving in the 16th century , these carvings were used to scare people about going to Hell and for propaganda purposes . It features a skeleton on a throne that is standing on top of the world , and the words " The mirror which flatters not . " Flynn thought " this whole record is like holding up a mirror to ourselves . It 's talking about things that are going on now , but it 's not necessarily specific to this time . "

Three special editions of The Blackening were released : a two @-@ LP gatefold vinyl , a two @-@ disc special edition packaged in a silver foil @-@ enhanced slipcase , with a bonus Metallica cover added to the end of the album . The second disc was a DVD featuring a video entitled The Making of The Blackening , and a 2006 tour diary of the Sounds of the Underground Tour . Both of these versions were released in 2007 .

The third version , released in 2008 , was a 3 @-@ disc set which came with the original album , a CD featuring various covers the band had recorded in the past , demos and other unreleased material and a DVD which featured various live performances of the band at festivals , the Burn My Eyes 10th anniversary show and music videos from The Blackening accompanied by their " making 's of " .

= = Track listing = =

= = Credits = =

Writing , performance , and production credits were adapted from the album 's liner notes .

= = = Personnel = = =

===== Machine Head =====

Robb Flynn ? vocals , rhythm guitar  
Phil Demmel ? lead guitar , backing vocals  
Adam Duce ? bass , backing vocals  
Dave McClain ? drums

===== Production =====

Robb Flynn ? production  
Mark Keaton ? engineering  
Vincent Wojno ? additional engineering , Pro Tools editing  
Colin Richardson ? mixing  
Matt Hyde ? mixing engineer  
Lee Slater ? assistant engineer  
Rohan Onraet ? assistant engineer  
Eddy Schreyer ? mastering

===== Visual art =====

Alex Solca ? photography  
Bau @-@ da Design ? package design  
Deanna Alcorn ? package design  
Robb Flynn ? package design

===== Studios =====

Sharkbite Studios , Oakland , CA , USA ? recording  
Strongroom Studios , London , UK ? mixing  
Metropolis Studios , London , UK ? mixing  
VIP Studios , Oakland , CA , USA ? Pro Tools editing  
Oasis Mastering , Burbank , CA , USA , mastering

== Charts ==

== Certifications ==