



'Deth or glory: (from left) Nick Menza, David Ellefson, Marty Friedman and Dave Mustaine, 1991.

## THE SPEED METAL MASTERPIECE. THE REBUTTAL TO METALLICA. THE GRAMMY WINNER. BUT WHICH IS MEGADAVE'S FINEST HOUR?

James MacKinnon dons his crash helmet to navigate Megadeth's fast and furious catalogue.

**ON APRIL 11, 1983**, Dave Mustaine woke up in a rehearsal room in New York's Music Building to find his Metallica bandmates Lars Ulrich, James Hetfield and Cliff Burton standing over him. Ahead of recording their debut LP, the trio had decided to kick out their lead guitarist for his drunken temper. Mustaine was duly handed his bags and a one-way Greyhound bus ticket back to San Francisco.

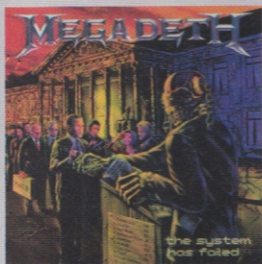
On the four-day bus ride across the States, the guitarist had no shortage of time to seethe over the indignity of being fired from a band he co-founded. As he plotted revenge against his erstwhile bandmates, a pamphlet from California Senator Alan Cranston referring to stockpiled nuclear warheads as "the arsenal of megadeath" would provide him with a nom de guerre.

The aim of Megadeth's early records was simple: everything had to be faster, harder and more brutal than Metallica. With 1985's *Killing Is My Business... And Business Is Good!* and 1986's *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?* that mission was executed efficiently. Later the 'classic' line-up of Mustaine, bassist David Ellefson, Marty Friedman (guitar) and Nick Menza (drums) launched a string of successful albums with 1990 landmark *Rust In Peace*.

In latter years, the quality of the band's releases has fluctuated almost as much as its membership (with 24 different members at last count, excluding Mustaine). The trail of destruction wrought in the music also continued off-stage, until the frontman sobered up on his 17th visit to rehab. Their enduring popularity is a testament to Mustaine's iron will.

MEGADETH





## The System Has Failed

(SANCTUARY, 2004)

**10** As the first album since Mustaine's radial nerve damage forced him to call time on Megadeth in 2002, this signalled the first step in both his physical recovery and the band's creative rebirth following a turn of the century slump. Kick The Chair and Something That I'm Not reset sights on the menace that guided their biggest triumphs. The reappearance of original guitarist Chris Poland added interest, but really this is a Mustaine solo record in all but name.



## Killing Is My Business... And Business Is Good!

(COMBAT, 1985)

**5** The sound of an angry young man rejected by other angry young men, Megadeth's debut was designed to settle scores. Mechanix reclaims a Mustaine composition pinched for Metallica's *The Four Horsemen*, and *Loved To Deth* and *Rattlehead* set a land speed record for fretboard navigation, while the jazz chops of Chris Poland and Gar Samuelson threw in roadblocks for anyone who dared have a go. The closing shred reggae cover of *These Boots Are Made For Walkin'* is a parting middle finger.



## United Abominations

(ROADRUNNER, 2007)

**9** A cursory glance at *United Abominations*'s tracklisting – *Play For Blood*, *Amerikhasstan* – reflects its creation as the cost and political motivations of the Bush administration's War on Terror became increasingly apparent. Some of the ire within was aimed at the band's former record labels too. Bar a superfluous retread of 1994's *À Tout Le Monde* with Lacuna Coil's Cristina Scabbia buried in the background, *United Abominations* is a satisfying salvo of punishing riffs and militant aggression.



## Countdown To Extinction

(CAPITOL, 1992)

**4** Megadeth's most commercial album is an embarrassment of riches, with all four members of the classic line-up contributing to songwriting. The six-minute *Ashes In Your Mouth* spewed intertwining guitar meltdowns that satisfied conservative thrashers, while *Sweating Bullets*' Jekyll and Hyde stomp was catchy enough to propel Megadeth to double-platinum-selling status. The title track's indictment of hunting caged animals would also garner the band a bizarre accolade: The Humane Society's Doris Day Music Award.



## Youthanasia

(CAPITOL, 1994)

**8** The last truly solid album produced by the peak line-up with Marty Friedman and Nick Menza. True, there was nothing as snottily in-your-face as *Peace Sells...*, but Megadeth's continued trajectory into radio-friendly metal would, briefly, reap dividends. *À Tout Le Monde* – all brooding pathos and cathartic guitar harmonies – is the quintessential Megadeth ballad cemented on set lists to this day, but *Reckoning Day*'s transition from steamroller rampage to classical-inflected acoustic bridge is just as affecting.



## Endgame

(ROADRUNNER, 2009)

**3** While post-millennium 'Deth offerings will always stoke a desire to return to vintage material, special recognition should go to *Endgame*, a late-career gem where all the classic elements aligned. The title track's conspiracy theorist diatribe of waking up in a police state ('the US of A') is classic Mustaine territory and the proggy thrash gallop that follows even more so. The scything guitar duels with Chris Broderick on *This Day We Fight!* keep the pedal to the floor and, crucially, Mustaine's snarl throughout possesses enough vitriol to dissolve steel girders.



## Dystopia

(TRADECRAFT/UNIVERSAL, 2016)

**7** As has often proved the case with Mustaine, adversity brought out his best side on the 'Deth's 15th offering. After half his band quit following tours for 2013's offensively lacklustre *Super Collider*, Mustaine countered by hiring hotshot six-stringer Kiko Loureiro and Lamb Of God's powerhouse sticksman Chris Adler to deliver an explosive payload of "thrash 'em all and let God sort 'em out" crackers. The title track gained Megadeth their first Grammy after multiple snubs. Twelfth time's the charm...



## Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?

(CAPITOL, 1986)

**2** Released in thrash's annus mirabilis, *Peace Sells...* carved out Megadeth's place in the genre's Mount Rushmore. If *Wake Up Dead* and the cover art speak to the band's scorched earth policy, labyrinthine two-parter *Good Mourning/Black Friday* flexes their compositional muscles beyond being the quickest fingers on the West Coast. Meanwhile, the title track's tirade against American consumerism and power dynamics introduces concepts that have become Mustaine mainstays. Also, *My Last Words* is a flesh-flaying belter.



## So Far, So Good... So What!

(CAPITOL, 1988)

**6** Chemicals were already starting to rust Megadeth's engine by their third album. Drummer Gar Samuelson and guitarist Chris Poland were dismissed for hocking their gear to score heroin, while Mustaine's own habit would see him enter rehab after crashing into an off-duty cop's car in 1989. Despite the surrounding chaos, it's a sturdy release. Skip the cover of *Anarchy In The UK* in favour of *In My Darkest Hour*, an elegy for Mustaine's former Metallica bandmate, Cliff Burton.



## Rust In Peace

(CAPITOL, 1990)

**1** Megadeth's fifth record was a confluence of intensity and virtuosity that perhaps realised thrash's potential even more than Metallica's knotty... *And Justice For All*. With Marty Friedman sparring with Mustaine on UFO guitar thriller *Hangar 18* and the Dave Ellefson-Nick Menza rhythm section detonating each of Lucretia's breakneck shifts in time-signature, Megadeth broadened metal's horizons through sophisticated compositions. *Rust In Peace* is an uncompromising monument to the genre's awesome power and not a speck of corrosion has formed on its cutting edge.