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Classics

For a brief moment in the mid-to-late 1980s, there existed one of those rare instances where two distinct music genres crossed paths and cross-pollinated leagues of successive

genres, mutating metal and punk music into more extreme and aggressive territory. It was a time when possibilities were realized, as fans of hardcore punk ala **Discharge** noted how well the speed metal of **Motorhead** fit their aggro tendencies and vice-versa. Punk got beefier, adding second guitars and more complicated song structures while metal revitalized itself with punk's fury and visceral roar.

These albums are perfect documents of this time in American underground music. They document the initial spark of creativity that resulted from the commingling of punks and hessians. This is the best of "crossover metal."

Sadly, this moment was brief and stained indelibly by the atrociously bad follow-up albums some of these groups put out after their peak. Once-DIY punks saw their more metallic efforts as a way to cash in, so the bigger production values and egos of these audio abortions cast long shadows over their sadly forgotten, yet still brilliant work. This list is a guide to the best albums these bands did before they got dull.



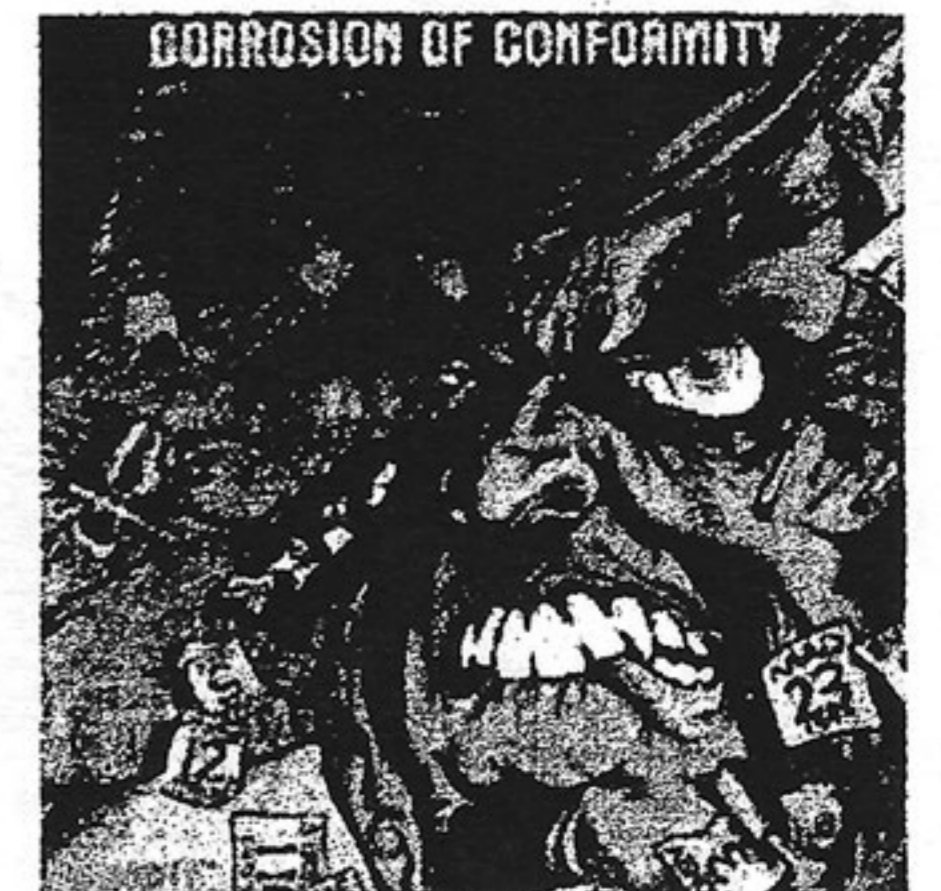
Attitude Adjustment *No More Mr. Nice Guy* (A Matter of Image, 1988)

This band initially put out a rather tedious, by-the-numbers hardcore album on the infamous Pusmort label called *American Paranoia* in 1986. After some sort of internal power struggle, a new band with most of the members and the simplified name "Attitude" released a more metal-influenced, yet still tedious turd entitled *Kein Schlaf Bis Deutschland* in 1987 on the German We Bite Label, which reeks of the post-core influence of the time, complete with dorky braided hair and rah-rah songtitles like "Homeless Crew" and "Save Thy Brother." Then in 1988, after most people had rightfully written them off, came a ferocious rebirth, stripped mean and lean in a shitty xerox cover. Gone were the nasally, boyish vocals, replaced with a much older, grizzled growl and straight-ahead thrashing that echoed the doom-ridden violence of the cover art. Song titles like "Born to Lose" and "Satan is God" fully trade in their earlier efforts of positivity for venom, and reworked versions of "Grey World" and "Attitude Adjustment" from *American Paranoia* added a grit their early work lacked. Unfortunately, *No More Mr. Nice Guy* is impossibly rare, so this band's ultimate legacy will probably remain unheard.



Corrosion of Conformity *Animosity* (Death/Metal Blade, 1985)

COC has made the longest career of all the bands mentioned here, so with a 20-year-plus history it may be hard to see past the rather bland chugga chugga metal pap they've been spewing since this landmark record. Before *Animosity*, COC was one of many scrappy punk bands playing hard, fast, and loud, but with the release of this album they evolved into something far more sinister than most politically-motivated hardcore punk bands ever were before.



Guitarist Woody Weatherman wears a Slayer shirt on the back cover and it's easy to see the dark influence the speed metal scene had on COC, who now built up their sonic outbursts into finely crafted monstrosities with guitar solos that added to the coming-apart-at-the-seams feel that nearly every song on *Animosity* bristles with. Don't say you like or dislike this band until you've heard this album at high volume!

Die Kreuzen *Die Kreuzen* (Touch and Go, 1984)

How often do you hear something this fresh from 1984? If anything, this 20-year-old scream from Milwaukee's gutter suggests that there is still a lot of territory to be covered in metallic-tinged hardcore. Ditching the straight ahead 4/4 or 2/2 beat of most metal/hardcore, Die Kreuzen cranked out the most hyperkinetic and bizarre rhythmic spasms of any band in either the hardcore punk or speed metal genres. They shred serious fucking ass. They followed up this masterpiece with 1986's *October File*, which found a more restrained, yet still tense listening experience; a pretty good listen after the exhausting

die kreuzen

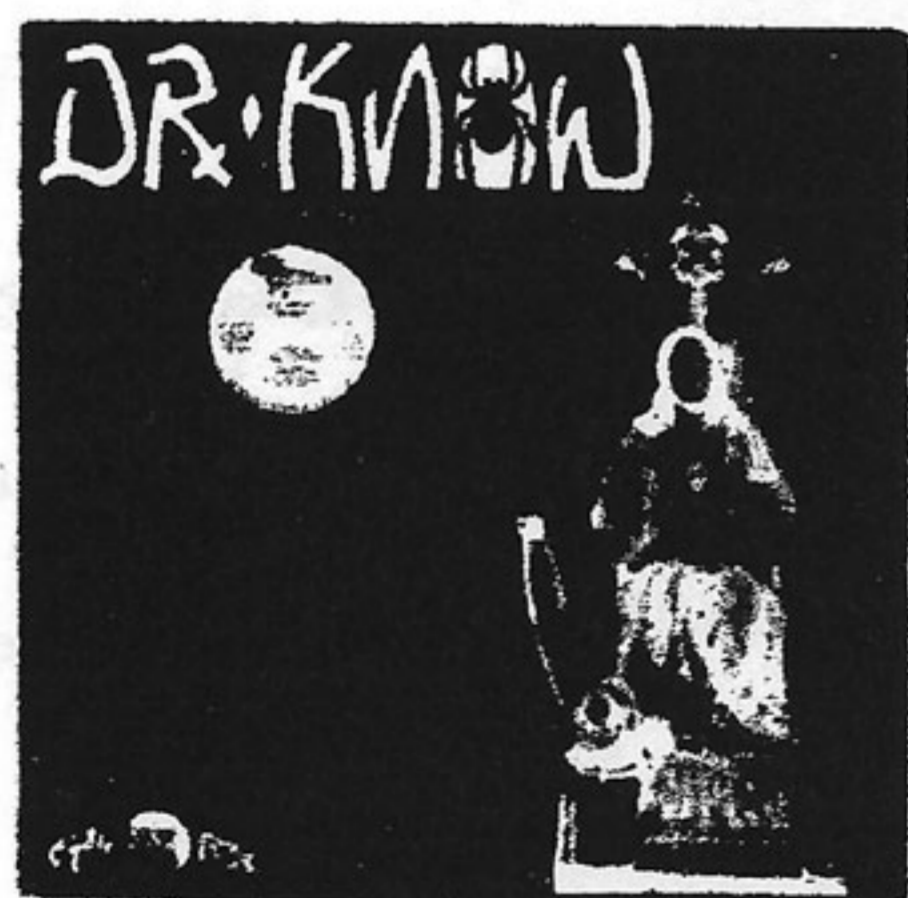


exorcism of their early work. Sadly, they decided to become a regular old mid-tempo rock band and their subsequent albums aren't much better than any weakass hair band of the time. In many cases

they're even worse. A pitiful death to some of the most startlingly original aggro music of all time.

Dr. Know *Plug-In Jesus* (Mystic, 1986)

All the macabre metallic mayhem dished out on the Mystic label from this Oxnard, CA band is worth checking out, from their 5-song 7" EP *Burn* to the many excellent compilation tracks (the label put out an assload of themed compilations, and the Dr. Know tracks were always the highlight) collected on the *Best of Dr. Know* LP. *Plug-In Jesus* has slightly better production (most Mystic releases were fuzzy and weak on the low end) and less formulaic songs, although like DRI they never strayed too far from the thrashing tempos



and occasional breakdowns that were a staple of the genre. The most recognizable element of Dr. Know is the pleading vocal style of Kyle Toucher (with a slightly whinier Brandon Cruz on vox in the early days) that sounded like Igor channeled through Slayer's Tom Araya, singing about the horrors of murder

and mayhem with a sacrilegious tint in songs like "God Told Me To," "Life Returns," and "Crucified." You will hear no better example of the power of crossover than when Kyle Toucher belts out "Crucified! Like a piece of meat!" over the blazing snarl of Dr. Know's uniquely buzzing, dirty dual guitar attack. They gained a modest following and petered out with some weaker records, *Wreckage in Flesh* and *This Island Earth*, which amazingly has some piano parts that almost work. More amazingly, Poison Idea was able to brilliantly fit piano into the crossover equation on *War All The Time*.

DRI *Dealing With It* (Death/Metal Blade, 1985)

The Dirty Rotten Imbeciles had established themselves as one of the fastest punk bands in the US scene with *Violent Pacification*

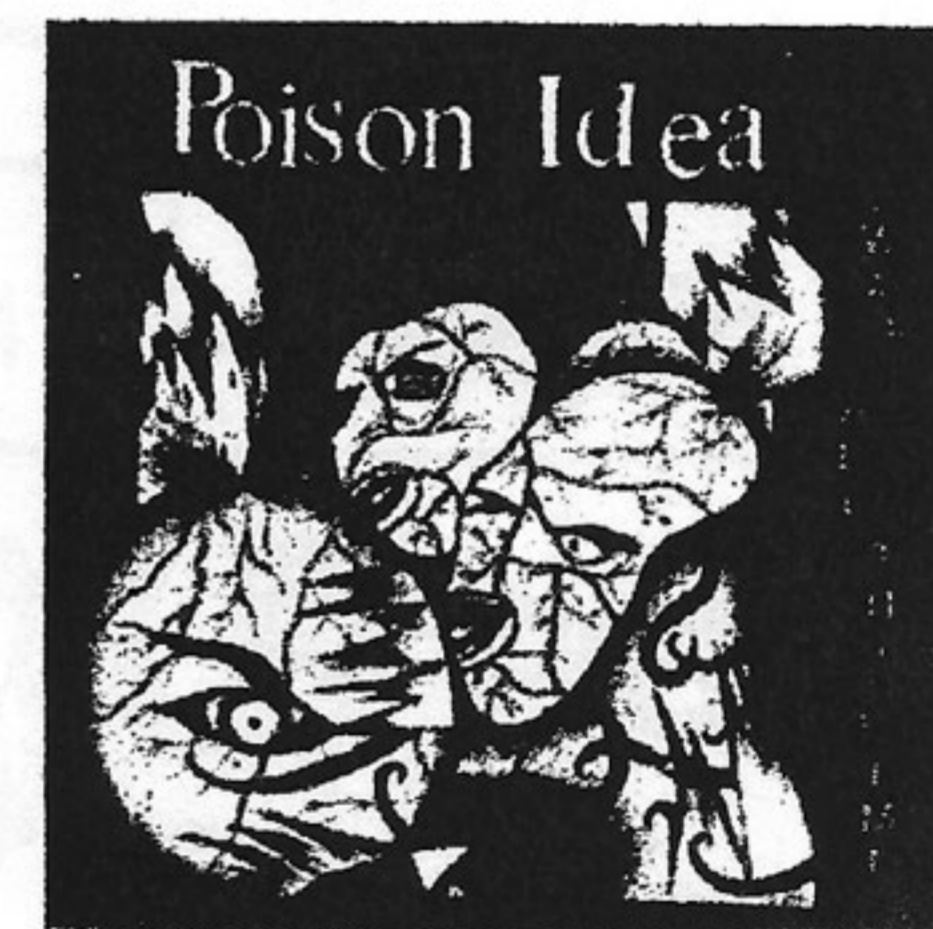
and *Dirty Rotten LP* in 1984, and like labelmates COC in 1985, they added a heavier sound, more guitar solos, and more complex song structures to what would be their landmark crossover record. DRI maintained the simpler hardcore-style staple of fast-slow-fast sections that aren't as ornately designed as COC's finest work. *Dealing With It* teeters dangerously close to being wearisome as 25 tracks whizz by at breakneck speeds, but there are enough start/stops and breakdowns to keep things interesting. And while it lacks the meanness of its contemporaries, *Dealing with It* holds its own with a less serious, yet tightly-wound and effective pummeling.



Ironically, their next album entitled *Crossover* marked their departure from anything more interesting than dull heavy metal.

Poison Idea *War All The Time* (Alchemy, 1987)

While Poison Idea rests comfortably in the punk rock stable (their previous album was *Kings of Punk* after all), few can deny that this portly Portland group wasn't touched by the metal hand, beginning with this release. The back cover photo not only shows some longhairs in the group, but a second guitarist as well — a tell-tale sign of metaldom. Issued on the doomed Alchemy label, then rereleased in 1994 by another doomed label, Tim/Kerr, *War All The Time* has had a hard time finding itself an audience, which is a pity since this record marks an amazing fusion of hard and heavy hardcore with heady pretensions (the title is taken from a Charles Bukowski poem) and fussed-over production. Most PI fans are content with *Feel the Darkness*, their 1990 release, but it lacks the experimentation and burning songwriting style that continually ups the ante on *War All The Time*, instead opting for more obvious and less interesting avenues. The hardly subtle cover of *Darkness* has Tiny Tim with a gun to his head; a far cry from the weirdo surreal cover of *War*, which is reflected in its more-developed sound. The Boston based Taang! Label has reissued most of their work, including some recent 7"s of the reformed group, so hopefully they will get this lost classic back in circulation sometime soon.



Prong *Primitive Origins* (Spigot, 1987)

Here's one last band that tarnished its "primitive origins" by slowing their music down and trying to be fancy musicians. They even managed to get a minor hit and video on MTV from their weak *Beg to Differ* album, but of course it's long forgotten now, even though their two first records, *Primitive Origins* and *Force Fed* hold their own among crossover metal's fiercest. With throaty, near-Grover vocals and ceaseless velocity maintained through sturdy-yet-squealing guitar, this NYC trio knew how to fuck shit up proper. The last instrumental track, "Persecution," is one of the best crossover metal tracks ever. ■

