STEROID MAXIMUS
Gondwanaland
(Big Cat/All formats)
JIM 'FOETUS' Thirlwell's latest manifestation finds him
orchestrating a sprawling
soundtrack to the scariest movie
never made, a Vietnam bad-trip
horror opera from the deepest
bowels of the Inferno itself.

Assisted by dark-rock
extremists like Roli Mosiman and
Don Fleming, Thirlwell reins in
the elemental forces of pure
noise before letting slip the dogs
of war. Our descent begins
harmlessly enough in a scarred
cityscape of timeless big-band
bebop, The Man With The
Golden Arm updated and fed
through samplers, all crashing
brass and film noir tension. But
then, imperceptibly, the scene
shifts to some hideous
underground abbatoir ringing
with Muslim prayer chants and
the disturbing death moans of
doomed creatures.

Then all hell breaks loose.
Several levels down we hear the
defaening roar of subway trains
colliding, massed demonic choirs
screaming in unison, slaves being
beaten to bloody offal in the
shadowy depths of some rusting
supertanker as it crosses an ocean
of toxic sludge. Yep, it's party
time and Beelzebub's buying.

Oases of calm punctuate the
dislocation, but calm of a
distressing kind. The breathy
moans of someone either being
tortured or brought to a vigorous
climax, elegant string passages
that could almost belong to
Debussy or Mahler. Except
Mahler never used a chainsaw.

Test Department, Swans and
even Barry Adamson have
scoured different quadrants of
this windswept tundra before,
but Thirlwell comes closest to
creating an entire universe of
pain and deformed beauty. (7)

Stephen Dalton