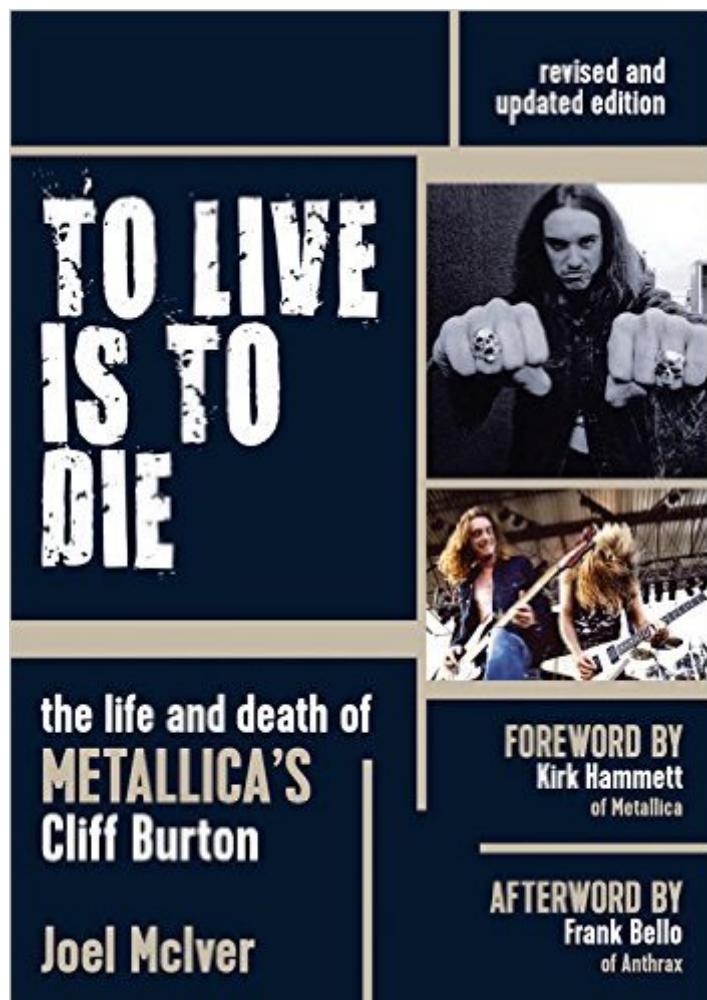


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To Live Is To Die: The Life And Death Of Metallica's Cliff Burton



Synopsis

Metallica - the seventh-biggest recording act in American history - are consummate musicians, but it wasn't always that way. Their early career is marked by a gradual evolution from garage-level thrash to sophisticated, progressive heights - an evolution driven by their bass player, Cliff Burton. Burton pushed the band to new heights with his musical training, songwriting ability, and phenomenal bass skills across three albums: Kill 'Em All (1983), Ride The Lightning (1985) and Metallica's undisputed masterpiece, Master Of Puppets (1986). He was the first heavy metal bassist since Black Sabbath's Geezer Butler to regard the bass as a lead instrument, delivering intricate live solos based on classical fugues and even laying down a solo track on Metallica's debut album. Cliff's life was short but influential; his death was sudden and shocking. At the age of just 24, he was killed when Metallica's tour bus overturned on a remote Swedish mountain road in the early hours of September 27 1986, crushed to death after being thrown from his bunk through a window. The driver, who has never been identified, told the rest of the band that the bus had hit black ice, leading to the accident; singer James Hetfield refused to believe him and has often spoken publicly about his doubts. With Cliff's death, Metallica's most critically acclaimed period of activity ended. They went on to record huge-selling albums, but by their own admission never pushed the creative envelope as radically as they had done in the first four years of their career. In 2006, a group of dedicated Metallica fans unveiled a memorial to Cliff at the site of his death; the cult of Burton grows year on year, with bassists of many musical styles (even outside heavy metal) acknowledging his influence. This revised and updated edition, published to mark the 30th anniversary of Burton's sad passing, adds a new appreciation of Cliff's influence on a new generation of rock and metal bass players, with commentary from the cream of the modern bass scene, plus a look at his signature bass gear and Metallica's current activities, which reference the Burton era more profoundly than ever before.

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Customer Reviews

Well, it has taken nearly 23 years, but Clifford Lee Burton has finally gotten some of the respect he deserves, a book dedicated to his life, thanks to Joel McIver. All these years, we only had the Cliff 'Em All Video and brief commentary that you would see on Metallica documentaries. Sadly enough, Cliff was just a mere side note and almost always glossed over, which gave the newer Metallica fans a false sense of how the band developed their style and attitude, which in return, outraged the old fans. The book did a good job detailing Cliff's days before he joined Metallica, with his musical training that was inspired by the death of his older brother and the support he had from his parents Jan and Ray Burton. The book also touches on his bands prior to Metallica, which were Easy Street and most notably Trauma. McIver details all of the tracks that Cliff played on, with moderate bass detail from Kill 'Em All through Master of Puppets. The only omission would be the Creeping Death 12" single, in which Am I Evil? and Blitzkrieg were on the B-side. A lot of the quotes from Cliff and other people, I had heard many times and could practically finish the sentence, but there is very little to go on, being that Cliff didn't do many interviews. I only wished there were more recounts from people and bands he had toured with. I also found some date inconsistencies in the book. It was refreshing to hear some of the more recent recounts from people like Ron Quintana, Harold O, Brian Slagel, Fred Cotton and some of his earliest friends. To me, the memories and testimony from Corinne Lynn, Cliff's girlfriend, is what made the book special.

Cliff has always been my favorite member of Metallica and, given his untimely death early in the band's career, coupled with his not giving many interviews, he's always been a bit of a mystery man as well. Cliff needed a book written about him, and I'm glad this author took on the task. The book's heart is in the right place as it pays righteous dues to the influence Cliff had within Metallica and to his cool, focused personality, all the more awesome given his young age. The author clearly did his homework and spoke to a good many people, including not only Metallica members and associates, but also Cliff's friends and bandmates from pre-Metallica days and his girlfriend Corinne Lynn. Besides the personal details, the author also goes into some educated detail about Cliff's bass playing, while making an effort (as he explains) not to go overboard with the geek stuff. All in all, a

great subject and not a bad book. So, why only three stars? Couple things. Although the personal stories about Cliff from those who knew him well are the best parts, the book often devolves from being the story of Cliff to being the story of Metallica generally. I realize some background is necessary, but there's a bit too much at times - it seems almost like padding in spots to make the book long enough. Example: There's an account of how, after Metallica's first big US stadium show, James Hetfield and a friend got really drunk, threw food at audience members, trashed the dressing room, and later wrote obscenities on the seat of another friend's white pants. This story goes on for pages, and the only thing it has to do with Cliff is that (as the author recounts in like, two lines) Cliff refused to participate in the food throwing and trashing. Multiply that by about two or three stories per chapter.

Reading it halfway through, I must say that this book is a joy to read for all metalheads out there, yet most importantly for music lovers of various tastes. Citing Flea's precise adjectives, the 'deep, wicked and virtuosic bass player' persona reflected out of Cliff Burton's (bass) musical genius is well inspected, documented, as well as revised by a truly committed author like Joel McIver in his metal literary works. This is immensely reflected in this biographic work, exposing the personally wise, intellectual, honest, hence diligent character of Cliff Burton, from his humble upbringing in the 'hippie' Castro Valley surroundings (owing to his supportive parents), through his committed musicianship in mastering and revolutionizing the art of metal bass guitar shredding, and his influential role and impact as the 'mediating', yet 'pioneering' point of reference which innovated Metallica's music in their prime, from 1983's 'Kill'Em All', up to the 1986 masterpiece 'Master of Puppets'. Cliff exposed such persona through mastery of musical theory, to Lars, James and Kirk, innovating Metallica's sound up-to-date. Likewise, the way how McIver's description of Cliff's character is seen is well-focused, pin-pointing specifically upon his unique DIY attitude and overall philosophy of life. This is seen through a committed author like McIver delivering close interviews ranging from Metallica's bandmates, recording producers and road crew, up to his distant and close friends, altogether with his parents, Ray and Jan. The book closes with a detailed review of his untimely death and McIver's predictive-visionary evaluation of the possible contribution and impact of such a bass genius in post-Cliff Metallica till today.

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