If you know Lacuna Coil then you’ll already be aware that every album entry in their storied career is more than just a sound. Each one is a richly textured soundtrack to a specific time and a place. With *Sleepless Empire*, that place is dark, cinematic, and unmistakably true to the unique characteristics that have given Lacuna Coil such a celebrated entry in the annals of heavy music.  
 As founding songwriter-in-chief Marco Coti Zelati, aka Maki explains, while the writing process for Lacuna Coil’s tenth studio record began in December, the record’s real creative birth coincided with the release of 2022’s *Comalies XX*, a 20th-anniversary reimagining of their landmark 2002 record, *Comalies*. It was more than an epic and rapturously received reinvention of that 21st century classic. It would serve to align the past, the present, and the future of Lacuna Coil as they take their first steps into the fourth decade of their remarkable career.  
 “I never get stuck in the past,” says Maki. “Sure, I still love Type O Negative and Paradise Lost, but I also love soundtracks: big orchestral stuff like Hans Zimmer, Danny Elfman or even John Williams. If people had a chance to listen to *Sleepless Empire* without the voice, guitars or drums – the orchestral part – it’d be a soundtrack because it’s very cinematic and that’s how I spend most of my time. I grew up watching movies all day long, even with my father – there was this massive culture of movies and soundtracks, even iconic horror ones like *Friday the 13th* or *Halloween* and obviously growing up in Italy, Goblin and their incredible soundtracks for *Profondo Rosso* and *Suspiria*.”  
 And from the colossal refrains of album opener *The Siege* to the wickedly catchy *I Wish You Were Dead* and the irrepressibly classic feel of *Sleepless Empire’s* title track, there’s no mistaking the confidence of Lacuna Coil’s latest, and it has its share of surprises, too. They come in the form of two very special guest appearances from none other than New Years Day banshee Ash Costello on their epic In *The Mean Time* and an ear-splittingly over-the-top contribution from Lamb of God singer Randy Blythe on *Hosting the Shadow.* According to founding vocalist Andrea Ferro, Randy’s inclusion was a family affair.  
“We met Randy when we did Ozzfest together back in 2004,” he says. “We were on the same stage and we started a friendship and always stayed in touch – we toured together in so many different situations and at so many festivals, so we know each other – he’s really like a part of the family to us. Finally doing a collab with him was both a natural thing but also a huge honor for us, as we’re friends but also fans.”  
 As for the addition of Ash Costello to the proceedings, it came from a place of mutual admiration and wanting to bring her celebrated vocal style into the fray.  
 “We were searching for that perfect ‘rock’ voice,” Ferro explains. “Not too clean or symphonic but rather something with fire in it, and she has it – exactly what we needed for that part. We really loved what she did to the song, it’s absolutely perfect.”  
 And if there’s a special edge to *Sleepless Empire* it’s about more than that vocal cross pollination alone. As Ferro explains, the key to Lacuna Coil’s eternally youthful aura is their curiosity and ability to respond creatively to new inspiration without losing sight of the qualities that make them who they are – and he counts Sleep Token, Spiritbox, Bad Omens, and Bring Me The Horizon as examples of other bands who are doing the same to keep the scene and their own sounds vibrant. That independent spirit has been key to balancing Lacuna Coil’s artistic prerogative against the weight of expectation, and Ferro is emphatic when describing how these strange times have generated no shortage of material to influence *Sleepless Empire’s* weighty lyrics and mood.  
 “Our sound is dark because it reflects the society we’re living in – it’s a portrait of our times,” he says. “We’re from a unique generation that remembers the analog world but lives in the digital one, we’re the first generation that’s lived through both so we’ve been witnesses the change to our society and that’s the *Sleepless Empire.* Everyone is always on their phone, always scrolling, always doing something – morning to night, it just never stops.”  
 And it’s perhaps the simultaneous promise and peril of our increasingly tech-governed world that’s been on Cristina Scabbia’s mind for some time, an unease she’s channeled into Lacuna Coil’s latest. It’s a feeling she’s unafraid of expressing outside of the studio, too.  
 “Before *Comalies XX* we literally stopped creating,” she says. “With the pandemic going on, everything was so negative around us that we didn’t want to connect to anything and in some way, it was like a comeback for us because it renewed our love of songwriting, but we needed to find a spark that’d create the concept for our record. We love singles, but we like an idea of a whole record that tells a story – the kind that captures a moment in time.”  
 It’s a philosophy that’s reflected in every aspect of *Sleepless Empire*. The album’s box set includes an Oracle divination game which the band have playfully hidden in the booklet for fans to find. It also influenced their decision to work with Neapolitan illustrator Roberto Toderico, whose stunning cover art is something that Cristina explains reflects a deeper sentiment than a purely aesthetic choice. It’s an expression of the band’s desire to remain defiantly authentic in an increasingly challenged creative landscape.  
 “I met Roberto at a comic convention. I love his work because it’s completely handmade,” she says. “People pretend that AI is creating something new and I disagree with that. I’m not against tech, what I’m against is people confusing tech with 100% creativity like music or painting or drawing that comes from what you have inside. I understand people’s pain from all this because I feel that too.”  
 It’s perhaps that perspective that gives *Sleepless Empire* such a timely but timeless feel. It’s a portrait of these times, and a powerful statement of intent from a band at ease with their past and defiantly forging ever-forward.