

EVOKEN: SHADES OF NIGHT DESCENDING, AGAIN!

What you hold in your hands is the long-awaited reissue of Evoken first proper recording, produced for a little more than 500\$ in 1994 and initially released as a self-released demo later that year in 534 copies only. Already re-released in February 1996 by French label Adipocere with a different cover, 'Shades of Night Descending' is still where everything began for Evoken. As a vital addition to both 90's extreme metal and early doom/death aficionados, and after being out of print for over ten years, it is now finally available again, with five bonus tracks taken from the first two post-'Shades' recordings. Funny how the band's status has changed since then because in 1992, with no specific direction and all the scene attention focused on death-metal, Evoken weren't exactly preparing themselves to rewrite doom/death rulebook.

Actually, when the band got kickstarted sometimes in New Jersey in early 1992 by the original trio of Nick Orlando (guitar), Rob Robichaud (bass), Phil Wilson (guitar), and Vince Verkay (drums), who joined the fold two months later, they weren't even called Evoken yet but Funereus. Doom, death, whatever: they haven't made up their mind yet and simply went for being as extreme as possible, as Vince recalls with a drop of irony: "Well, believe it or not but in our early days, we were actually more extreme than we are now! The songs at that point were over 12 minutes long, and kept at one pace...slllloooooowwwwww. These were pre-'Shades', and actually would be rewritten several times, with some songs completely scrapped! I think it was a time when weren't absolutely sure what direction we were looking to go." Ironically enough, although Evoken are now usually uttered with utmost respect along Thergothon and Shape of Despair are the forefathers of the so-called 'funeral doom' movement, back then they more a slow-paced death metal outfit than an actual doom band and Nick is the first to admit it: "Evoken has always sounded as such to me. I could go as far as saying that at no moment in our history have we ever played straight-up 'true doom'. We all listened to death fucking metal when we were younger and that's where our roots lie. So there was no question that we wanted our brand of doom to be the heavier, deathlier, darker brand of doom/death than your average, run of the mill Black Sabbath/St. Vitus clone band. Hell, we even had some black-metal influences and you can hear them in both 'Shades' and our 'Promo 1996'!" Actually, initiated by Robichaud who was at the time a rabid black metal fan, Funereus briefly switched after a couple of rehearsals to Asmodeus but soon realized that this moniker was already overused... "Plus, it made us sound like a black metal band, something we've never been" underlines Vince. "So, after some ideas, Nick phoned me up one night and asked "what do you think of the name 'Evoken'? As the rest is our own doomed history."

Although Vince says it was chosen for "a couple of reasons, one of them being that it just fit what we were trying to do", this choice was first and foremost a nod to the band's main influence at the time, Finland's Thergothon whose first and only demo 'Fhtagn-nagh Yog-Sothoth', released in late '91, featured a track simply called, well, "Evoken". "We were already fans of the demo but when their album 'Stream from the Heavens' came out, it just floored us! It was just one of a mass of influences that pointed in the direction we were looking to go at the time."

One needs to put things in context to fully understand 'Shades' profound Alien nature as around that time (1992/93), the underground extreme scene was at crossroads. While thrash-metal and heavy-metal were grasping for air, death-metal had just reached its peak. Morrisound studio was the place to be, Scott Burns the only "worthy" producer out there and there seems to be a constant flow of new bands popping up everyfuckinwhere. The more candidates to fame were appearing, the more the initial brotherhood spirit of the tape trading scene was fading away and the competition was harsh to say the least, every newbie trying to be faster, more technical, just more everything than their next akin. In the middle of it all, Evoken stood out like a sore thumb. Even the debut gig, performed at 'The Wave' in Staten Island, turned out to be hardcore warmongers Biohazard! Talk about wrong casting... "We didn't really fit in any kind of scene and as far as doom/death went, the bands were rare. Each country had maybe a handful, and not as many as you see today, especially in the U.S. You could count on one hand the amount of bands doing what we were doing. Plus it was so far scattered! Worldwide you had the likes of the might DISEMBOWELMENT in Australia, Dusk and Winter in the U.S and Thergothon in Finland but that's it. It was a very small genre, fans of metal and zines really weren't sure what they were hearing. Questions always would arise "why play so slow?" Nevermind playing live! Those watching could not understand why no sections to headbang to, or jump around too. At the time, nobody understood it was music to be absorbed, not let out. I guess in retrospect that maybe we didn't want to take part in this speed race and went the opposite way. But, it went beyond just trying to be the slowest. For us, the most important aspect, which still carries till today, is to be the heaviest! You can play five BPM, with one note being hit every two minutes but, if you're missing that power behind it, if you're missing that low-end to drag you down into your seat while listening, then it's pointless! As we started to progress in our writing, being the slowest did not hold the importance as it once did, although we still aimed at being the heaviest. Anyone can write super slow songs, but to be truly inspired by dark atmospheres and that gut-wrenching feeling of absolutely hopelessness is something else. And when you bring the low-end to the whole thing, it makes the experience complete for the listener... Well at least, it does for us anyway." By distancing

themselves from the rest of the pack, Evoken knew they were deemed to be left on their own unsupported while the rest gathered all the glory and fame. "In the US, we simply had no reaction. I guess people simply didn't care, nor had they any grasp on why we were doing this. Why play slow like this? What can you get out of listening or playing this slow? When we started, it was toward the tail end of the death metal explosion and b metal was on the rise with all its antics and theatrics. Simply put, nobody here wanted to listen to a twelve minute song move at a slow pace! People wanted something to headbang to, fast songs about church burnings, worshipping Satan or disemboweling someone. Things were different in Europe: fans were simply more opened to different things and this genre of doom wasn't so new to them. They had an understanding, with reviews being favorable. That's why in the early days, 75% of the interest and letters we received came from that part of the world."

Although the band had been rehearsing those songs for over a year, by the time they entered Solid Sounds Studio in Whippany, New Jersey, things were still pretty shaky. "At that point, we were only together as a full band only a few months. Our experience in actually going into a studio to do a proper recording was next to nothing and I didn't even have a drum kit then. I had to actually record the drums twice: when I laid down my parts the first time, I was so keyed up and nervous, I played the songs double the speed they were supposed to be. So when we listened to the whole thing right before recording the bass tracks, we realized the songs were too fast, with the times for the songs almost cut in half! We had a hard time convincing our engineer Matt to re-do all things, believe me... With inexperience also came silly decisions: instead of being smart about studio time, we booked time during the week, which meant going to work, coming home, eating dinner and heading to the studio together. We would finish up sometimes 3AM and have to be in work the next morning, which meant getting two or three hours sleep, then have to do it all over again the next day!" So what do you do when you're an underground band with no following, no money and no friends in higher places but yet are trying to somehow get as much recording time as possible to make sure your first demo sounds as great as possible?! You keep your fingers crossed, hoping to be lucky: "The budget for the recording was anything but normal. We recorded this MCD on a skeleton budget, and really had to figure out a way to be able to pay for the recording/mixing. So, we got VERY lucky. I believe, remember this was some time ago so, my recall is a bit hazy, we had around \$500.00, out of our own pocket to try and record. We knew this wasn't going to cover the whole process, so we paid for the rest of the recording and mixing of the album with cases of knishes, a popular Jewish snack food! When we mentioned John could get them for him by the case, we discovered our engineer's

weakness for them. So, 'Shades of Night Descending' was done on a budget of cash, and cases of knish!" The self released version of 'Shades' was put out in November '94, with a dripping logo designed by Verkay and openly inspired by Unleashed's army, and a beautiful and bewitching B&W cover by nineteenth century English romantic painter John Martin. "Fallen Angels Entering Pandemonium" was initially commissioned in colors to illustrate John Milton's 'Paradise Lost' in 1824. When former Amaymon guitar player Christian Bivel contacted the band in late '95 to rerelease 'Shades' on Adipocere, a French label which already made a name for itself by producing Crypt of Kerberos sole album or Moonspell first EP, he insisted on using another painting for the cover. But for this reissue, a brand new art was commissioned to Robert Høyem from At the Ends of the Earth Designs, Norway, an artists Vince discovered on the internet.

From then on, Evoken worked their way up on the food chain by hooking with guitarist/producer Ron Thal (yes, of Bumblefoot and, later on, Guns N'Roses fame!) and But that's another story, although the spirit of 'Shades' lingered on the rest of Evoken's discography. "The studio we used for 'Shades' had been sold soon after we recorded. So, we never returned there naturally, or rehearsed there since it was a rehearsal studio as well as a recording studio. Years later, when we were recording 'Quietus', the studio we were using closed down (yes, we have a black cloud that follows this band). Ron had to find another studio so we could finish up laying down the final tracking. That studio would turn out to be where we recorded 'Shades of Night Descending', under new ownership but still looking the same after 7 years, the only difference being that aside the fact the owner thought it was a good idea to have three worst porno movies on while we were trying to finish up, they made there the worst coffee known to mankind!" Reflecting on those early years, Vince admits that we were quite inexperienced then and it shows. But still, those were very exciting times for us. Maybe we didn't have a proper direction back then we had dedication and creative will. Still, it's still hard to grasp that we started as far back as 1992. But Evoken is basically our life up to this very day! It's what balances us and keeps us from going completely insane. Still, it's strange to think that at one point, at the very start of the whole thing, it was only Nick and I. We actually came so very close to simply ending it before it even started, and now here we are. So many things have happened over the years, things we never thought possible. We survived many line-up changes because the band's core - Nick, John, and me - we never wavered in our dedication to this. They, as well as our current line-up, are my brothers, in every sense of the word. And 'Shades' is where it all started."

Olivier 'Zoltar' Badin, Paris, October 2009