

## Darkthrone – A Blaze In The Northern Sky



Distorted tremolo-picked guitars. Unrelenting blast beats. Adamantly lo-fi production quality. This is Norwegian black metal. This is where it all began. *A Blaze In The Northern Sky* is a record so firmly established among the pantheon of seminal metal recordings that one might forget how innovative this album truly was. What *Kill Em All* is to thrash metal, what *Black Sabbath* is to proto-doom metal, *A Blaze In The Northern Sky* is to black metal. And how amazing is it that Peaceville Records outright refused to release this project before Darkthrone threatened to release it through Euronymous' Deathlike Silence Productions?

The lasting impact of this album begins from the cover art itself, which is dark and minimal, yet evoking and mysterious, much like the music itself. Well, the music itself is not minimal – at all, really. The album's opening track, "Kathaarian Life Code," begins with the slow beating of a thunderous drum, which is then joined by an ominous cult-like chanting of "Agathosdaimon". As the chanting and beating rise in tension, we hear the creeping whispering of the band's lead singer, Nocturno Culto. Just when it seems like the three elements will arrive at a diabolic crescendo, Culto wretches, and we're immediately dropped into incessant blast beats and abrasive yet powerful distorted guitar riffs. It seems as if Darkthrone made it their personal mission to beat the listener's eardrums into submission, and do not once falter in this mission for the entirety of the album's 42-minute duration.

Which is not to mean that *Blaze* lacks melody or musical diversity. In comparison to the other two albums in what has been dubbed the Unholy Trinity, which are heavily riff-based, the tracks on this album are dynamic. You feel like the the tracks actually take you somewhere. The riffs, tempos, and rhythms change drastically and frequently throughout each song, lending to a sense of actual artistic arrangement rather than the meatheaded “brvtal” headbang-fodder that much of the “rawer” black metal of today is. Rather than falling into this common pitfall of repetitive riffing, the instrumentation on *Blaze* keeps the listener on edge, as they never know when the pace of the song will completely change from ominously-slow grooves to frenetic frostbitten jackhammering.

This is where the genius of this album lies. While to the uninitiated listener, black metal as a genre could be offputting due to its discordant and chaotic nature, fans of the genre adore it for those very characteristics, and no band embodies those characteristics like Darkthrone. The album is a non-stop battle between the guitars, drums, and vocalists over who can be the most extreme, and it’s all the better for it. While later bands like Emperor and Immortal were able to make the genre more accessible through more conventional guitar-playing and more complex songwriting, Darkthrone will always remain the band that epitomized the entire essence and aesthetic of black metal, and *A Blaze In The Northern Sky* will always be the album where they defined what black metal is for all the bands that followed and expanded on the sound.