

# THRASHPIT

## Behemoth's Pandemonic Incantations

1998's *Pandemonic Incantations* is in my opinion a stumbling block in the Behemoth cannon of music. At times horribly unfocused or even outright experimental, the disc went for broke so often that it was probably too much change at once. With this in mind, it is definitely interesting that the album is getting the reissue treatment here and now in 2006. Though messy, sloppy, and disjointed at times, *Pandemonic Incantations* is still Behemoth and still worth a listen. Why is this? The answer lies in the mists of history.

In many ways *Pandemonic Incantations* was always doomed to being a weaker release for the band. It is an album of groundbreaking firsts; first album with drumming wizard Inferno, first album to move away from Slavonic black metal and into blackened death metal ala Morbid Angel perhaps, and first album that let the band's light symphonic touches expand more into the forefront. All these elements combined to make an album much too large in scope for the space allotted it; Behemoth could in no way refocus the instruments, change genres, and break in a new bandmate with roaring success all on one single disc. That doesn't mean the band wasn't going to try; in fact, the most interesting part of the *Pandemonic* sessions is just how often Behemoth succeeds in spite of the odds stacked against them.

The vaguely Middle-Eastern folk melodies and grand symphonics of "Diableria (The Great Introduction)" sounds like something Dimmu Borgir might pen, and I don't really mean that as a touch of praise. Personally, I'm glad that Behemoth would go on to drop the majority of the symphonic elements from their sound on later albums; the band's strengths lie in fiery drumming and massive riffs, not epic flourishes befitting other bands in the sugary symphonic subgenre. "The Thousand Plagues I Witness" starts strong but flounders towards its jumbled end. An excellent blast of blackened riffing transitions into a slithering folk melody before the band drops what is arguably the first death metal tune of their career. Nergal's pitch-black shrieks have always been preferred by me personally, and on this, he vomits acidic howls and growls much scarier than the typical, gruff growls he bellows with now. Sadly, the song gets lost in some poorly mixed guitars, an inexcusably low solo, and a bit too much blastbeating for its own good.

"Satan's Sword (I Have Become)" has a riff that will sound wickedly hypnotic at first, but as the song languishes in its own personal eternity, chances are you will tire of it. This lack of diversity is mildly offset by a fairly swank chorus and what amounts to one hell of a rhythm section groove. All of it is decent, but I feel it is too little too late.

The next two songs mark a general upswing in the songs penned for this album. The first, "In Thy Pandemaeternum" flays your skin with some furious blackened death metal. The song has a few bursts of darkly symphonic pomp amidst the tremolo-picking and general chaos; all of it is airtight and Inferno especially dials in a numbing drum performance. A jaw-droppingly great percussion flurry near song's end leads right into the even better "Driven by the Five-Winged Star." "Driven" builds out of an icy yet freakishly melodic riff played at glacial speeds, all before a flash of

molten-picking speeds things up. The song next moves into a highly fulfilling pattern of atmospheric, slow, and patient riffing offset by brief assaults courtesy of some manic lead guitar playing. Chocked full of melody, precision, and speed, these solos are typical of the guitar style perfected by the band for album's like last year's stellar Demigod.

"The Past is like Funeral" is one of the band's last forays into purist black metal, and the simply ridiculous tremolo-picking contained therein might just sandpaper a face or two off. The song moves into what is best described as a whirlwind of pagan death metal, its swirling riffs coming straight from the void of nothingness itself. The song also maintains an odd amount of galloping melody, something that the band is still pretty strong at today. Good stuff!

"The Entrance to the Spheres of Mars" desecrates your ears with some crystalline synth effects buried under a massive avalanche of blasting black metal. As Nergal spits chunks of his lungs at you, Inferno gives one of his most dizzying drum sessions ever and the band briefly achieves the perfect fusion between their early black metal career and the future zenith they'd reach in the brutal death metal field. The perfect fusion between the two, "Mars" is everything the band is capable of turned into one rock-solid metal anthem. Utterly grand I'd say...this one is a real keeper.

"With Spell of Inferno" has been on so many various demos, bootlegs, reissues, and what have you that by now I should be totally sick of it; in a testament to the song's overall staying power, this is still one of the best songs on offer here. Shard after shard of jagged black metal fury slices you into tiny chunks of quivering flesh as Nergal delivers one of his strongest vocal moments EVER. Inferno is in perfect sync with both Nergal and bassist Mephisto; the song switches from blackened punk rock-outs to grandiose symphonic cadences to grooving, chunky death metal and back again with ease. This song is a Behemoth classic and with good reason; check this out and you'll realize just why this song has remained in so many setlists for so many years.

The disc is rounded out by a bevy of reissue-only extras, most notably the awkwardly named "Chwala Mordercom Wojchiecha (997-1997 dziefiec wjekow hanby)" which was initially released only on Polish versions of the original print run. It is a decent although unremarkable fusion of fist-pumping symphonics and slow riffing. Really, there is nothing else to it, and it seems so hastily put together it must have been easily forgotten Stateside anyways. After that one gets ripping live versions of "Diableria," "The Thousand Plagues I Witness," "Driven by the Five-Winged Star," and "Satan's Sword (I Have Become)" off the original album. There is also a live version of "From the Pagan Vastlands" off one of the band's early tapes. All of it is excellent and really adds a new dimension to each song; it is apparent that the band is a force to be reckoned with live.

Pandemonic Incantations is not a necessity unless one is a Behemoth completist. Regardless, the disc has many pivotal moments well worth revisiting, and one can easily trace the band's subsequent output directly from this point. To give you an idea of what worked, the band has upped the death metal stylistic quirks in lieu of the symphonic elements. Also, the black metal has slowly been absorbed into this template and skinsman Inferno has been in the band ever since, with many fans considering him an integral piece of the Behemoth puzzle. Though flawed in many ways, Pandemonic Incantations is by no means a total wash and is definitely full of interesting history. Check this out after a massive payday, especially if you are a Behemoth fanatic. Three-and-a-half stars.

## Behemoth's Pandemonic Incantations

1. Diableria (The Great Introduction)
2. The Thousand Plagues I Witness
3. Satan's Sword (I Have Become)
4. In Thy Pandemaeternum
5. Driven by the Five-Winged Star
6. The Past is Like Funeral
7. The Entrance to the Spheres of Mars
8. With Spell of Inferno
9. Chwala Mordercom Wojchiecha (1997-1997 dziec wjekow hanby)
10. Diableria (The Great Introduction) Live
11. The Thousand Plagues I Witness Live
12. Satan's Sword (I Have Become) Live
13. From The Pagan Vastlands Live
14. Driven by the Five-Winged Star Live

Final Rating: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Behemoth can be further researched at [www.behemoth.pl](http://www.behemoth.pl).

Mp3s can be heard over at [www.myspace.com/behemothofficial](http://www.myspace.com/behemothofficial).