

The Rainbow's End: A First Taste of Doom

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2003 was a strange year to be a young metalhead.

Aside from the looming shadow of global terrorism, a quickly developing surveillance state, the dissolving housing market and the unnamable tension that would become the general social unrest that we currently exist in, it was also very hard to find old metal CDs!

It was the cusp of the reissue craze that would eventually function as the last big burp of the metal CD market, and while the internet was a great tool for finding out about milestone metal albums, actually getting the goddamn things in your hand (or in my case, your Sony Discman) was a challenge that my meager teenage means and limited mobility could not easily meet.

Which is why I made an embarrassing squeal and instantly bought the Candlelight Records reissue of Candlemass' first of four masterworks, *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*.

I'd read reviews and heard discussions among my more seasoned metal friends about how important the album was to heavy metal, and in particular doom metal. I'd seen the cover, a piked white skull on black, on many a denim vest. I'd read descriptions of the songs long before I'd ever heard them, and seeing the thing grinning back at me, on a rack otherwise tumorous with the Century Media Records dreck from the era, was a wonderful thing indeed. I quickly purchased it with money that should have been spent on any number of more vital things, and walked it home.

It would be a few days before I could actually sit down with it.

I was 16 or so at this time, and in the throes of a "denim vest every day, no it doesn't smell, why don't girls like me?" phase that I would shake, uh, sometime later. Hopefully. I was on a trip to the Getty with my ceramics class, ostensibly to take in the Greek pottery exhibit on display. While that would prove interesting, though not as interesting as the more violent Catholic tapestries on martyrdom (cue intense headbanging), it was the ride there I was interested in. It was 90 minutes of uninhibited listening time, coupled with no desire whatsoever to speak with my peers. Perfect.

I stuffed my backpack with CDs that morning, and between my well-worn copy of Kreator's *Pleasure to Kill* and probably some Overkill albums, was *Epicus*.

I blazed through the familiar initially. Thrash metal had done well by me thus far and I was initially content to listen to Mille Petrozza threaten the masses with grisly ends, or Bobby Blitz bemoan a hard life I would not even begin to comprehend at that age. It was somewhere around Knott's Berry Farm that I decided, "Hey, I'm not just some thrasher, I'm an open minded guy with good ideas and a good beard!" and popped in Candlemass. While I'm not an open minded guy, and certainly did not have a good beard, as soon as the echoing guitar and synth opened up "Solitude," the opening track, it was clear that I at least had the one good idea in me.

Candlemass



Candlemass

*Epicus Doomicus
Metallicus*

06/1986

Leviathan Records

There was something magic to it. Beyond the mere weight of the song's opening, where reverbing guitar plucks and the mournful voice of Johan Langquist floated downward into the simple, brute nature of Mats Bjorkman's guitar, it was the simple, unadulterated sadness present that set it so far apart the path I'd known. A song literally pleading to be left alone to die could be read as immature or overdramatic, but hey, that's also a teen metalhead in a nutshell.

I don't remember if it was sunny or warm that day, but I do know that the tint set by just the first few moments of *Epicus* prevented that from being a reality. The world of the record was a cold one. From that first riff, the school bus became empty, the sky grey, and all motion taking place so far away that it wasn't even registering. The crescendo of "Solitude" came to a close, accompanied not by the explosive rage of my previous metal listening, but with one last request for a lonely death.

I was smitten.

Picking up from there was "Demon's Gate," opening with a youthfully enthusiastic, but ultimately goofy distorted voice, leading me on a walk into a very formulaic vision of Hell. It was more Principal Skinner than Satan, but as soon as the verse kicked in, the quality ceased to matter. Where words failed, music illustrated.

However, it was "Crystal Ball," the dark horse highlight of the album even now, that Candlemass took firm hold of their place in my heart. After an initial looming riff, part Sabbath and part drunk, an open guitar trill hung in the air, quickly cut off by a vocal and riff combination that is still rarely topped. An open stomp of a guitar line, accompanied by the frustrated, grieving lyrics of fortunes desired and lost, "Crystal Ball" was simultaneously fantastic and earthbound, a synthesis that I still seek in my own work. Bassist Leif Edling wrote most of the lyrics for the entire album, but was at his strongest in the song's final verse, choosing the perfect words. Similarly to the verse itself, I was rapt.

*"I saw the rainbow's end
I am raptured, I cannot pretend
I've found Atlantis
The talisman of Seth"*

That phrasing, "the rainbow's end" took the grey drive I was on to a deeper level. The ability to grasp hope and loss in so few words, taking the fantastic and linking it to something so intimately real, was something near a religious moment. Atlantis would not last. Seth's talisman, the eye he lost in revenge, would bring no wisdom. Your dreams can come true, and they can still be truly horrific.

Again, magic.

At that point the songs ceased to be songs as such. They were letters in the same word, and the word was *DOOM*. I did not hit pause, I did not skip around; I sat and listened. The album ended, and I put it on again. The petty interruptions of our trip's arrival and the lectures were just breaths before returning to Candlemass' world. Even as I write this, I find part of me pulling to return there, to seek that dark, still place I was shown that day.

The way I listen to, write and experience music after that first listen was changed forever with *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, not necessarily for the better or worse, but changed nonetheless.

It would be overdoing it to say that I returned from that Getty trip a changed person, because that sweaty, "bearded" mess of a teenager would continue on painfully stereotypical paths throughout his youth. With that, there would be plenty of other albums that would hit in just as powerful, though different ways, continuing to shape the Z-list riffer that is becoming painfully aware of his use of the third person here. But from that day, there was some level of awareness triggered within. Of a grey space constantly there, and a desire to not look away.

I may not wish for a solitary death, nor possess a crystal ball, but that world where both exist just outside of the one I live in is a place I did not know until then, and am grateful to know now.