

At its strongest, music is a gateway into another world. The key to a gate nothing else can pry open. Music, essentially, is a weapon to destroy the walls we built around us – and Finnish metal melancholists Insomnium are amongst its strongest wielders. Their ninth masterpiece, “Anno 1696”, leads us deep into a dark and troublesome past in Northern Europe. This is an age of unrest. The age of great famine in the North. The witch hunt is in full swing all across Europe and the gruesome witch trials have even reached the remote and majestic landscapes of Finland and Sweden.

Set to their latest batch of achingly beautiful, soul-cleansing post-doom dirges and accompanied by a sombre short story written by frontman Niilo Sevänen himself, Insomnium once more summon a manifesto of grief and hope from the ever fertile and melancholic Finnish soil.

Founded in 1997 in the Karelian city of Joensuu, Insomnium first gained recognition in 2002 with their wintry debut “In the Halls of Awakening”. Quickly building on this with fierce death/doom juggernaut “Above the Weeping World” (2006) or melancholic masterpiece “One for Sorrow” (2012), the Finns surprised everyone with their sublimely beautiful, achingly forlorn “Argent Moon” EP in 2021, only to shed their skin once more. “We have found our own thing and that trademark sound, but yet we don’t want to keep repeating ourselves and make the same album over and over again,” Niilo Sevänen underlines. “With every new member we have evolved a bit since all these incredibly talented musicians have brought their own magic along. If someone thought that we have grown soft with Argent Moon EP”, he impishly grins, “I think ‘Anno 1696’ shows that there is the same old spirit left.”

Mixed by Jaime Gomez Arellano (Orgone Studios) and mastered by Tony Lindgren (Fascination Street Studios), “Anno 1696” is by far their most accomplished, emotionally rattling, soaring achievement. Their ninth full-length hasn’t been the easiest genesis, though. “But we made it, and it’s coming straight from the heart”, Markus Vanhala says. “Making art is always a battle with yourself, is about beating yourself up and both channelling and enduring the strong feelings rising within you. But when you succeed in getting your creative process successfully done, there aren’t a lot of things beating this tiny moment of victory. Chasing that brief fleeting moment – that’s why we’re doing this for 25 years. Brief is the light on our chosen path.”

With “Anno 1696”, Insomnium take us into a world woven of sorrow and last crumbling vestiges of hope, of wrath and morbid lullabies, an album relying on the strengths of their beloved trademark sounds and a new sense of grandiose, melancholic storytelling. Welcome to 1696. Welcome to hell.