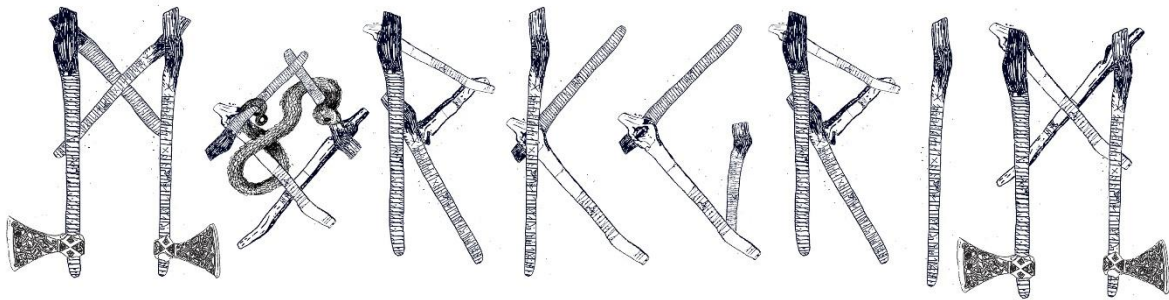


MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

Founded in 1994, Mørkgrim remained largely dormant for more than three decades before finally emerging with its debut album, “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*”. Rather than attempting to recreate the sound of the early '90s, the album draws on the project's original spirit while combining raw Black Metal with Folk, Norse traditions and the stark landscape of Nordfjord. Built around a concept of passage, ritual and transformation, it is as much an immersive experience as a collection of songs.

Behind Mørkgrim stands Hrafngrímnir, an artist whose musical journey has taken him from the Norwegian Black Metal underground to a successful career as a multiplatinum producer in American Hip-Hop. We spoke about the origins of Mørkgrim, the significance of the Old Ways, the album's intricate symbolism and the role of isolation, nature and collaboration in bringing *Sögur frá Norðfirði* to life. (JOKKE)



What made you decide that the time was finally right to awaken something you had left dormant for so long?

Back in the '90s, I was playing with other bands, while Mørkgrim existed mainly as a one-man project. I had ideas and a very clear vision for it, but at that point I simply didn't have the means to put everything together the way I heard it in my head.

Life moved on and music became an even bigger part of it, first through bands and eventually through my work as a producer. Mørkgrim never disappeared, but there was always something else demanding my attention.

Then my son told me I should finally make the record. Something clicked. I suddenly felt that I had both the reason and the ability to finish what I had started more than thirty years earlier.

In that sense, Mørkgrim wasn't really dormant. It was unfinished.

You wrote several Mørkgrim songs during the early days of the project, but they were never recorded. Did any of those compositions eventually find their way onto “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*”, or did you deliberately leave the past untouched?

Some of the DNA survived. I had old riffs and ideas from that period, and a few of them found their way into the album in completely new forms. Other things were rebuilt from the ground up, and a lot of the record was written from scratch.

I wasn't interested in making an archaeological reconstruction of what Mørkgrim might have sounded like in 1994. I wanted to preserve the feeling I had back then, not freeze the music in that year. So, the past is definitely inside the album, but it isn't trapped there. I wanted to make a record that feels timeless to me rather than one deliberately trying to sound old.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

The debut is a concept album entitled “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*”, or “*Tales from Nordfjord*”. What story does the album tell, and why was Nordfjord the place around which you wanted to build that story?

It isn't really a story with a conventional beginning, middle and end. I see it more as a passage through different states and places.

The listener moves through invocation, violence, descent, illumination, vision, rupture and ritual before eventually reaching a threshold. The raven opens the passage, blood and war enter it, darkness becomes fate, the northern lights reveal the presence of the dead, Freyja brings vision, Garm brings rupture, and Varðlokkur takes everything into ritual and magick.

Nordfjord became the natural world around that passage because this is where the album came into existence. Mountains, forests, fjords, mist, darkness, silence... They aren't scenery added afterwards. They are part of the world in which the record exists.



The album eventually reaches a shore, but there is no real ending. Even the hidden message appearing at the ninth minute of the outro is part of that structure. Nine has an important place within the Old Ways and throughout the album.

The final bonus track is not an epilogue. It is the threshold to wherever the journey goes next.

How did the landscape and history of Nordfjord shape the songs? Are the lyrics based on specific historical sources, local folklore and sagas, or are they largely your own interpretation of the old traditions?

I wouldn't say the landscape or history of Nordfjord wrote the songs for me, but being here gave them a physical world to exist inside.

The lyrics aren't meant as historical reconstructions or retellings of specific local sagas. They come from traditions, nature, lived experiences, magick and things that are very real and close to me, but everything is transformed through poetic storytelling.

The music combines raw early-'90s Black Metal aggression with acoustic Folk and Norse elements. Was finding the right balance between these two sides difficult, or did that combination come naturally? To be honest, I find the flow a little fragmented due to having equal parts Black Metal and Folk.

I understand the fragmentation you mean, but in a way that fragmentation is essential to the record.

I could have made a straight Black Metal album and kept the Folk material separate. It probably would have flowed more conventionally, but then the entire idea behind “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*” would have collapsed.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

I see the album almost like following a wanderer. The landscape changes around you. One moment you're crossing something violent and chaotic, then suddenly everything opens into silence, ritual or nature. Those changes are part of the journey.

So, I never really searched for a balance between Black Metal and Folk. Each part appeared where I felt the journey needed it. The fragmentation isn't something between the songs. It is part of the story they are telling.



As you mentioned, the album is very carefully constructed around the number nine, including its repetitions, track structure and the hidden message appearing at the ninth minute of the outro. Why did the number nine become such an important organising principle?

Nine has a deep significance within the Old Ways, so when the album began taking shape, it felt natural for it to become part of its architecture.

But I didn't use it because I wanted listeners sitting with a notebook trying to solve the record. Most people may never even notice everything connected to it, and that's perfectly fine.

It was more about constructing the album according to a language that means something personally to me.

Almost like painting something using symbols that have been part of your life for a very long time.

You don't necessarily need to recognise the structure to feel what it creates.

You say that the album is not meant to be decoded. Yet there is an enormous amount of symbolism, mythology and deliberate structure behind it. Is there a tension between wanting the listener to experience the journey intuitively and giving them so many clues to interpret?

Not really, because I don't see those things as clues. They were tools I used to build the world of the album.

The symbolism, numbers, rituals and traditions all mean something to me personally, but I'm not asking the listener to arrive at the same interpretation. They are the foundations underneath the record, not instructions for how to understand it.

I'd much rather someone close their eyes and let the album take them somewhere completely different from where it takes me.

The album is meant to awaken something – an image, a memory, a feeling, maybe something you can't even explain. That part belongs to the listener.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

The album was written and recorded on a remote farm where you deliberately live without many of the conveniences of modern life. How important was that physical isolation to the sound and atmosphere of “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*”?

The isolation didn't create the music. Those things were already inside me.

What the farm did was give the record surroundings that were coherent with what I was creating. Silence, darkness, weather, mountains, distance from people. Instead of having to imagine that atmosphere, I was living inside it.

For me, the environment became almost like a resonance chamber for the album. It reflected something that was already there and made it deeper.

And authenticity was important to me. I didn't want to write about one existence while living completely detached from it. Eventually, that went much further than making an album. This is where I now live permanently.

You describe the Old Ways not as an image but as a way of life. What does that distinction mean to you, particularly in a Black Metal scene where Norse mythology and heathen imagery have often become aesthetic rather than lived experience?

For me, the distinction is enormous.

The Old Ways are often reduced to mythology, religion, gods, symbols or something historical that people study. I don't see them that way. Those things can be part of it, but they are only what you see on the surface.

For me, it is much more about how you live according to the Old Ways: your relationship with yourself, nature, sacrifice, endurance, consequence and what you are prepared to give in order to achieve something meaningful.



I was called into this when I was a kid, and over time it became increasingly complex until it eventually became the foundation of how I live my life.

That doesn't mean romanticising the past. There is a price attached to living according to certain principles. Sacrifice is meaningless if nothing is actually sacrificed. But there are things you can discover through that process that can't really be understood from the outside.

I'm actually writing a book about this because I feel there is an entire dimension of the Old Ways that rarely gets discussed.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

Do you believe genuine isolation and a closer relationship with nature are necessary to create convincing music about the old gods and ancient traditions, or can someone living in a modern city reach the same place through imagination and study?

No. I don't believe anyone needs to live in isolation to make convincing music about anything. Music is personal and everyone reaches it differently.

But my own relationship with isolation, nature, imagination and study is probably different from the conventional meaning of those words.

Isolation teaches me to listen. Nature teaches me to see. Imagination isn't an escape from reality for me. It is a way of seeing something that doesn't exist yet and then moving towards it. And study is not about reading books. The deepest study is often the study of yourself and experiences.

I also don't really see the old gods as subjects that I decided to write music about. I see them as companions. In the same way, ancient traditions aren't interesting historical themes to me. They are traces of a way of living that modern society has largely forgotten.

So *“Sögur frá Norðfirði”* isn't an album about the gods or the Old Ways. It is a journey in which gods, nature, rituals, death, magick and many other things happen to be present.

Does living so remotely ever become restrictive, or does the absence of modern distractions actually give you greater creative freedom?

I don't really think in terms of whether a place gives me comfort. I'm much more interested in where I need to be in order to accomplish the things I want to accomplish.

If that means living remotely, I live remotely. If tomorrow one of my goals requires me to be somewhere completely different, I will go there.

But creatively, yes, there is enormous freedom in removing noise from your life. I don't have television, I'm not surrounded by constant information, and I don't feel much obligation to live according to the rhythm society expects from you.

When you remove enough outside voices, you eventually have to listen to your own.

Nils “Dominator” Fjellström joined Mørkgrim in 2023, a remarkable choice as Dominator has a very recognisable reputation for extreme precision and aggression. What made you choose him, and did his approach ever clash with the primitive, instinctive character you wanted Mørkgrim to have?

For me, Nils is one of the best drummers in extreme metal, so having him become part of Mørkgrim was something very special.

But what interested me wasn't simply his speed or technical ability. Precision doesn't necessarily work against something primitive or instinctive. In the right hands, it can make that instinct even more violent.

Nils understood when the music needed force and when it needed space. He didn't come in trying to demonstrate what he could do technically. He listened to what the songs required and then brought his own character into them.

He didn't polish away the primitive side of Mørkgrim. He gave it another weapon.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

Several guest musicians make an appearance on the album. Icelandic singer and artist Saga B provides the lead vocals on “*Freyja Kvað*”. Was her Icelandic background relevant when you approached her for the song, particularly given Mørkgrim’s focus on Norse traditions?

I knew Saga from before and, when “*Freyja Kvað*” started taking shape, I specifically wanted a female vocalist for it. Being Icelandic, Saga had no problem pronouncing the lyrics naturally.

She also brought in some of her own melodic ideas, and I immediately felt they belonged there. Her voice gave the song exactly the atmosphere I was looking for.



At that point, it became a very easy decision. It wasn't about bringing someone in simply because she was Icelandic. She understood the atmosphere of the song and added something genuinely her own to it.

So, she ended up singing the lead vocals on “*Freyja Kvað*”, while I sing the background vocals.

English guitar player Dev Gohil co-wrote “*Nordljós*” and contributed additional guitar. He also shares the guitar solo on “*Blóðsvorr*”. There is an interesting contrast between the extreme solitude in which Mørkgrim was created and the fact that another guitarist actually helped shape some of the music. Does collaboration undermine that sense of isolation, or does it simply become part of the creative process once the songs leave your farm?

I don't see a contradiction there. Isolation doesn't mean refusing to let other people into the music.

Dev is an amazing guitarist. I had recorded a solo for “*Blóðsvorr*”, but I knew it wasn't completely where I wanted it to be. Dev is technically a much better guitarist than I am, so I asked him to build on what I had already recorded. What he added was exactly what the song needed.

Later, he sent me some guitar ideas that eventually became part of “*Nordljós*” as well.

The isolation is where much of the world of Mørkgrim exists, but it isn't a rule that says everything has to be created by one person. Working with talented musicians like Nils, Saga and Dev gives me possibilities I wouldn't have alone.

Solitude gives me the vision. Collaboration can sometimes make that vision larger.

You eventually turned your back on the Black Metal scene because you felt it was losing its true soul. Was there a particular moment or development that made you realise you no longer wanted to be part of it?

The feeling that had originally drawn me to Black Metal was still very much alive in me, but I felt it was slowly disappearing from the scene itself. What had once felt like something deeper than music was becoming more and more like just another genre.

That's not a judgement on where the scene went. It just stopped reflecting what Black Metal meant to me personally.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

As Black Metal became more widespread, I felt even more detached from the scene around it. I've always had an instinct to move away when something starts becoming too defined or predictable.

At the same time, the sound of many of the bands that had originally drawn me into Black Metal was changing and evolving in directions that weren't really what I had connected with in the beginning.

I never stopped loving Black Metal. I stepped away from the scene because I no longer recognised in it the same spirit that had drawn me there in the first place.

The music stayed with me. The scene didn't.



Your musical journey took a rather unexpected turn after leaving Black Metal, eventually leading to you becoming a multiplatinum producer with Billboard number one credits in American Hip-Hop. How did that experience influence the way you approach composition and production today? The vocals on the album are very prominent in the mix – is this the result of your production work in Hip-Hop?

I'm sure all the music I've made over the years has influenced me somehow, but I've never consciously thought, "This is what Hip-Hop taught me, so now I'll apply it to Black Metal."

I approach both in essentially the same way: I keep working until what comes out of the speakers feels right to me.

Even in Hip-Hop, my productions often sound different from what's standard because I've never been particularly interested in changing my sound just to fit a trend.

The same goes for the mix on this album. The vocals aren't prominent because I applied some Hip-Hop production formula. I simply like vocals and drums to have a strong physical presence, while guitars can sometimes function almost like layers of texture painting the world behind them.

That's just how I like to hear music.

There is an amusing contrast between underground Norwegian Black Metal and mainstream American Hip-Hop. Did working at such a different level of the music industry ever make you appreciate the uncompromising nature of your early Black Metal years differently?

From the outside, they probably look like completely opposite worlds. I've never really experienced them that way.

I approach them with the same mentality: make something I actually want to hear and don't worry too much about where it is supposed to fit.

MØRKGRIM – BLACK METAL STAYED WITH ME. THE SCENE DIDN'T

There are even qualities in Hip-Hop that feel surprisingly close to Black Metal to me: darkness, rebellion, individualism, creating your own world and sometimes deliberately standing outside what is considered acceptable.

I love both genres for different reasons. But Black Metal has always been closer to who I am.

You describe Mørkgrim as “Black Metal returned to its source”. That is quite a strong statement. What makes your approach a return to the genre's source rather than simply another modern interpretation of early-'90s Black Metal?

When I first discovered Black Metal, I felt that there was something behind the music that couldn't be reduced to riffs, distortion or an image. It felt like the music was only the visible part of something much deeper.

While making “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*” and now listening back to it, that same depth is there for me. That's what “returned to its source” means to me.

Not returning to 1994. Returning to what made Black Metal feel like more than music in the first place.

If “*Sögur frá Norðfirði*” had actually been recorded in 1994 rather than 2026, how different do you think it would have sounded?

Raw, primitive and obviously much less polished, but also filled with frustration.

I knew what I wanted Mørkgrim to be, but I didn't yet know how to get there.

If I had completed the album in 1994, it certainly would have sounded rougher and probably more primitive, but I don't think it would have been more authentic because of that. It simply would have been less complete.

After such a long journey through completely different musical worlds, what does Mørkgrim give you that producing music for other artists never could?

I genuinely enjoy producing for other artists. There is something special about entering another person's world, understanding what they're trying to create and then building something together that neither of you would necessarily have made alone.

But Mørkgrim has a completely different function in my life.

There is no artist to understand, no brief to interpret and no world outside myself that I have to enter. Everything can come together there: music, nature, experiences, beliefs, darkness, things I've carried since childhood and things I'm still discovering now.

When I produce for somebody else, I help them build their world.

With Mørkgrim, I enter my own.

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