

WHEN THRASH RULED THE WORLD!

Thrash metal came roaring out of the underground to become an '80s commercial juggernaut, and the 'Clash Of The Titans' arena tours of '90 and '91 showcased the music at the very height of its powers. *Jason Arnopp* speaks to **Megadeth** bassist **David Ellefson**, **Anthrax** guitarist **Scott Ian**, and **Testament** vocalist **Chuck Billy** to find out what it was really like to be up onstage night after night at such an influential musical event...

BACK IN THE EARLY '80s, when the likes of Metallica, Exodus, and Slayer first brought thrash metal kicking and shrieking into existence, you'd have been hard-pressed to imagine such an unholy bunch of uncompromising noise-makers selling out enormous arenas. Yet in September of 1990 Megadeth, Slayer, Testament, and Suicidal Tendencies teamed up to barnstorm their way through a bunch of huge European venues. Dubbed 'Clash Of The Titans', this muscle-flexing, multi-band tour proved that the newer, faster, more brutal, less flashy version of heavy metal had transcended its raucous roots. Now thrash was music for the masses.

The following summer, on 28 June, Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax – three acts that, alongside Metallica, had now been dubbed thrash's 'Big Four' – played New York's Madison Square Garden. This was just one of 49 mega-shows that formed the US version of 'Clash Of The Titans'. Such mainstream success would have been

utterly unthinkable five or six years earlier. Interestingly, though, support at the show came from Alice In Chains, a Seattle band embodying a new grunge era that in double-quick time would throw many a metal band under the bus. 'Clash Of The Titans' was a phenomenally successful venture, but it could be argued that the tour marked the peak of thrash's mainstream popularity and it was all downhill from there.

Megadeth bassist David Ellefson, Anthrax guitarist Scott Ian, and Testament frontman Chuck Billy were right at the heart of the action. So who better to explain what 'Clash Of The Titans' was really like than these thrash legends?

WHEN AND HOW DID YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT A 'CLASH OF THE TITANS' TOUR?

DAVID ELLEFSON: "Our manager Ron Laffitte came over to us at a North Hollywood rehearsal place. I think we were still writing 'Rust In Peace', so this would have been

early 1990. Ron had been talking to Slayer's manager, Rick Sales, and they'd conjured up this idea of Slayer and Megadeth doing a tour together. Both of us had new records coming out – Slayer's was 'Seasons In The Abyss' – so it seemed like a good idea. I think it was either [Megadeth frontman] Dave Mustaine or our managers who came up with the 'Clash Of The Titans' title."

CHUCK BILLY: "It started off with a rumour that this big thrash tour might be happening. We'd already been to Europe with Anthrax [in 1987] and Megadeth [in '88], so to go back with Megadeth and Slayer seemed like an unbelievable prospect. Once it was confirmed that it was going to be a big arena tour, and that we were on the bill, we decided we needed a new record to push. So we wrote the songs for [fourth album] 'Souls Of Black' really quick, then got in the studio. I don't want to blame Atlantic Records, but they were always trying to get us to bend our heavy metal influences to be more

accessible and commercial. I still think 'Souls Of Black' is a good record, though. I don't know if it was just because Atlantic had this big marketing machine, but we were getting everywhere and we were selling records. Anyway, it was working."

MEGADETH AND SLAYER WERE BIG ENOUGH TO HEADLINE INDIVIDUALLY BACK THEN, AND PACKAGE TOURS WEREN'T PARTICULARLY COMMON. DID YOU HAVE MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE CONCEPT?

DE: "I think we looked to our brothers in Metallica, who were pretty much able to headline arenas on their own by this point. They broke down doors and created opportunities for those of us who came next. While the rest of us could have all tried to duke it out by ourselves, it would have been much harder to scale the mountain, and we might not have even made it to the top. But I figured that with all our combined efforts, if we could