

Brainwashed - Wraiths, "The Grey Emperor"

Written by John Kealy

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The Grey Emperor takes full advantage of the *Jurassic Park* style of terror. Just like the foreboding and gently vibrating cup of water that announced the arrival of the *Tyrannosaurus Rex*

, this piece begins slowly with an ominous pulse which sets the mood for the hour it lasts. Unlike Steven Spielberg, Wraiths do not immediately give out into an adrenaline-releasing rollercoaster ride. Instead they keep the listener on edge for a long time, picking slowly at their sanity.

[At War With False Noise](#)

The Grey Emperor is not an exercise in how deafening noise can be. Lo-fi noise fills in the gaps like background radiation but the volume kept firmly down in the process. Wraiths introduce various unidentifiable sounds into the piece, letting the whole thing simmer like an unholy concoction straight out of *Macbeth*. Eventually the witches' brew comes to a boil and what feels like an arctic wind comes through the speakers (the effect helped by the current freezing whether here on the western fringes of Europe). The arctic wind becomes an icy breath, fearful and cruel.

Rusty noises that could either be percussion, heavily distorted and malignant guitar, bass or even vocals again give the impression that something is coming, something large and threatening. The ambiguity of the sounds adds to the panic in a way that pure feedback or sounds identifiable as human cannot hope to achieve. Towards the end of the piece, Wraiths do pick up the intensity without ever reaching "in the red" levels of volume. However, that does not mean that this is not uncomfortable listening (I get the feeling that my fiancée never wants to hear this again) and by the time it ends, it feels like I have had a near miss with Cthulu (the music I mean, not my fiancée!). So many pure noise acts try and get to this level of unease but few ever get it as right as Wraiths have.

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My final remark about this album is reserved for how it looks. The demonic engraving on the back of the sleeve combined with the wax seal on the front give *The Grey Emperor* a formal look like a pamphlet for a Lutheran- style religious reformation but one plotted out by devil worshippers. Breaking open the seal with an audible crack, it is impossible not to feel a little thrill of the unknown when loading the album into the CD player for the first time. While there was no infernal racket, Wraiths have married visual and sonic aesthetics perfectly. This is as unsettling as an album can get.

samples:

- [Extract 1](#)
- [Extract 2](#)
- [Extract 3](#)