

# Black to Comm: Seven Horses for Seven Kings

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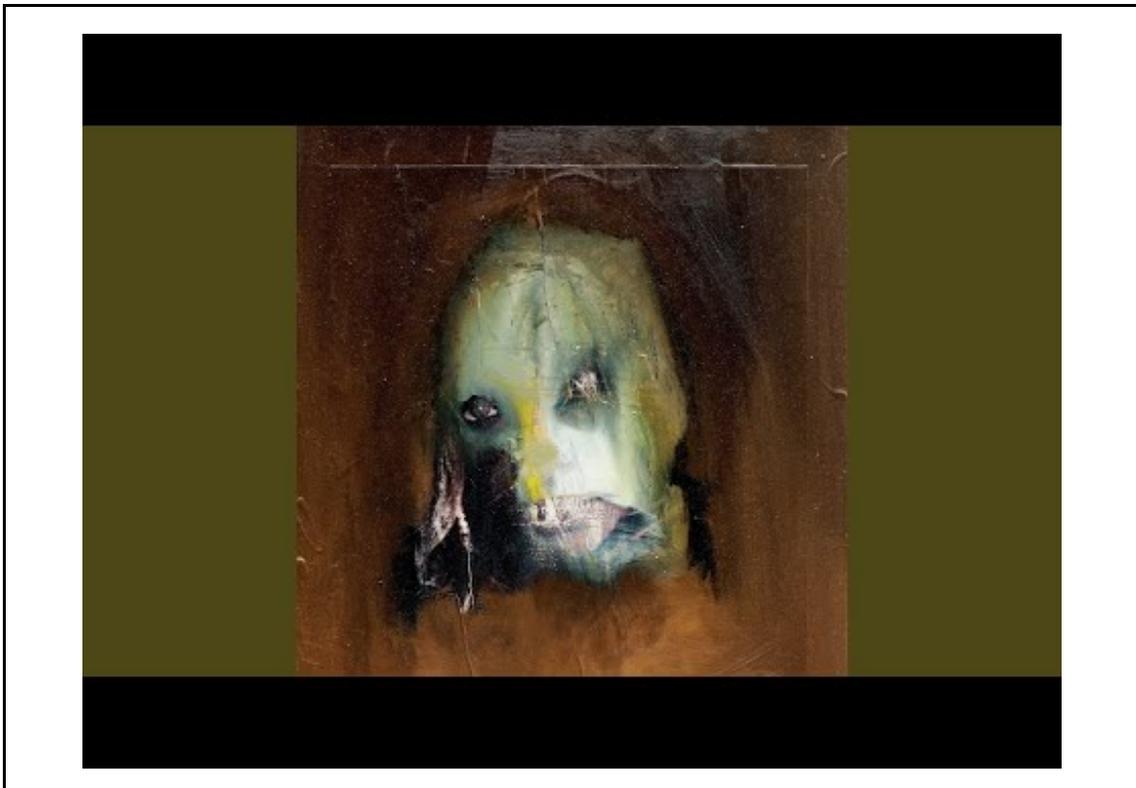
*Seven Horses for Seven Kings* is a horror-movie thrill ride elevated by its invocation of dread mythology, martial power, and arcane history; it's a great dark-room album that pretends, but not really, to be something more. It feels bigger and more significant than it is, but not in a way that sends us scuttling for meaning but in a way that makes us feel like we're witnessing a work of great art rather than B-grade schlock.

If a statement on Bandcamp is accurate, Marc Richter, the German who makes unsettling sound collages as *Black to Comm*, doesn't want us to read too deeply into his record. This is a relief given how vastly experimental albums whose press releases do all the talking outnumber ones that speak for themselves. It's tempting, because the sound palate is grim and dissonant and because the record's title is redolent of obscene power, to think of it as a political album. But that seems like a stretch, and I'd argue the title is just a nonsensical mishmash of demon iconography: seven kings of hell, seven seals, four horsemen of the apocalypse, and so on.

*Seven Horses* succeeds because it's really good at being dark. A lot of albums aim for true horror and just end up edgy or noisy, but this thing seems to conceal a lot of secrets. It brings to mind torches panning across archaic runes in dusty old temples. There's unmistakably something ancient about it, and not just because a lot of its samples come from medieval music. The density of the mix, together with a pleasing low-end, creates the illusion that everything's half-buried in time and dust. Even when he's sampling free-jazz saxophones or the music of contemporary classical composer Nils Frahm, the music conjures the same gnosticism as Nico's solo albums, the pained drones of the Third Ear Band, or the jeremiads of Current 93.

It's also fleet on its feet in spite of spanning an hour across thirteen tracks. Unusually for an album that's at least adjacent to ambient—Richter disdains the term—the tracks don't bleed into each other but cut off almost rudely, hoping we're prepared for what's next. The individual tracks are more memorable than on most albums of its ilk, especially the liturgical organs of "Licking a Fig Tree" or the plangent shimmer of "Angel Investor." That latter track, in spite of its oily title, is the record's most satisfying reprieve, leaving behind all the prophecies and revelations to indulge in the gauzy, bass-boosted drone of Rafael Anton Irisarri or latter-day Gas.

Is it frivolous, in a time when fascism is on the rise on both sides of the Atlantic and the world catapults towards almost-certain doom at the hands of climate change, to use imagery of gods and kings and the end of the world in the service of what's basically a haunted house? Absolutely not: an artist shouldn't speak up on these ills if they have nothing to say, lest they send the wrong message. If *Seven Horses for Seven Kings* reveals anything about our times, it's that they're awful enough that an album like this feels like escapism.



<https://youtu.be/DFknx19PrjQ>