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Reading about **Spanish** trio **Rhino**

before I ever heard them, their sound was described, more or less, as “thrash-meets-doom.” I sat for a second and speculated, “So it sounds like **High on Fire**.”

It’s true, parts of *Dead Throne Monarch* — **Rhino**’s second album in as many years, released in the **US** via **Arctic Music Group** — show a resemblance to or influence from the increasingly seminal **San Francisco** speedlords, but there’s more to their sound than mere **Pikeries**. Guitarist/vocalist/main songwriter **Javier Gálvez** has been in sundry thrash and death metal bands for two decades, and he certainly brings that sense of brutality and urgency –if not always the speed — to this project.

The brutal groove that pervades throughout could be measured as a more diverse take on **Birds of Prey**’s visceral attack, and though **Rhino** do change things up with shades of raw doom and sludge, grunge and even acoustics, the jump from one to the other is rarely so outlandish as to interrupt the solid head-nod/bang the previous part spawned. That is, where every time **Soilent Green** locks in a decent groove they only keep it for two measures before going onto the next thing, **Rhino** isn’t afraid to ride it out for a while. Chalk it up to the differences between doom and grind.



Dead Throne Monarch opens with the title track and some nasty, mostly-indecipherable slurred snarling from **Gálvez**, while bassist **Sergio “Rambo” Robles** and drummer **Julen Gil** march in thunderously metallic lock step. As much as **Gálvez** proves over the next several tracks to be the star of the band — mostly because of his varied vocal approach — **Robles** and **Gil** also show themselves as essential from the outset. Every member of the trio performs strongly, and as the more blatantly **High on Fire**-derived “Reins of the Warlord” shows, they’re all needed.

Gálvez employs a gruff, throaty voice on “Reins,” which sits well atop the sludgy groove, but as the song crash lands into the nine-minute highlight “Earth Reclaims the Usurper,” the atmosphere takes a trench-bound nosedive into doomed riffer madness. Shades of **Down** crop up at 7:23 with a guitar-led charge similar in mindset to “Bury Me in Smoke” — not the only time this happens on *Dead Throne Monarch* — and the culmination of the song shows just how massive and unrelenting **Rhino** can be. Though the opening of “Bahamüt” sounds so much like **Nile** I had to check and make sure it wasn’t a cover (it’s not), even that isn’t out of place as it transitions into start-stop aggression and another vocal change as **Gálvez** works some drawn out **Alice in Chains** harmony in with his shouts.

By this time, it’s clear that despite the **Bilbao** residents’ superficial simplicity — the name, the thrash/doom descriptions, etc. — there’s more to *Dead Throne Monarch* than just one influence or sound. They offer a shorter, thrashier cut with the drum-launched “Pale Horses Coming,” which serves as a suitable lead-in for the 15-minute epic “Funebre,” a song that would close many records. Skies darken with clouds drawn in by slow, lumbering guitars and insistent tom-work from **Gil**, and the track reveals itself as not only the longest on the record, but the deepest foray into doomed recesses. A soulful, **Soundgarden**-esque, oft-unhinged multi-tracked clean vocal from **Gálvez** provides another album highlight, and I can only imagine the smiles that came across **Robles’** and **Gil’s** faces the first time they heard the riff that propels the second half of the song forward at 7:52. If the one that came across mine is any measure, they would have been considerable.

Inevitably, even as the song runs at full-speed, “Wolf Among Black Sheep” was destined to be anti-climactic. There’s a reason records end with the long-ass, killer doom cuts — because following them is hard as hell. In a different place, the *Surrounded by Thieves*-ism likely wouldn’t suffer such a fate, but as all of the 3:57 run time is needed to recover from the 15:02 preceding, the song is too easily overlooked. The melodic vocals

(more **AIC**, and well done at that, especially considering it's only one dude doing them) reappear on the slower, acoustically-introduced "Promise of Storm," and by the time the **Yob** "The Mental Tyrant"-esque triplet riff arrives following an impeccable transition at 4:05, *Dead Throne Monarch* is once again in control of your ears and psychological well-being; both of which have been marked for termination, by the way. Sorry, that's how it goes.

Side-note/sonic coincidence: Compare the **Gálvez** vocal at 5:18 with the decidedly more energetic "Up Not Out" from **Puny Human**'s 2007 sleeper *Universal Freak Out* and feast on the similarities. Probably not an intentional influence, given the aural devastation surrounding, but cool nonetheless.

"Wendigo" offers much-needed acoustic reprieve and yet another harmonized vocal highlight, which approaches **Zakk Wylde** levels of "Whoa-yeah-mama" silliness gracefully without crossing over, and as a summation of everything before it, the sludge breakdown-imbued, double-kicked/triplet-riffed, fuck-all thrashfest of closer "Horned Crown" shows suitably what you'd wear sitting as a *Dead Throne Monarch*. If that's the case, sign me up.

My worst fear for this album is that I'll log it, send out the "Hey, this has been reviewed here's the link," email, stick it on my shelf and forget about it. Were that scenario to manifest, rest assured it would be my loss. As it stands, **Rhino** are more than welcome to use my ears as a punching bag anytime they need to, safety and reasonability be damned.



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