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Información general

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Right from the cover art, *Master of Puppets* promised an even greater degree of political awareness. Dog tags hang from military-style grave markers, each headstone attached to strings leading to the shadowy hands of an unseen puppet master. The graves are nameless, arranged in neat rows — anonymous soldiers paid token respect for their sacrifice though nobody can be bothered to clear the overgrowth choking their graves. The setting sun reinforces the scene's sense of death and abandonment.

Back in '88, Hetfield told an interviewer that *Master of Puppets*' title track was about "how things get switched around, instead of controlling what you're taking and doing, it's drugs controlling you." Drugs as puppet master evokes myriad mental images even for the layperson, so how did a commentary on the military industrial complex become the face of the album?

According to Johnny Morgan's and Ben Wardle's *The Art of the LP*, "The artwork here was conceived by the band with their manager Peter Mensch, and is far from ambiguous." But if Hetfield's lyrical concern was addiction then the sleeve appears to be ambiguous, at least until one considers the possibility that the cover is tying together more than one of the album's songs. The record's fifth cut, "Disposable Heroes," opens with the lines:

Bodies fill the fields I see, hungry heroes end
No one to play soldier now, no one to pretend
Running blind through killing fields, bred to kill them all
Victim of what said should be
A servant 'til I fall

Mystery solved, perhaps.

The cover painting was done by Don Brautigam, an illustrator out of New York's prestigious School of Visual Arts. Brautigam had been working as a commercial artist for 15 years prior to this project, designing both album and book covers along with illustrations for magazines and advertisements. Prior to *Master of Puppets*, his most recognizable work may have been the cover for Stephen King's 1980 novel *The Stand*, which won a "cover of the year" award from a trade group named Marketing Bestsellers.

Brautigam used acrylic paints on illustration board, combining traditional brushes with airbrush, the latter giving *Master of Puppets* its dreamy, soft focus feel. Some sources claim that the artist worked from a drawing provided by Hetfield, but what no one disputes is the quality of the finished artwork. In his book *Fade to Black*, Martin Popoff says that painting "is gorgeously possessive of both depth and striking color sense, given the contrast between the pure white of the crosses and the multiple rich shades of brown both above and below." *The Art of Metal* calls the image "striking."

Collectors have their work cut out for them if they want to put together a complete set of Brautigam book and album illustrations. The artist completed as many as 3,000 assignments dating back to 1972. In terms of hard rock and metal, it's his work you see on the cover of Motley

Crue's *Dr. Feelgood*, the [Anthrax](#) albums *Among the Living*, *State of Euphoria* and *Persistence of Time*, [Testament's](#) *The Ritual*, and the first [Frehley's Comet](#) album. That's Brautigam's work on the cover of [AC/DC's](#) *The Razor's Edge*, too.

Those sleeves all have in common vivid colors and visually arresting images, as do his book covers for the likes of Stephen King and Dean Koontz, among others. All of which makes Brautigam's only other Metallica assignment such an oddball: he's the man behind the cover of the band's self-titled 1991 album, aka "The Black Album."

So what happened next? Political awareness took a dominant role in thrash metal artwork, typified by everything from *Puppets'* follow-up, *...And Just For All*, to former Metallica shredder [Dave Mustaine's](#) *Peace Sells...But Who's Buying?*, which dropped just three months after *Master of Puppets*.

And speaking of who's buying, Christie's Auction House sold Brautigam's original *Puppets* artwork for \$35,000 back in November 2008. [Their catalog](#) listed the 17x17 inch painting under "Punk/Rock," which may mean nothing, but I like to think that in some subtle way it points to the role that *Master of Puppets* played in bringing punk's activist spirit into the metal community.

Brautigam didn't live to see his most revered album cover exchange hands for the price of a nice car. He passed away in January 2008 after a battle with stomach cancer.

Read More: [Cover Stories: Metallica's 'Master of Puppets'](#) | <http://loudwire.com/cover-stories-metallica-master-of-puppets/?trackback=tsmclip>

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