Metallica’s „Fade to Black”

It has its critics, but **"Fade to Black"** is undoubtedly one of the most important songs in Metallica's history. Their first true ballad, it showed they were far too astute to box themselves in, creatively speaking, and churn out only pedal-to-the-metal thrashers. There's hardly a whiff of that here and, instead, this somber comment on suicide showcases James Hetfield's increasingly mature lyrics and Kirk Hammett's impressively tasteful guitar melodies. And perhaps more than any other song Metallica released in the 1980s, it pointed to the move to the mainstream that the band made beginning with its album ‘Metallica’ (aka ‘The Black Album’) in 1991.

Fade to Black

In 1984, Metallica was still far from being recognized (by most of the world, anyway) as a band that would change heavy metal and hard rock, but the band's ‘Ride the Lightning’ track "Fade to Black" became a concert favorite and one of the few Metallica tracks to get radio airplay in the mid- to late '80s. Its simple melody and subtle progression was unlike the band's typically multi-layered sound, and its imprisoned, smothered, and oppressed feel mirrored the rest of the ‘Ride the Lightning’ album.



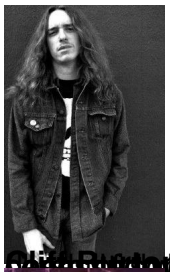
‘Ride the Lightning’ album

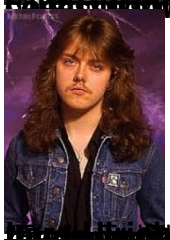
James Hetfield commented on the song in a 1991 interview with Guitar World: *"That song was a big step for us. It was pretty much our first ballad, so it was challenging and we knew it would freak people out. … I wrote the song at a friend's house in New Jersey. I was pretty depressed at the time because our gear had just been stolen, and we had been thrown out of our manager's house for breaking shit and drinking his liquor cabinet dry. It's a suicide song, and we got a lot of flack for it, [as if] kids were killing themselves because of the song. But we also got hundreds and hundreds of letters from kids telling us how they related to the song and that it made them feel better."*



James Hetfield

The track's calm, matter-of-fact introduction and powerful, suicidal lyrics are chillingly realistic, and the song feels like a suicide. Its detached disposition soon swirls into not-quite-suppressed self-hate and rage, and at midpoint in the track, the tempo kicks in and a precisioned guitar riff gallops over boiling-over anger (*"yesterday seems as though it never existed/death greets me warm, now I will just say goodbye"*); the song eventually (and appropriately) fades out.











Metallica - Fade To Black (Live at The VH1)