

‘Stagnation’ is not a word in the Katatonia dictionary. Since breaking through as masters of death/doom, Stockholm’s freethinkers have transcended genre, consolidating goth, shoegaze and prog into bleak, melodic songs. Now, after three decades of invention and reinvention, *Nightmares as Extensions of the Waking State* marks another bold leap – not to mention singer, founder and lead songwriter Jonas Renkse’s most personal effort to date.

Following the immediate anthem-making of *City Burials* (2020) and *Sky Void of Stars* (2023), Katatonia’s 13th album gets more experimental and more metal without holding back on catchiness. The dark hooks and tender vocals remain, yet the band also drive in unpredictable directions while delivering their hardest riffs in years. It’s an indelible introduction to new guitarists Nico Elgstrand and Sebastian Svalland, who replace longtime member Roger Öjersson and co-founder Anders Nyström.

“*Nightmares... is a very riff-based and very guitar-heavy album,*” says Jonas. “*When I was writing it, I knew that we would have a couple of new guitar players coming in. And, if you have two guitarists joining, you don’t want to present them with songs that are 60 percent keyboards. Maybe I subconsciously felt that I had to come up with some cool riffs so that they’d still want to join the band!*”

The force and fearlessness throughout *Nightmares...* is clear from the start of the very first track, ‘Thrice’. Thunderous chords give way to an ambient verse, before the music builds back up to a wall of open-string chugs. On ‘The Light Which I Bleed’, Nico and Sebastian lead a loose, proggy jam that ratchets into a hard-hitting doom riff. ‘Wind of No Change’ even bridges the present and Katatonia’s earliest past, bassist Niklas Sandin and drummer Daniel Moilanen laying down a goth pulse while Jonas croons “*Hail Satan*” in a throwback to the band’s extreme metal roots.

“*I just had this riff going, and I thought it had a bit of a heavy metal feel to it, or even a Slayer vibe,*” the frontman explains. “*And then I thought, maybe I should write something Satanic, because I haven’t really touched that with Katatonia since we did our first demo.*”

In the lengthy Katatonia tradition of keeping listeners on their toes, *Nightmares...* also packs songs which rebel against the rest of the album. The verses of ‘Departure Trails’ de-emphasise the six-string, with the ballad stacking layers of keyboards and synths to near-symphonic levels. Meanwhile, ‘Warden’ boasts one of the most pop-friendly choruses in their catalogue.

Jonas calls his band’s ongoing rejection of musical rules “*subconscious*”. He adds, “*Touring is great, but it gets tedious if you play the same old style of songs all the time. You want to change it up in some way, and I think it’s the same with the records.*”

Katatonia started writing what would become *Nightmares...* in October 2023. Nico was already in the touring lineup at that point, and Sebastian was brought in the following June, effectively ending Anders’ near-35-year membership of the band he helped start.

“*I haven’t really spoken to him about it but, in my way of seeing it, he wasn’t happy with being in a band, at least not this band,*” Jonas says to explain his former musical partner’s exit. “*He didn’t*

*want to tour. He didn't write music for a long time. He wasn't very interested in band stuff: meetings, rehearsals. He wasn't really there."*

In October 2024, Katatonia holed up in a converted church in rural Sweden owned by Tore Stjerna (Mayhem, Watain, Tribulation) to track drums, then recorded the rest of the instruments in their own studio in Stockholm. All the while, Jonas was getting closer and closer to his 50th birthday and found himself in a reflective mood. *"I've been like that for the last couple of years, especially last year,"* he admits. *"50, it's a big number, and I've been doing this for so long now."*

That introspection manifests across this new set of songs. After coming up with the album's title, Jonas penned 'In the Event Of': the climactic finale narrates a nightmare he had more than 10 years ago, with a soundtrack of ominous synths and sorrowful chords. The artwork of *Nightmares...* is a direct illustration of those lyrics.

*"It was supposed to be day, but it was super dark,"* Jonas remembers of his haunting dream. *"Looking at the sky, you could see flashes of fire behind dark clouds. And there were chains coming from the sky. The last line of the song is, 'Mothers waiting in rows for the shadows of their children.' I could see fences, a place where you would keep people captured, and mothers standing there, waiting for their children to come back."*

Just as soul-bearing, if not more so, is lead single 'Lilac', which voices a desire to forget painful memories. Jonas also sings in his own language for just the second time ever during ambient piece 'Efter Solen', which he co-wrote with Joakim Karlsson, a close friend and collaborator in synth-rock project Korda.

He reveals, *"It's the first song we ever worked on together, and it wasn't done. While I was writing this album, Joakim was on to me, saying, 'We should finish that song! I want it finished because it's so good.' I said, 'Yeah, but maybe we should use it on the new Katatonia album.' When I was finishing the song, I was so used to hearing it in Swedish that I had to write the rest of the lyrics like that."*

Now more than a dozen albums deep into a 30-year-plus career, Katatonia's well of inspiration still hasn't run dry. If anything, *Nightmares...* is one of the bravest and most vulnerable releases to bear their name. And, going forward, the band's confidence will only continue to grow, thanks to the new blood in their ranks.

*"This is a great place to be in,"* Jonas says of the Katatonia of 2025. *"Inspiration-wise, it's so good to be surrounded with people that come in with energy and ideas and a strong will to take part, to take the band further. I want people to feel at home in this band and feel like we're making a difference together."*

**– Matt Mills, March 2025**