

Death Grips' No Love Deep Web: A terminally destructive message

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Death Grips are a trio from Sacramento, California, composed of vocalist MC Ride (Stefan Burnett), percussionist Zach Hill and producer Andy "Flatlander" Morin. They fuse elements of hip-hop, metal and electronic styles to match lyrics that express anguish, paranoia and, ultimately, a lust for vengeance against society at large. These dismal sentiments, of course, don't come out of thin air.

No Love Deep Web (self-released October 2012) is their third full-length offering since garnering national attention with the debut mixtape *Exmilitary*, released for free on the Internet in the summer of 2011. The subsequent buzz earned them a recording contract with Sony's Epic

Records, and the label released the band's follow-up in the spring of 2012, called *The Money Store*. Epic had slated NLDW for a 2013 release, but the band leaked it themselves in October and Epic consequently dropped them.

Each release has featured lyrics that favor dark imagery over clever wordplay, but much of the content is either abstract or amorphous, with only occasional references to real events or processes. These concrete moments were more frequent on *Exmilitary*, the experiences recounted included being stopped and searched by police ("Klink"), the stupefying information overload ("Culture Shock"—"You're the media's creation, yeah, your free will has been taken and you don't know") and hedonistic misadventures ("I Want It I Need It"), for a few examples.

On *The Money Store*, Ride's lyrics devolved almost entirely into impressionist word-salad that expressed a vague, if still maddening, paranoia and disgust directed again at the information society (as in "Hacker" and "I've Seen Footage").

NLDW's lyric sheet scores somewhere in the middle

as far as considering the actual source of the anguish, but now the songs mostly express the desire to escape an unbearable reality by going out in a murderous blaze of glory, thus achieving a certain kind of freedom or even nirvana.

Musically, *No Love Deep Web* sees the band reining in its previous diversity, while also quashing the slight sense of fun that managed to permeate earlier efforts by virtue of their free-wheeling adventurousness. This is their first album not to feature obvious sampling, while their first two sampled everything from the Beatles to Kraftwerk to Bhangra music.

Prominent on every track is an array of synths—basses, leads and pads—that alternately roar, stutter, wobble and generally sound convincingly like a warzone. Only the relatively low-octane closing track, "Artificial Death in the West," brings us down out of fight-or-flight mode. The songwriting is overall noticeably tighter and more consistent as well. Previously their songs, even the best ones, tended to go on for too long or in aimless directions.

Zach Hill's drumming technique is world-class and his extraordinary physical power suits this project perhaps better than any of his others. He is known for breaking drum kits in concert with the force of his playing, and his brief teaming up with San Diego-based punk rocker Wavves was sometimes awkward for the disparity of technical ability between the pair, for example. But here his power is matched by that of his bandmates.

Ride's vocal delivery has improved technically with this release. He operates in several different modes, ranging from solemn to threatening to entirely unhinged. He genuinely seems to lose control emotionally on the opener, "Come Up and Get Me." Occasionally the different voices coexist and converse

with one another, as on “World of Dogs.” The mix is the band’s best so far too.

In short, Death Grips have made a musical development as a band since their previous efforts, while sacrificing a bit of adventurousness for focus. They were in the midst of their first nationwide tour when they cancelled several remaining dates to get into the studio and record NLDW. Playing live may have honed their musicianship and mission.

As for content, at a visceral level the band’s music is both lyrically and musically attuned to the most alienating effects of today’s high-tech capitalist society. The band has mined a slew of contemporary styles for the harshest sounds around, and the result rings true to the anxieties of living in a confounding deluge of information that seems to reveal violence, stupidity and alienation on every front, while one’s every move is increasingly clocked by hostile corporations and police agencies.

The music on *No Love Deep Web* has an organic relationship to the experiences that provoked its creation. The lyrics and sounds come out of and closely reflect, albeit in a thoroughly unhealthy fashion, a lived experience, as opposed to resorting to escapism by evoking a fantasy realm ruled by demons. That said, Death Grips never even hint at attempting to understand or even to cope with the situation that moves them so, but instead are just hopelessly overwhelmed by it. In that sense, the band does not fulfill the artist’s most basic task: not simply to transmit the chaos and brutality of the present world, but to make sense of it!

To wit: the aforementioned “World of Dogs” has the disturbing refrain “Ruthless and free, it’s all suicide to me.” Album opener “Come Up and Get Me” sees our hero holed up in an abandoned building, taunting unidentifiable pursuers as “Nazis” and desperately shouting obscenities. On “Deep Web,” he is “In [his] glass house, prepared for surprise attack,” he has become the “omega megalomaniac,” etc. Musically the album is quite varied, but the feeling is so unyieldingly loud and negative that many listeners may find it hard to endure for long.

Death Grips are reacting to really existing social contradictions that bear down on broad sections of the population, not just the most sensitive and unstable. They don’t simply speak for themselves, but for layers

at present demoralized and lacking perspective. This sort of anger and frenzy can take individuals in different sections, some of them quite sinister. It is also remarkable how ready a portion of the music press has been to praise them uncritically, and how eagerly a major label courted them.



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