

Throughout history, there have always been musicians that pushed against the scene's boundaries, most by doing exactly what they wanted with no apologies. Los Angeles hip-hop collective Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All fits that bill almost perfectly. Time and time again they've reminded the public that they make music they would like to listen to instead of subscribing to a set of rules in order to get radio play. On the surface they may seem like a bunch of kids giggling to themselves about rape and murder, but there's much more to it than that. The best example of this is the group's de facto leader Tyler, The Creator. While his lyricism may be the darkest the group has to offer, his words often end up being the most personal. His 2009 release *Bastard*, though rife with violent imagery, was an incredibly intimate look at Tyler's life and the experiences that shaped his view of the world. After an almost overnight explosion into the mainstream, Tyler announced *Goblin* as his next album, and it instantly became one of the most anticipated releases in the eyes of Odd Future's sudden surge of followers.

Like Tyler, his latest creation is a bit of a paradox. The same oppressive beats and synthesizers that made *Bastard* compelling can be found in *Goblin*, but unfortunately don't make the same impact as the first time around. While it remains solid and enjoyable, Tyler's production has done little in the way of evolving from album to album. Fortunately, glimpses of the future can be found in some of the tracks like diamonds in the rough. The largest of these is the instrumental "AU79," a piece that combines Tyler's signature minimalist approach with light, atmospheric harmonies obviously influenced by The Neptunes. While it's near the end and passes almost in the blink of an eye, this instrumental is the most recognizable example of growth Tyler has made since *Bastard* was released, and offers a taste of what he might unleash on subsequent albums.

No, *Goblin* won't impress many people with its production alone. What really caught my attention on this release is just how much Tyler himself has grown as a person in such a short period of time. Going from relatively unknown to selling out shows overseas is a jarring experience no matter who you are, and the rigors of fame have definitely had a dramatic effect on Tyler's psyche. *Goblin* overflows with emotion when it comes to privacy and the life-changing aftermath of popularity, and Tyler's internal monologue becomes a very public argument with himself on many of the tracks. It's apparent that he still has much to accomplish before he feels satisfied, but are awards and recognition really what he wants anymore?

Nowhere is this more apparent than "Nightmare," a track where Tyler tries to balance his depression with the sudden acclaim his music has given him. While you think he'd be ecstatic to receive emails from some of the best musicians in the business, Tyler is still trying to cope with the departure of fellow Odd Future artist and best friend Earl Sweatshirt. In the end, he wonders if dying would be easier than living through the problems in his life. These themes are continued in the album's finale "Golden" as Tyler admits all he thinks about anymore is killing himself. While his lyrics may be a bit dramatic, they add a sharp twinge of reality to the often over-the-top way in which he and the rest of his clique present themselves publicly. Tyler's paranoid ramblings are matched by the equally paranoid synthesizers, as they ebb and flow with an urgency that's become rather commonplace on every Odd Future release.

But for every introspective track on *Goblin*, there's a complete banger that creates entirely different, more confident personas in Tyler's fractured mind. "Radicals" lifts the popular "kill people, burn shit, fuck school" mantra made famous by Odd Future and adds a more sinister edge by promising more kids will be singing it eventually. While the track opens with a humorous disclaimer, it's hard to think Tyler doesn't believe at least a little of what he's preaching throughout this song. Uplifting themes of doing

what you believe and being yourself are portrayed in exaggerated terms, but the overall message still bleeds through.

“Transylvania” sees Tyler taking on the image of Dracula, albeit a more misogynistic version of the famous vampire. The grim and sexual imagery match perfectly with Left Brain's menacing production, and they blend to form an erratic highlight for Goblin's first half. With only two tracks in between, “Her” introduces us to Tyler's real views on women as a balance to the overblown personality from before. He pines for an unrequited love over a simplistic metronome beat and subdued piano melodies, conveying images of loneliness that many of us can attest to feeling at some point in our lives. Another departure from the usual Odd Future subject matter comes in the form of “Analog,” as Tyler and Hodgy Beats detail taking girls to the lake for romantic rendezvous. While many of the lines can be interpreted as darker in nature, the combination of unusually sweet lyricism and neutral production makes this track both a standout and proof that Odd Future can rap about more than rape and dismemberment.

But they can't all be winners. The self-fulfilling prophecy “Bitch Suck Dick” is a trite piece of swag rap that pays homage to acts like Waka Flocka Flame with its nonsensical lyricism. It's ridiculous, but not in the usual Odd Future sense of the word, and feels completely out of place on the album. “Window” is an Odd Future group track that incorporates verses from many of the rapper's on the roster over almost non-existent production. While it allows many of the groups members to air their thoughts on the meteoric rise Odd Future has experienced lately, it feels like nothing is accomplished as the track slowly grinds on to its conclusion. Unfortunately, the only thing “Window” really achieves is showcasing just how much better Tyler and Hodgy are compared to the rest of the roster. The opposite can be said of an earlier track titled “She,” featuring Frank Ocean. His verse and chorus showcase both sides of his expertise, as he can write both hip-hop and R&B influenced vocals with ease. While “She” tends to get lost in the midst of heavier tracks like “Yonkers” and “Transylvania,” it deserves a ton of recognition for leaning a bit more towards a mainstream sound Odd Future isn't known for while staying true to their original vision.

Goblin eventually reveals itself as an overarching story about Tyler's fractured personality trying to come to terms with his depression and notoriety spanning all the way back to the beginning of Bastard. While the story is there to connect each track with an all-encompassing theme, it's hard to ignore that the struggles Tyler exhibits throughout the album actually showcase intense personal problems he faces on a daily basis. What began as an exciting journey into the mainstream has become a stressful reminder that his life will never be the same. While the production may not be as exciting as the first serving, it helps to connect Goblin's deeper meanings with their formation on Bastard. The highs are incredibly high, but unfortunately the lows can be just as extreme. Tyler has already become an overwhelming figure with his short time in the spotlight, and all eyes will be on him for years to come. Whether that's a good or bad thing has yet to be determined.