

Brainwashed - Wolf Eyes, "Dread"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Launching their Lower Floor imprint in 2017 has turned out to be one of the best ideas that Wolf Eyes have ever had, establishing a new outlet that thus far has a near-perfect track record of only releasing the band's strongest and most coherent material. This latest installment, a reissue of an early masterwork from the Aaron Dilloway years, continues that hot streak beautifully. *Dread* is a murderers' row of grimy, shambling, and ruined delights, featuring two absolute monster bookends with no filler or half-baked experiments in between. This album is broken, thuggish, and ugly in all the best ways—I cannot think of any other Wolf Eyes album quite as simultaneously focused and inspired as this one.

[Lower Floors](#)

There is truly no better way to open a Wolf Eyes album than a piece like "Burn Your House Down," in which Nate Young repeated howls that he is going to do exactly that over a shuddering and heaving mechanized nightmare held together by an obsessively swooping and plunging bass snarl. As brutal as it is, "Burn Your House Down" is perversely elegant in its simplicity: there is one strong motif and one (very) strong lyrical sentiment that relentlessly move forward through a howling chaos of broken beats, sputtering electronics, strangled feedback, and mangled samples. Also, it is a remarkably concise piece, as is the later "Let the Smoke Rise." On more recent albums, the band's best material tends to take the shape of longer pieces, but Wolf Eyes had some of the lingering intuitions of a rock band at this stage and it suited them well: *Dread* is ostensibly a noise album, but it does not exactly feel like one, as there are skeletons of hooks, rhythms, and songs within its burning wreckage. Also, Young's world-weary, stream-of-consciousness vocals give Wolf Eyes a humanity and charisma that is lacking in most other noise artists' work (even if it is arguably an anti-charisma). There are certainly moments of brute force here, but Young, Dilloway, and John Olson generally worked quite hard to be menacing through mood and texture rather than raw power.

Even the longer pieces on *Dread* feel like ingeniously crafted "songs" rather than sprawling experiments—they just take a more slow-burning approach in which several broken and meandering threads unexpectedly converge into something of real power. The 14-minute "Desert of Glue/Wretched Hog" is an especially deft example of that, as it initially sounds like

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someone just dicking around with a thudding, go-nowhere drum machine pattern amidst some random electronic squiggles. Once Young's vocals appear, however, it coheres into an endearingly lurching, sparse, and fitful pulse embellished by a surreal miasma of tape-based lunacy (elephant noises are an especially delightful recurring theme). At some point, it all seemingly dissolves into indulgent chaos, yet a stomping new beat soon reforms to resurgently bulldoze its way through a cacophony of splattering electronics and distressed-sounding didgeridoo. When Young reappears to announce that he is "coming on like a wretched mess," he fucking means it and he is entirely correct. I had a much harder time warming to the 11-minute "Half Animal, Half Insane" because it takes such a long time (roughly 8 minutes) to build up to its gloriously dumb and pummeling crescendo, but it is actually a dark horse candidate for the album's coolest song. Once it catches fire, it feels like a compellingly grotesque caricature of meat-headed, "angry guy" rock-like Phil Anselmo bravely soldiering through Pantera's final song at a gig where all the instruments are broken and on fire and a chittering swarm of robotic insects has engulfed the audience.

The album closes with its second brilliant "single," the 4-minute "Let the Smoke Rise." It shares the deceptively elegant (if slime-coated) simplicity of the album's opener, but lowers the intensity to a bubbling simmer: the piece is little more than Young's sneering and nihilistic anti-poetry over an erratic and heaving groove that sounds like a poorly built machine on its last legs. Also, one of the lines sounds a lot like "Baby, I'm Oedipal," which is very amusing. In any case, it is the fourth great song in a row on *Dread*: all killer, no filler. I dearly wish I had heard this album sooner. Like many people, I first encountered Wolf Eyes with 2004's

Burned Mind

. I liked it, but it definitely did not motivate me to try to track down the bands' earlier releases, as I would never have guessed that Wolf Eyes were much better a few years earlier (for one or two albums, at least). I love some of their recent albums too, so it is debatable whether

Dread

is Wolf Eyes' absolute zenith, but I have no doubts about whether it is essential (it is).

Dread

is a perfect and improbable confluence of disparate aesthetics that no one else could ever replicate: a potent and visceral collision of high-brow and low-brow that deftly avoids the weaknesses of either. There is nothing else quite like Wolf Eyes at their peak, an experience akin to being stomped by a violent biker gang over a disagreement about their views on musique concrète or Jacques Derrida's indirect influence on underground rock.

Samples can be found [here](#) .