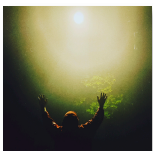


# REVIEWS



## Nasty Lad

### Call of the Void



As Nasty Lad, Alabama native turned Austin Texas resident, Andrew Blessing creates anthems for an anxiety-plagued, quarantined generation. His new album *Call of the Void* is an ambitious 10 track wonder, weaving indie bedroom pop

with elements of lo-fi and synthwave. Melancholy imbues its tentacles into every song, lamenting through haunting melodies, hypnotic guitar riffs, pulsing drum beats, and textured synthesizers. Yet *Call of the Void* doesn't dwell in the sadness; through deep self-reflection, it acknowledges the importance of self-agency and acceptance.

The album opens with a foreboding "Intro" that would fit well on an 80s coming of age movie. On "The Long Suffering," Nasty Lad tackles post-addiction and listlessness, intertwined with glimpses of optimism: "*The only love I found was in a bag downtown / Every day I wake, I sigh and rub my eyes / Staring at the ceiling, so bored I want to die,*" juxtaposed with proclamations: "*Once you've lost it all you're really free / No more pretending now, no strings on me.*" A brooding, yet twangy 70s guitar melody, and an uptempo backtracking wash away the intrusive thoughts, as if wiping a slate clean for the next chapter in life. The head-bobbing 90s grunge-pop "Feeling Blue" takes similarly dark themes, but paves it with a golden path of awareness. It doesn't

just acknowledge depression, it puts it into a choke hold. "Stay Away" also mixes dark and light, hot and cold. It's a sensuous, textured dreamscape that will find you bobbing your head along to someone essentially writing themselves off on behalf of another. The chorus suggests: "*Stay away, stay away, stay away, from me, from me,*" before culminating in a distorted scream: "*Stay away!*"

"Mea Culpa," a paragon in tone and lyricism, mixes the past with the futuristic – a gritty retro r&b beat set to a swelling Blade Runner backtrack. The breathy vocals "*I don't know why I ever let you take all of me / Had to let you go. You're unreasonable / Feelings' chemical. Shit was getting old,*" could be speaking about the end of a toxic relationship to a person or an illicit substance. The vocals end the song with the sanguine self-realization "*I won't be controlled,*" right before a cathartic electric guitar solo. "Creepin' (Interlude)" provides a nice, humorous reprieve from emotion-heavy topics on the album. Laced with deep bass and thick guitar runs, it's like an ice cold glass of beer on a balmy summer night. "Kin Folk," a grungy, lo-fi banger, could be playing on a boom box at your local skate park. Here is the point *Call of the Void* stops treading in vices and embraces encouraging self-actualization. This is best shown in the showpiece "'99 Buick," a 4 minute 9 second science fiction film, infused with the wavy synths of *Trevor Something* and the industrial drums and textures of *Nine Inch Nails*. The track opens with a car turning on and driving off. The slightly distorted

vocals are propelled forward by momentum and a newfound conviction: "*City is asleep. Shadows dance and creep. I do not feel alone... / Lonely is the only L word that I know.*" Nasty Lad embraces loneliness as fuel to paint the world whatever color he wants, almost as if pain is a badge of honor – a rite of passage to euphoria.

The far too short "Cluster B" – parks the car of the previous song on a cliff, facing a golden sunrise. It's a pragmatic digital landscape that juxtaposes the raw instruments found in the album's intro. The beginning was a warning. By the end, a voice calls back from the void, saying it will all be alright. Lastly, the deep bass, trap-pop gem "Grey Gardens" croons not to a lover, but to the warm serenity of isolation and staying in. "*Never never ever want to go outside / Never leave my bedroom anytime I try / I don't think I'm gonna see my friends tonight / I don't ever ever want to go outside.*" This mantra of sorts takes loneliness and normalizes it – putting a mirror up to a society that is increasingly moving from the outside world to the online one.

Nasty Lad makes music that is brimming with gloom but glows with hope. *Call of the Void* is a beautifully crafted, compelling album that was somehow made on a personal computer. It's like a poetic vision board that exhibits all of our insecurities yet gives us permission to find connection through it. **SAVANNAH THOMAS**