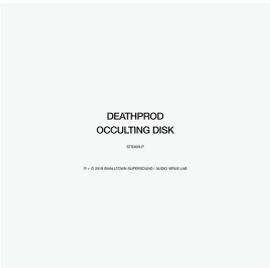


## Brainwashed - Deathprod, "Occulting Disk"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 10 November 2019 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 11 November 2019 13:18

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DEATHPROD  
OCCULTING DISK

It has been 15 years since Helge Sten's iconic Deathprod project last surfaced with proper new material (aside from a teasing collaboration with Biosphere back in 2015) and he has been missed. Unsurprisingly, that long hiatus did not result in Sten's characteristically grim vision brightening at all. In fact, it has only grown darker, as the bulk of *Occulting Disk* is bleak void of seismic drones and nerve-jangling insectoid dissonance that Sten describes as an "anti-fascist ritual." I am not particularly optimistic about this album's chances in eradicating fascism any time soon, but the album definitely delivers on the ritualistic part, as this seems like a hell of a great soundtrack for summoning demons. While I am still on the fence about whether I love the stark, crushing blackness of

*Occulting Disk*

quite as much as the slightly wider emotional palette of earlier Deathprod, this album is undeniably an impressively visceral and monolithic artistic statement. That is more than enough to reaffirm Sten's status as one of the reigning kings of heavy drone, but the album builds towards an explosive climax that ensures that

*Occulting Disk*

feels like an exciting new chapter as well.

### [Smalltown Supersound](#)

I have historically not been a big fan of the dark ambient genre, as a lot of uninspired dreck has been released over the years and gloomy drones and rattling chains hold zero appeal for me. That is a real shame, as some of the artists who initially shaped that milieu are on such a completely different plane than their imitators that it seems cruel and unfair that are lumped together in the same stylistic niche. In fact, Deathprod gets bonus points from me for taking such a long vacation from that dour scene, though I am delighted that Sten eventually came back with something new to say. Much like Richard Skelton's The Inward Circles project, Sten's Deathprod work strikes a rare and perfect union of ambitious scope and sound design mastery that can be legitimately awe-inspiring. At its most extreme, *Occulting Disk* sounds like the universe is being slowly pulled apart as it gets sucked into a vast black hole. The more modest moments, on the other hand, merely sound like the earth is shaking and crumbling as hell opens up.

Most of this album falls into the latter category, though Sten varies the mood a bit by also

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evoking the anticipatory dread and the scorched aftermath on either side of that infernal apocalypse. On pieces like the opening "Disappearance/Reappearance," however, Sten takes a curiously minimal approach and seems content to just conjure a series of frayed and sizzling synth pulses. That is admittedly something he is quite good at and he gives those deep, shuddering throbs plenty of space to roil and decay. However, the stronger pieces tend to be those where Sten strives to be a bit more than a blackened and gnarled force of nature. For example, "Occultation 1" resembles a slow-motion rain of shooting stars that has been rendered sickly and hallucinatory by the distended warping of time and space. Of those two pieces, that latter definitely achieves the more impressive feat. In those moments of transcendence, Deathprod seems less like a one-man earthquake and more like something supernatural that is blissfully unhindered by the usual limitations of sound and physics.

For the most part, the seven other numbered "Occultations" feel like different heads of the same hydra: each lays out a menacing and dissonant theme and allows it to squirm and smolder for several minutes before it fades away to politely make room for the next horror. Despite their similar forms, however, the eight "Occultations" delve into an impressive variety of uncomfortable, dread-soaked moods. For example, "Occultation 2" is a miasma of grinding, buzzing noise, while "Occultation 3" is a ghostly swirl of swooping and sliding feedback-like tones. I am especially fond of the latter, as I am of the following "Occultation 4," which essentially repeats the same trick in more corporeal form to leave an uneasy wake of ugly oscillations behind its plunging tones. The sixth "Occultation" is quite heavy as well, as thick drones morph and phase-shift in a way that feels like an especially foreboding scene in a noirish, sci-fi dystopia. Following a woozily cosmic interlude of suspended (if comet-streaked) animation, however, the album is finally ripped wide open with the crushing and churning centerpiece "Black Transit of Jupiter's Third Satellite." As soon as it explodes from the speakers in a snarling, heavy, and impossible dense living mass, it is clear that everything beforehand was just a mere prelude to the real show. It feels like I am watching a vast and viscous black cloud blot out and smother the sun in nightmarish slow motion.

The album ends with an eerie coda that feels like quavering, phantasmagoric streaks of light shooting across a completely ruined and desolate landscape, which I suppose is the perfect way for a Deathprod album to end: all life is extinguished in a great cataclysm and an indifferent universe continues on as if nothing had changed at all. It is hard to complain about an album that has such an apocalyptic and world-shaking final act, but it is notable that *Occulting Disk* feels like a series of vignettes building up to a single dazzling catharsis rather than a collection of fully formed compositions. As such, I can only point to "Black Transit" as a complete and perfect piece. The arc works nicely if the album is viewed as a whole, however, and it can even be viewed as an escalating series of occult rituals designed to open a portal to a malevolent new dimension. Moreover, I love some of the sounds that Sten conjures up in his "Occultations"—it would be a reach to describe this album as dark ambient or really any existing genre at all, as its closest kindred spirit is often the squirming, lysergic lunacy of Rashad Becker's

*Traditional Music of Notional Species*

. As far as my personal sensibility is concerned, that is one of the higher compliments that I can pay an artist. As such, the Deathprod of *Occulting Disk*

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is a significantly different animal than the Deathprod of

*Morals and Dogma*

or

*Treetop Drive*

, but this new incarnation is every bit as great as the old one.

Samples can be found [here](#) .