

The Dark Christians: Plastic Boys- Yung Lean, Bladee, Ecco2k, and Vattenrum
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Cloud rap is a subgenre of hip hop which has exploded in the 2010s, which is known for its relaxed, dream-like and reverb-heavy production style. Many in the scene have credited the beginnings of this music's popularity back to Swedish artist Yung Lean.¹ Yung Lean released his debut album "unknown death 2002" in the summer of 2013. He started his musical journey with a group which calls themselves "Sad Boys". However it wouldn't be very long until he started collaborating with other artists. Bladee, another Swedish artist, had reached out online with Yung Lean because they were working on a similar style of music. He and his group called themselves "Gravity Boys" or "Shield Gang". Together since 2013 the duo has created one of the most active and connected fanbases online. These two groups are most famous for producing music with notoriously depressing lyrics rapped over melancholic lofi beats. Eventually evolving into their final form, "Drain Gang". Still though in 2020 the groups peak popularity came from Yung Lean's debut album. Yung Lean was 16 when he released this album. Rapping about sex, drugs and occasionally Pokémon. It has been shown that Yung Lean was forced to mature at a young age. In his song "Ginseng Strip 2002", he acknowledges this separation from his peer group with the final line, "Yung Lean only attracts an older clientele, very well!"

What has been surging in hip hop over the years is a new style of production called "sampling".² In music, sampling is the reuse of a portion of a sound recording in another recording. Artists take a "sample" or a portion of a melody, rhythm, speech, or, in some cases, entire bars of music and alter its sound. Most of Yung Lean's first album takes advantage of this, including some of Drain Gang's continued work. This is an expression of the emotion behind their music. Distorting reality to fit their muse through the use of drugs. It appears that Yung Lean has created an anthem cry for his transitional generation. Generation Z, born after the millennials are known to be born from 2002-present.³ This generation has been experiencing an unprecedented amount of mental illness. In their music they express the cycle of destruction many find themselves in. "Solarflare" by Yung Lean released in Unknown Death is an entire song about having unprotected sex while high. This song's music video is a representation of being on a small "Isd trip". In it, he glorifies the use of drugs, and describes "snorting coke with Darth Vader" and how he abuses a woman's emotions to get off sexually. The emotional connection that was once adored by the population has been replaced with "hook-up culture".⁴ Throughout the track, Lean expresses disdain for spending casual time with women: "When I catch her in another world, I'ma realize why I hate her...I'ma play her, I'ma rob her, I'ma fuck her with no rubber".

The Swedish pair who often refer to one another as brothers are very open about their relationship. Yung Lean once tweeted, “just to make things clear bladee is not My sidekick. Hes been the goat since day 1 n from me its all love(spiderweb)”.⁵ In 2016 they released the track “MJ” that talks about their bond.⁶ The two seemed cemented in their emotional state and their relief is the music they create which allows them to have their lavish lifestyles. “Me and Bladee show no love, money, we be foldin’. Holdin’ onto the light like golden.” A shared mentor and friend, Barron Machat had passed away. Barron was staying with Bladee and Lean in a condo in America and left the two alone one night and had a fatal car accident.⁷ By grieving together it seems that they were able to create a unique and powerful, emotional-tie strength between each other. Both Yung Lean and Bladee have a line in reference to Barron, but also deny everyone but each other. Bladee first, “Who’s that in the beamer, man it’s Yung Lean and Bladee... You don’t really know me, okay, go away,” followed by Yung Lean’s verse “They say they want the old Lean, but they don’t know me. Me and Bladee show no love,”

Many fans are unclear on when they committed to “Drain Gang” but it’s because the emotion was always there. In the song “MJ” Yung Lean says both of the group's names “It’s Sad Boys, GTB, bitch we rollin’”. While Bladee coins the term “draining” he so often refers to in his music, “Gonna have the time of your life, You know- you know I’m a drainer”. Bladee begins this song by changing the depressing reality of taking prescribed xanax pills and lionized it by comparing himself to the King of Pop Michael Jackson. This is the continued theme of the song, “My life is a movie, but it’s nothing to me.” Especially in the context of the song he is celebrating the life he has been able to make for himself “I got Gucci labels, I’m a paper chaser”.⁸ The reality is that Bladee is living a life based on pain. He has claimed himself as “Trash Star”. Often in our modern movies we have characters overcoming tragic childhoods, and the 2019 blockbuster Joker revolves around someone who is maxing out on medications. We may or may not know why but Bladee states that he is taking the generally accepted maximum daily dose of xanax for depression, “Six mgs, I feel like MJ”.⁹

In an unreleased song titled “Myself” that may have been intended for his second album, Yung Lean explains why he is in his head space. The hook and beginning of the song repeats “Workin’ on myself, by myself, for myself... prefer my boys over wealth, I’m a sinner, fuck heaven, I’m in hell”. An idea that both Bladee & Yung Lean share. Bladee released a song titled “into dust” which has the echoing lyrics of “find yourself” all over the song. As seen through their music they find themselves by embracing their dark side. Yung Lean expresses how he finds this use of substances

key in “Myself” with the line “My idea of heaven is a place on earth, Smokin’ herb, getting hurt”. He states directly through these lyrics that he is dependent on some form of drug use to reach this place, which is implied throughout all of his music.

Bladee and Yung Lean both often rap about their distresses involving women. Likely where the previous anger started from. Bladee turns to using marijuana and xanax to bring in his “dark” side to help him cope. His verse in his song “Friday Nite” is about him using various drugs to cope with the likely loss of a previous girl. Implying that he goes to his xanax pills to bring evil, he refers to his hometown while likely thinking of an ex-girlfriend, “I remember Stockholm in the summertime, I remember something but I’m smoking now... But I’m always poppin’ just to calm me down, Callin’ all my demons so they come around”.¹⁰ Although Bladee frequently talks about his xanax usage he does not condone it. In an interview he explains “Smoke weed, try psychedelics, but just stay away from pills. It might seem like we glorify them but we really try not to, addiction is like being in an abusive relationship.”¹¹

In Yung Lean’s *The Fader* interview he seems to tell a story of how coming to America got him so addicted. “So once you do get to the U.S. and someone meets you at the airport and gives you money and gives you drugs, we go too crazy.”¹² This would have been the same trip in which his mentor Barron passed. Yung Lean says too that he was in the hospital for a short time, and he calls Bladee “an angel for helping him when he was overdosing.” Until 2017 it seemed they were stuck into this unfortunate loop, Bladee even releasing an album featuring Lean twice titled “Working on Dying”. Then, just the next year in 2018 he released two more albums with a brand new tone, “Icedancer” and “Redlight”. Icedancer is a celebration album, and in one chorus Bladee goes “Golden ticket, golden star... Trash Star, beat the odds.”¹³ Certainly now, he is basking in the light of the Drain Gang life he raps in “Waster”, “Drain Gang, yeah, we on, I’m the chosen one”

Bladee’s album “Redlight” defines what “drain” is for us. The fans describe it as listening to their music and feeling their emotions as the music plays. As described near the end of the album in “Puppet Master” Bladee raps, “I had ups and downs but it’s falling into place, Like the love from God when you look me in my face,... I had almost drowned if I didn’t fuck with that drain”. To him, drain is a fluid term, more like a feeling. In “College Boy”, “I’m smoking drain, I’m a take it to the face”. This particular song goes on to describe how he is now avoiding relationships. “She want Bladee, I run away... Stay away, I switch my state”. Many in North America may think of this as moving away from her physically, but the surrounding lyrics regarding smoking “drain” and “I need an eighth” suggests he is smoking marijuana to switch his mental state.

Their music is actually conceived and born in this act of dissociating. In an interview with MTV Yung Lean explains how he was writing lyrics based on his hallucinations he saw while in the mental hospital.¹⁴ A common belief is that to truly understand the music they make you need to also be using drugs as you listen. What we are likely seeing is the connection between what has made these people addicts. As Yung Lean stated in his interview with *The Fader* “I don’t like party music. I like emotional music.”¹⁵ This is what led to the definition of “draining” evolving. Playing off the urban term “vibing”, it’s relaxing in an altered mental state in a comfortable way; therefore *draining* is joining in with the music and feeling the emotions they play for us.

Thinking of hallucinations, their more friendly cousins, dreams are also tightly related to the enjoyment of their music. *Hypnagogic Hallucinations* are hallucinations that occur in your state just before falling asleep. Drug use and mood disorders will put you at more of a risk to experience these.¹⁶ The other risk factors are the same ones factors of paranoia; namely stress and anxiety. Fans have described their music as playing on the drowsiness you experience before falling asleep. A lot of youth commonly today have trouble maintaining relationships, especially in our new era of thought. Songs like “Friday Nite” have Bladee depressingly conveying his hurt, and tells us how the struggle for finding a partner has brought him destruction, but he will always continue to search. This is a very generic and broad feeling that many youth can relate to. Kanye West released an album in late 2019 titled “Jesus is King” and was having interviews describing his regrets about the cultural impact his music has made.¹⁷ Of course, this is the American culture that our Swedish artists were trying to adapt to. The powerful highs they allude to in songs frequently, their song “MJ” describes how this path has provided them their success so they will continue down them.

Hallucinations and dissociations are a part and parcel of having an altered state of mind. These people seem to have very differing opinions of themselves.¹⁸ We have lots of evidence of this happening within music involving both Yung Lean & Bladee. This is much more apparent in their more party type songs like “MJ” discussed before. Are you celebrating your life, or trying to fix it? Back in 2013 they released the song “Plastic Boy” together.¹⁹ Together they tell a story of a dream, as they begin their continued reference to plastic throughout their career. Lean begins with sharing how he pours his heart out when performing his music “Walk in the back room, when I finish shed a tear. Then I buy the sword and the spear, light year”. This is a very light and comforting song, very upbeat and it even sounds as if Bladee and Yung Lean are softly singing over the music. The sound of the music even allows you to ignore Yung Lean’s

obscene line in the hook “I see dead people, I really be trippin’”. He does this by setting up Bladee’s heroic verse, by throwing out a proudful boast “Cause I’m rich man, cause I’m rich man.(flex),(stunt),(woop)”. Then, Bladee’s verse begins with saying he is where Lean was off to, and with a girlfriend so attractive she’s almost perfect; “Holy Sword, Shadow Bladee, my girlfriend looks like anime”. While looking like anime may be a nice modern comparison for flawless looks, the point of the comparison was to point out how this couldn’t be truly real. “Bladee man, Astroboy, I’m smoking on a asteroid”, something that although would be fun to imagine, not actually real or possible. The next line he states what this experience is for them “I’m inside a plastic void, I turn into a plastic boy”. What he goes on in the song is to imply that these drugs are how he is able to sleep. Maybe talking to Lean, or himself “I’ll break your soul, my mind is using mind control”. Through Yung Lean’s verse we know he goes to this time after singing about his personal emotions he plays in his music. Likely putting them into a state of depression, or anxiousness after which would interrupt their sleep and possibly causing them to be unable to sleep on their own accord.²⁰ Evidenced in the final line Bladee confirms he was asleep, thus implying this journey put him to bed, “When I woke up one day, everything was gone.”

Although Bladee’s first album was released in 2014 he released the album “GTBSG” for Gravity boys, Shield Gang in 2013.²¹ The other two rappers in Drain Gang rap in this album with Bladee; Ecco2k and Thaiboy, while Yung Lean is featured in some songs. Each of the members' first verse of the album begins with telling us who they are. Thaiboy brags in “Bankaccount”, celebrating how he gains money and spends it quickly “Rubber-rubber bands, stacks on my bank account”. Bladee shares in his song named after his twitter handle “Bladeecity”, “I Have sunlight on me light earth, I’m tryin’ to get clean, wash away the dirt”. The last member Ecco2k begins his first in the song titled “Bleach”, coming in after Bladee. Very important to note that these two have been friends since they were children, even making a punk rock band when they were 11 years old.²² Ecco’s first words are “I can bleach the darkness out your mind” as he directly speaks to both Bladee and the audience. This album became a transfusion of emotions and creative expression when the two were introduced to Thaiboy and musical producer Whitearmor through friends. Bladee tells *The Fader* that this is how his musical journey took off.²³

Drain Gang has the unique advantage of having Whitearmor being their main producer, perhaps the most talented in the game right now. It seems very likely that Whitearmor does not enjoy being in the limelight at all. What is apparent to fans, is that all of Drain’s members are shy to the media but especially him, almost a ghost. He was the producer for nearly every track on GTBSG, and remains to be Drain Gang’s main

producer. This is a huge impact of their unique group dynamic. The group of "Sad Boys" are producers as well that have been working with Yung Lean & co since 2013. Usually as we know artists are forced to change their vision to help get music made and into the mainstream. Or simply forced to buy their way in. This is argued perfectly with this group actually, as they will not change for anyone, but can't break back into the mainstream. It's inspiring to their fans however, they have been able to see the sincerity in Drain Gang's music through the brotherhood they have created. Often they make their music videos involving one another, from the highest viewed video of Yung Lean's from 2013 "Kyoto". This music video has the Sad Boys and Bladee featured together. One of his most recent music videos out in 2020 "Boylife In EU", has Bladee dressing like a girl, is spinning an umbrella and the "Art Direction based on Yung Leans Drawings & Dreams".²⁴

Most fans would argue that their music videos show a lot of feeling as well. If you are looking into who is making the videos, you will see that again since 2013 they have been edited by, mainly each other. The music video for "Plastic Boy" by Yung Lean ft. Bladee was edited by Ecco2k. It really is a never ending loop considering how many songs they have released at this point. What we as viewers can see is that they are making music of the soul. Their unique connection with their producers are keeping their music pure. Drain Gang consists of the same rappers and producers back then as they do now. Very unfortunately in the summer of 2019 they lost one of their friends and colleagues, known as Vattenrum. Yung Lean and Whitearmor both made social media posts in remembrance of him, stating that he will continue to be an inspiration for their work.²⁵ Vattenrum was known as a "Sad Boys affiliate", which for sure is a title of honour. He is most remembered to fans for producing the track "Plastic Boy" for Yung Lean and Bladee, and as Lean said in his FaceBook post, Vattenrum's energy will live on.

Once you look a bit deeper into some of the lyrics they can see how these artists are not just rapping about nonsense and have been goal driven since the very beginning. Ecco2k seems to be the continued catalyst for recovery for their group. Just a few months after Vattenrum's surprise death, Ecco2k released his first solo album. When he released this album titled "e" it was a surprise album drop that was about his struggles with addiction, and the isolation he felt as someone different in Sweden. Visually different, and putting his emotions on his outfits he often stood out. Ecco2k told Vogue what happened to make "e" be produced, "I let chaos back in. That's what allowed 'e' to happen." An interesting thought considering the months leading up the album he was definitely in a state of grievance. Producer Whitearmor and a Sad Boy producer "Gud" made nearly every track on the album. With the release of the surprise

album he also came out with a very bright white look, many describing it as his flamboyant self, but it directly references one of his lines from "Bleach".²⁶ As he names their hometown and uses the double entendre of cleaning "the darkness out your mind" he tells us "We the future of the frozen city, dressed in bright white". Perhaps, finally, Ecco2k has found internal peace for himself after the long hard road he was given.

The emotional shift that has happened for Drain Gang has unfortunately left some fans bitter about the music changing. Thankfully though, they will not listen to their critics. Instead, Bladee, Ecco2k and Whitearmor decided to create another upbeat creative style with the track named after Cyndi Lauper's famous "Girls Just Want To Have Fun", theirs was titled "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" in February of 2020. As they attempt to take meaning from the original song, which was based on the line "My mother says, "When you gonna live your life right?"". *Drain's* song has two main meanings. First, most important to them is a song that talks about getting over their lost friend Vattenrum. Seemingly introspective, and conflicting lyrics throughout, "(Hold on, let me go)". They must be able to overcome the loss of this friendship, but also know they never want to forget him. The second is the plea from Bladee and Ecco2k to their fans, to allow and embrace their new path as they want to enjoy what they create. Bladee tells us in his verse the importance of his music "Never-ending, Story of my life, Ballad for the sins". Bladee has always used drugs, and gone through tremendous mental anguish, but now is the time for him to create happy music. As this is his emotional state now.

March of 2020 the world began to wake up to an infectious virus that would put all of us in a state of global pandemic. In this time people across the planet were being asked, some forced to stay home to prevent the spread. This isolation began to really constrict those who were already mentally fragile. This wouldn't stop Bladee or Drain Gang however. On April 9th, Bladee dropped the mixtape "Exeter". This was only 18 minutes in length, suggesting maybe an early release. The entire album sounds like Bladee is simply happy. Interestingly, the final song is titled "Imaginary", and suggests that everything for him lately has been a dream, a feeling that goes back to Plastic Boy. The second last song of the mixtape is the song "Love Story" which he sings with his childhood friend, Ecco2k. This song is likely a sequel to "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun", and again playing off meaning to Taylor Swift's "Lovesory" and her classic line "Baby just say yes." The message of this song alludes to their continued cycle of drug use. It begins with telling us that "Everything came back to me, Every path leads back to you again" likely in reference to their coping method that Ecco said was needed for him to get the album "e" to be released.

Bladee tries to tell us that his life while high is actually exactly what he truly desires. What he uses as a comparison for the feeling he has while using it is actually a direct call to his fans. Commonly, Bladee is asked by fans for the secret to his skin care routine because of his amazing skin, "Perfect, you got perfect details, Like my skin, baby, perfect". Their struggle for addiction is what made this song be named after Taylor Swift's "Love Story", as what they are saying is to stop fighting, and embrace. This may seem as a very tragic step for them to take, but it is one that is very good. In this song, they only reference one drug, that being marijuana "Make the street smell like flowers, Make a moment". Marijuana has been surging for medical use, namely for anxiety and depression over the years.²⁷ What is important about using marijuana to treat these, is that they would still be getting the THC chemical which is psychoactive, and these effects are allowing them to "Feels just like I'm Daydreaming".

Yung Lean is planning his next album for the immediate future, May 15th of 2020. Slowly building suspense since April shortly after the release of Exeter, Yung Lean has been feeding fans non stop promotional material. Almost as if he is too anxious to begin sharing his message. He released a music video containing two songs for the future album "Starz", titled Violence+Pikachu. Both songs were produced by Whitearmor, while the video was edited by Ecco2k. Subtly Yung Lean is trying to share the message in this music video, the environment surrounding him as he raps is a destructed place, likely calling back to how he threw physical tantrums which led to his admission to the mental hospital. During the song "Violence" Yung Lean shares a thought which is not mentioned in the official lyrics, "You say you're a product of your environment, my environment is a product of me." Interestingly enough, Yung Lean is still trying to speak to his North American audience. At 3:24 in the music video the camera zooms in on a necklace Yung Lean is wearing. This depicts an image of a clown, this is the same clown that is pictured at the end riots in the movie, Joker(2019).²⁸ Should note that he wears a jester hat throughout. Yung Lean has a very interesting way of expressing himself, on May 10th he released a 20 second clip titled "My Agenda" where a human-demon like figure, which may be himself, shoots him in the heart with a shotgun. I'm not sure what the message behind this album will be, but considering the life journey of Drain Gang, I hope everyone who is struggling will give it an honest listen.

"What can I say? Everything just happened to play out this way" - Bladee, Apple 2019

Endnotes

1. Amarca, N. (2015, June 25) Highsnobity
2. Flatow, I. (2011, January 28). *Digital Music Sampling*. NPR
3. This number does change frequently however, noting that Yung Lean was born in 1996 means he was a toddler just before the “official” title change
4. Camosy, C. C. (2019). *Resisting throwaway culture*; See chapter 2; Hook up culture described by theologians is the premise that youth are beginning to have sexual relationships specifically separate from a normal intimate relationship.
5. Retrieved on: <https://twitter.com/yungleann/status/992022299934183430?lang=en> Goat is a colloquialism for “Greatest of all time” often referred to “the best” of something definable.
6. Retrieved on: <https://genius.com/Bladee-mj-lyrics> This song has the attitude that they put on together to get over the loss of their mentor.
7. Cooper, (Yung Lean's *Second Chance* 2019) This was the cause of one of his trips to the mental hospital
8. Highsnobity All News (2020, May 1). *Gucci*: This brand is so popular, it's now simply a fashion statement to own.
9. *Xanax Dosage Guide*. Drugs.com. <https://www.drugs.com/dosage/xanax.html>.
10. Retrieved on: <https://genius.com/Bladee-friday-nite-lyrics> The period in between these two lines may suggest that introspection scares him, and he needs his demons as protection.
11. Staff, (*The Capoxxo Interview* 2018)
12. Cooper (Yung Lean's *Second Chance* 2019)
13. Retrieved on: <https://genius.com/albums/Bladee/Icedancer> Song, first quoted is “Jaws”
14. Yung Lean (Warlord, Stranger) talks with MTV News Retrieved on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoBiw7nSrG8>
15. Cooper (Yung Lean's *Second Chance* 2019)
16. (Cirino and Biggers, 2020)
17. (Schatz, 2020) Kanye West “This album has been made to be an expression of the gospel and to share the gospel and the truth of what Jesus has done to me. When I think of the goodness of Jesus and all that he does for me, my soul cries out.”
18. Chiu C-D, Chang J-H, Hui CM. Self-concept integration and differentiation in subclinical individuals with dissociation proneness. *Self & Identity*. 2017;16(6):664-683. doi:10.1080/15298868.2017.1296491.
19. Retrieved on: <https://genius.com/Yung-lean-plastic-boy-lyrics> Plastic Boy, lyrically seems to imply that they are doing drugs in a dream-like state and having fun with their altered reality. Bladee calls a special call out to “superstone” which used to be a minecraft mod to make your sword invincible. This is another point on how they alter current reality. Retrieved on: <https://www.planetminecraft.com/mod/supercraft-1632623/>

20. Staner, Luc. "Sleep and anxiety disorders." *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience* vol. 5,3 (2003): 249-58.
21. <https://genius.com/albums/Drain-gang/Gtbsg>
22. (Angell, 2020) The longlast impact of their friendship is profound like a brotherhood. Ecco's album "e" hints to Bladee as "true friend" through out
23. (Angell, 2020) This meeting is what started his digital music, away from things like punk bands.
24. Retried from Yung Lean's youtube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLVeCAWV9-M>
25. (Yung Lean, 2019) Retrieved from his social media page:
<https://www.facebook.com/346804438754965/posts/rip-isak-aka-vattenrumyour-energy-and-friendship-will-always-stay-alivehttpswwwy/1990375277731198/>
26. Retrieved from: <https://genius.com/Bladee-and-ecco2k-bleach-lyrics> Bleach is a song defining Ecco2k, he mainly is following Bladee on his spiritual journey, being the inspiration for recovery
27. Bridgeman, Mary Barna, and Daniel T Abazia. "Medicinal Cannabis: History, Pharmacology, And Implications for the Acute Care Setting." *P & T : a peer-reviewed journal for formulary management* vol. 42,3 (2017): 180-188.
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Boylife in EU video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLVeCAWV9-M>

Violence and Pikachu <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VamfnrmmAow>

My Agenda <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxQF0qLn1QQ>

Plastic Boys. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5T_ePuulsOw