

Lotic: Power

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The discomfort everyday queer presentation can induce in the casual bigot can be kind of empowering. Back in 1967, the transgender soul singer Jackie Shane railed about how if people ever stopped pointing at her on the street, she'd go home and look in the mirror and wonder if she put her makeup on wrong. The great gay anthem "Queen," by Perfume Genius, is about the way people still recoil from queerness and the associations with disease and sexual perversion still inexorably attached to it. If that isn't power, what is? But perhaps no one has phrased this topsy-turvy dynamic as deliciously as J'Kerian Morgan: "*Brown skin, masculine frame, head's a target/ Acting feminine, make 'em vomit.*"

Power, the new album from the Houston-born, Berlin-based producer known as Lotic, is about the power of simply existing. It's a suit of bulletproof armor, and though the threat of violence looms overhead and moments of beauty are rarely allowed to exist unscathed, its optimism is dizzying. Morgan was homeless for much of the recording of the album, but it doesn't dwell on hard luck, preferring to look towards the future with resolve and resilience. At times, *Power* is

beautiful and luxurious, its twinkling, bell-centric textures evoking ambient artists like Donato Dozzy and Ernest Hood. At other times, it kicks up such an orgiastic squall of noise it justifies the album's portentous title through sheer physical force.

Morgan's voice is more central to the music than ever. They're in rapper mode, flexing, issuing cool warnings. "Nerve" is a tribute to Houston hip-hop, and the producer sounds almost like Kendrick Lamar, their nasal whine understating the cool badassery of their threats. Few performers are as larger-than-life as rappers, and for all its toxic hetero-masculinity, rap is one of the few places on the charts where theatricality thrives. Morgan's a natural on the mic, and though they're not exactly Big Daddy Kane as far as bars go, their cool confidence comes on every bit as strong as their beats. "Bulletproof" doesn't need more than eight individual words to make an impression: "*I'm still alive/ I'm gon' thrive/ I'm a bulletproof nigga.*"

Lotic's music is defined by its sci-fi sound design, and here Lotic adds little alien whispers and skitters of noise to suggest omnipresent menace. But the album's most shocking moment of violence comes about two minutes into the title track. The song's been all literal bells and whistles for a while, a sea of crystalline tones. Then a drum roll shatters the landscape—and not just any drum roll, but the kind we hear on late-night news before we learn the latest godawful thing to happen in the world. It might be the most universally traumatizing sound Morgan could have chosen, pulling us out of our ambient comfort zone into the realm of harsh reality.

But then something astonishing happens. Morgan starts jamming along to the newflash drums, adding a little hint of acid bass and a bright, pinging synth lead, as if they're hijacking the airwaves. Suddenly, the Trump era's official fanfare of horror has become a joyous jam session. That leads into the final track, "Solace," which finds Morgan whispering "*it's gonna be okay.*" That might not be true—at least not for everyone—but at least we can fuck shit up while the ship goes down.