

Like the waves that crashed on the beaches of King Ronin Da Scholar's Hawaii birthplace, his life has been as changeable as the eb and flow of the tides. Hip hop, though, was always an anchor that brought resolve, from loneliness felt in his childhood to the trials of juggling mental illness, academic successes and a stint in in-patient care as a young adult. Now, the Salt Lake City-based artist is his own anchor, using hip hop to climb waves of grief and anger to build wild compositions that surge with equal parts tightly-controlled chaos and lose-your-mind glee.

Drawing on influences like Kendrick Lamar's descriptive and poetic diversity of style, and finding kinship in the nihilism of Notorious B.I.G. on albums like *Ready to Die*, King Ronin Da Scholar also draws on the cartoonish hyper-violence and Eastern themes of the Wu Tang Clan. With all this, King Ronin postures like a tough-as-nails rock star, even while exploring the kind of demons that many a rocker have under their belt. Early singles like "Ideations" King Ronin tags as "unapologetically suicidal," owning his darkest experiences with aggressive raps and fiery delivery. "This mentality just exists in life sometimes, make the most of it," he says, and by pulling playfully from the aesthetics of the media he grew up on—from gorey films to violent video games to early Eminem—he does just that.

Besides crafting his pain into a caricature of itself, King Ronin also offers catharsis to those experiencing similar situations, to show that they're not alone, that there can be a productive purpose to "talking shit, not just wallowing." This part of Ronin shows up on singles like "Empathy (I Feel)" where his tones turn to honey. This flexibility—from honest empathizing to going hard—is all over his debut EP *It's Whatever* (2020), and is what makes it such a distinguishing debut for the young artist. With themes of love, desperation, loss, and violence, the EP is also full of colorful turns—to raunchiness, over-the-top braggadocio, promiscuity, frivolous materialism and mania, all leading to mosh-able tracks like "M.A.N.I.A" and "Cup Runnin' Over." While writing these songs, considering his lows, Ronin mused, "Let's pretend that none of it exists, and let's pretend that I'm hot shit."

"I've been able to see where the grass is greener and where the grass is shit brown. And because of those events I've developed this language that expands the reality of and gives a broader focus to finding peace of mind," he says. This balance that embraces the rage with the sage earns him the name King Ronin Da Scholar. As he puts it, "A king is a sovereign, yet a humble servant. A ronin is a samurai warrior without a master. A scholar seeks knowledge for the betterment of his environment."