

DMX LOU DIAMOND PHILLIPS LILA WATKINS



MAKIN' IT HARD

DMX

going 1997. A year since the deaths of Biggie and Pac, the shiny suit was in full swing. The rap as a genre had gotten soft. The game was ripe for the picking. Born in Baltimore, raised in Yonkers, N.Y., East DMX, Simmons had grown up in a neighborhood that of all things, he called a "management" area. "I was a



TEN YEARS AGO, IN THE WAKE OF THE DEATHS OF BIGGIE AND 'PAC, HIP-HOP WAS SOUNDING A LITTLE TIMID. THEN A RABID RAPPER CAME OUT OF YONKERS WITH A BARK THAT PUT THE BITE BACK WHERE IT BELONGED. ON THE DECADE ANNIVERSARY OF ITS RELEASE, XXL PRESENTS AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE CREATION OF DMX'S DEBUT, **IT'S DARK AND HELL IS HOT.**

///COMPILED BY LAURA CHECKOWAY, BEN DETRICK, THOMAS GOLIANOPOULOS, CLOVER HOPE, ADAM MATTHEWS, BRIAN MILLER, ANSLEM SAMUEL ///IMAGES JONATHAN MANNION///



pring 1998. A year since the deaths of Biggie and 'Pac, the shiny-suit era was in full swing. Hip-hop as a genre had gotten soft. The game was ripe for the picking.

Born in Baltimore, raised in Yonkers, N.Y., Earl "DMX" Simmons had grown up troubled. A stickup kid, in and out of jail, he rapped with a group called Gangsters of the Ghetto. In 1988, at the age of 17, he signed a management deal with the neighborhood Dean siblings—Darrin "Dee," Joaquin "Wahh" and their sister, Chivon—who were launching a label, Ruff Ryders Entertainment. A string of street singles earned the gravel-voiced MC local notoriety and landed Ruff Ryders a deal with Columbia in 1992—but it would prove to be short-lived. It was five years later when they got their big break: a contract with Def Jam.

Once at the house that Russell built, DMX and the Deans hooked up with A&R Irv Gotti to work on a debut album. Assembling a production team anchored by Ruff Ryders' in-house beatmaker, Dame Grease (with a last-minute, eventually historic addition of the Deans' as-yet-unknown nephew Swizz Beatz), the crew set to work in Yonkers, Baltimore and Atlanta for an intense two months of recording. "I used to just crash out in the studio," says Yonkers producer PK. "I used to be there for literally 48 hours. People would tell me, 'Yo, dude, you need to go home. Your hygiene ain't right.'" Led by the gritty smash single "Get at Me Dog" and bolstered by X's dynamic guest verses on LL Cool J's "4, 3, 2, 1," Ma\$e's "24 Hours to Live" and The Lox's "Money, Power, Respect," *It's Dark and Hell Is Hot* was released on May 19, 1998, and debuted atop *Billboard's* Top 200 album chart on the way to 4.6 million in sales. DMX was shamelessly grimy, somewhat terrifying, but, in the view of many, absolutely necessary for throwing some shade on a rap scene that had gotten lite. "I always liked the more aggressive stuff," says Russell Simmons. "DMX was our alternative artist at the time. He was my hero."

With another multiplatinum DMX album only eight months away and a succession of hit crew albums and a second superstar, Philadelphia rapstress Eve, on the horizon, Ruff Ryders shot to the top of the millennial music scene. While Dame Grease would have a falling out with the label shortly after the album came out, he would continue working with DMX, who would have a long run as a hip-hop top dog, selling more than 16 million solo albums over the next five years.

On this 10th anniversary, *XXL* pays homage to a classic and speaks to those who were involved. —CLOVER HOPE

XFACTORS

(1) "INTRO" PRODUCED BY IRV GOTTI AND LIL ROB

- EARL "DMX" SIMMONS** >>> Yonkers rapper
- DARRIN "DEE" DEAN** >>> executive producer, A&R, co-founder of Ruff Ryders
- JOAQUIN "WAHH" DEAN** >>> executive producer, A&R, co-founder of Ruff Ryders
- IRV GOTTI** >>> executive producer, Def Jam Records A&R, founder of Murder Inc. Records
- DAME GREASE** >>> producer, mixer, engineer
- RAY COPELAND** >>> DMX's uncle, manager from 1995 to 2002
- ANTHONY "PK" FIELDS** >>> Yonkers producer, mixer, engineer
- SWIZZ BEATZ** >>> Bronx producer, Dean brothers' nephew, founder of Full Surface Entertainment
- YOUNG LORD** >>> Bronx producer
- LIL ROB** >>> Queens producer
- SHEEK** >>> Yonkers rapper, member of The Lox
- STYLES** >>> Yonkers rapper, member of The Lox
- DRAG-ON** >>> Yonkers rapper
- KASINO** >>> Yonkers rapper
- JAZZ YOUNG** >>> Def Jam marketing exec
- JUSTICE JOHNSON** >>> engineer
- RICH KELLER** >>> sound mixer

DMX: I did that straight through, one take. Irv was like, "This shit is incredible." He said I was the only person that he knew could do it like that. I don't punch in at all. A lot of these niggas out here punch in, like, two bars. If I can't spit the whole rhyme all the way through, I can't say it. Fuck that.

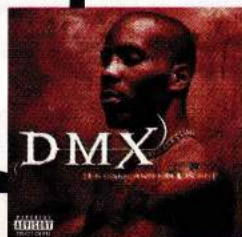
IRV: I felt the intro was the most important record. Because, if we're starting this movement, when people put the album in, that first record's gotta grab 'em. It gotta catch 'em. It's gotta be hot. It was a Mtume sample, and I looped that up and had Lil Rob lace the drums on it, and then just told X, "Yo, gimme two 24-bar verses. I wanted this to be the first song on the album, so when niggas put the album in, you tellin' the

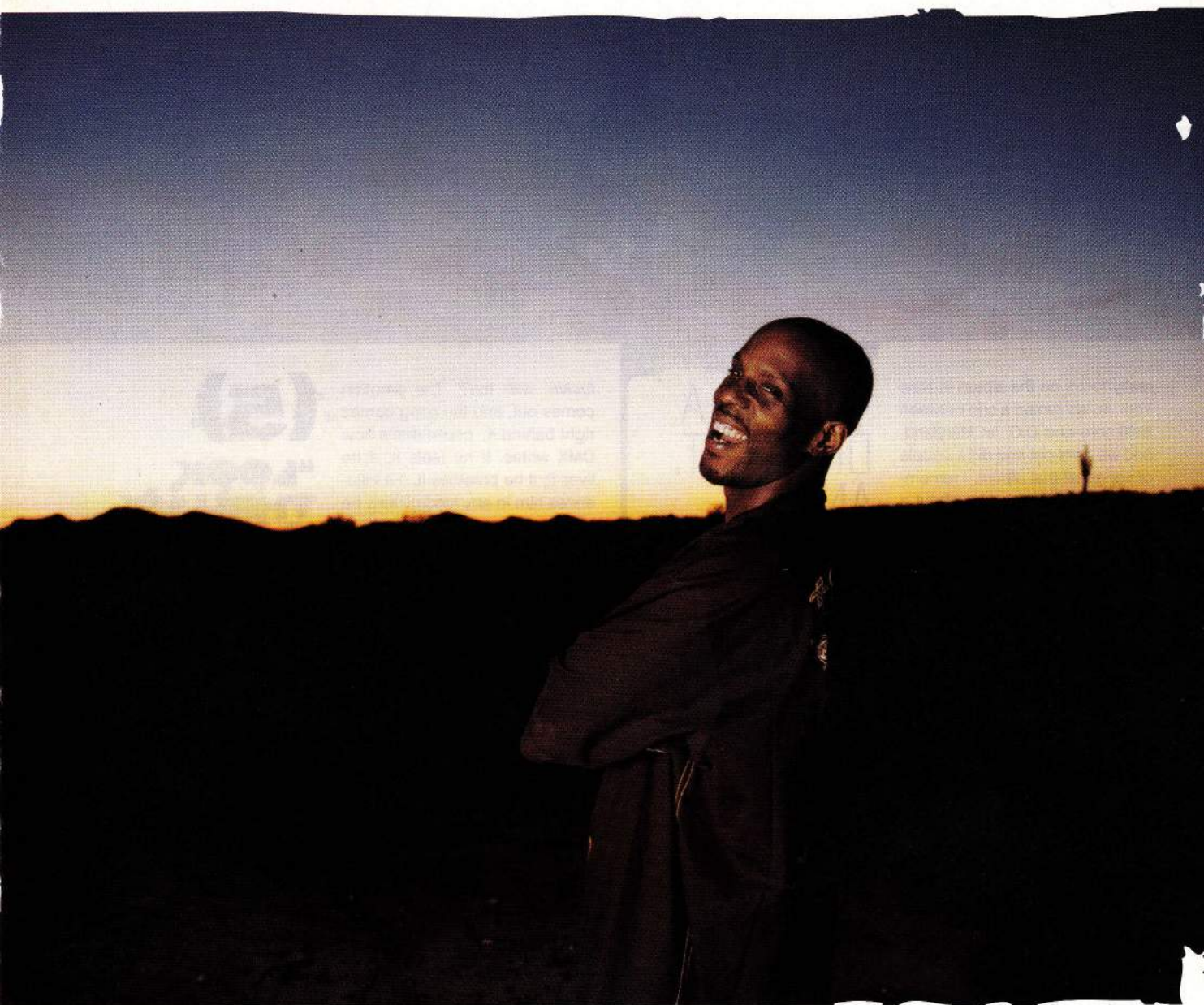
world don't fuck with you, 'cause you here, and you gonna kill everybody movin'." And he came in like, "I'm the hardest/Rap artist/ And I'ma start this/Shit up for real/ Get up and feel/My words/I make Herbs spit up and squeal." When he went in on that, I was like, "We got something."

LIL ROB: Irv's always been the dude to be able to hear a beat and automatically be able to say, "Yo, this beat is for X," or, "This beat is for Jay." He heard that beat and immediately said, "Yo, this is X's intro for his album."

(2) "RUFF RYDERS' ANTHEM" PRODUCED BY SWIZZ BEATZ

DMX: I wrote that in Baltimore. We had a house out there for a little while. That's where I recorded most of the album. Had a little radio box, blank tapes and just





"I PLAYED THE 'RUFF RYDERS' ANTHEM' BEAT, AND X WAS LIKE, 'I'M NOT DOING NO F&#KIN' ROCK 'N' ROLL BEAT!'" —**SWIZZ BEATZ**

SWIZZ BEATZ: CAMERON KRONE/ISTALUX

wrote. I wrote three songs in one night—that song, "Let Me Fly" and "I Can Feel It."

I didn't wanna do that song. I thought the beat sounded corny. It was a little simple ditty. But Darrin was like, "Just do it for me." So I was like, "Fuck it." It [turned out] aight, 'cause I'm not gon' write no bullshit. It wasn't one of

my favorite songs, though.

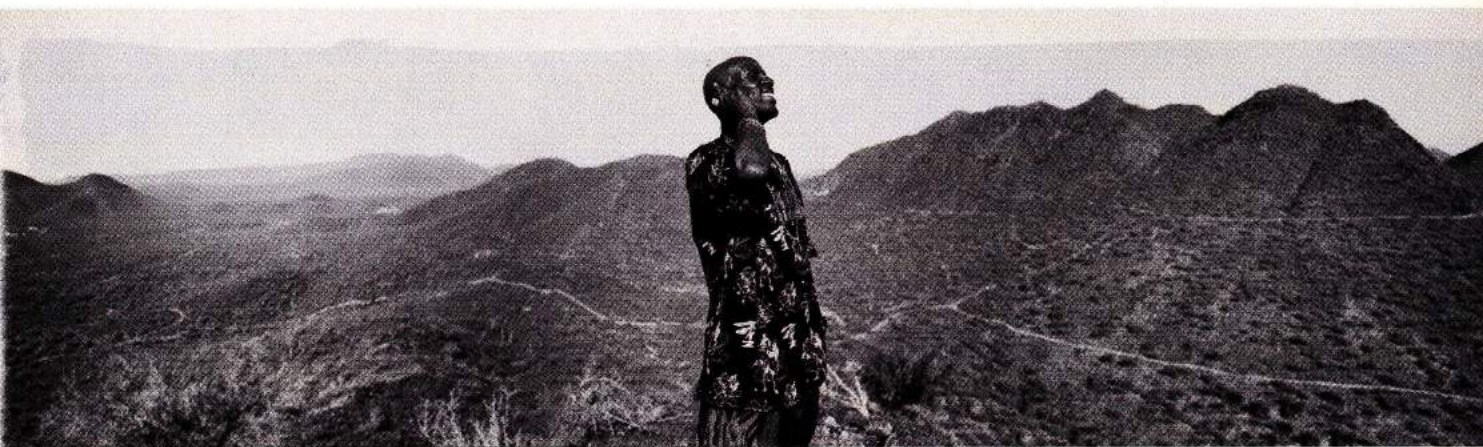
SWIZZ BEATZ: I only did that one song on the album. I kept it real simple and straight to the point. I left room for the chorus to be an anthem style. That came from living in Atlanta, where all the colleges and high schools were always chanting.

I was living in Atlanta, and

when I came back to New York, they had already wrapped the album. I was like, "Yo, how the fuck y'all gonna do the album without me?" So I came up there with a bunch of beats. But X already felt like he finished the album. And when an artist feel like he finished the album, they don't wanna go in, so that's the hardest thing to do.

I played the "Ruff Ryders' Anthem" beat, and X was like, "I'm not doing no fuckin' rock 'n' roll beat! I'm on some hood shit. That's some fuckin' White-boy rock shit!"

WAAH: X wasn't really trying to do the "Ruff Ryders' Anthem," 'cause it was kind of a down-South feel. And he was getting in a whole lot of trouble at that time. We couldn't



really focus on the album in New York, so we rented a crib between Baltimore and D.C., in Maryland, and we went out and did a couple of songs off that album. I remember staying out there for about a month or two, trying to get him focused on doing different songs that he would normally not do.

We knew it was a hit. Most artists don't really feel some songs. The songs that artists don't feel are pretty much the songs that are hits. Those are the ones that we have to kind of force upon X to do. We had a couple days to do it, and he wasn't really trying to. He was doing everything *but* that song... We went through hell to get that song.

(3)

"F&#KIN' WIT' D"

PRODUCED BY **PK**
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION BY **DAME GREASE**

PK: DMX was like, "Yo, I need another beat like 'Get at Me Dog.'" I was like, "That's nothing. I'll be right back." Went to my house, got a 90-minute tape full of just samples of everything. I just put everything on a tape and listen to it, sample it, loop it up and put drums to it. I was like, "Yes! I got another one." Grease came through. He put little changes in it, the same way he did with "Get at Me Dog."

DMX is like a ball of energy. You can take a piece of the sun and basically put it around you. Hot fire, just jumping around, really into it. Fifteen, 20 minutes, the song is done, and it's on to the next one.

RAY COPELAND: He just wrote that song to spite niggas messing

"IT WAS A DROUGHT. AND EVERYBODY WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WAS COMING NEXT. LIKE, 'WHO IS COMING? WHAT'S COMING?'"
—WAAH



with him all the time. Like, "X, we need you to do this. Come here." He said, "Why everybody always

fuckin' with me?" The emotion comes out, and the song comes right behind it, 'cause that's how DMX writes. If he feels it, if he lives it, if he breathes it, if it influences him in any kind of way, he turns it into a song.

(4)

"THE STORM" (Skit)

PRODUCED BY **DAME GREASE AND PK**
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION BY **WAAH AND MAD MAN**

DMX: I didn't do any skits. Waah and Dee did the skits. That wasn't my thing at all. I didn't see the purpose. I heard it, was like, "Okay, you guys want a little airtime. So have fun."

PK: Waah was like, "The songs is crazy. The beats are crazy. But now we need some skits." He was really on some detailed shit, along the lines with the producing shit. If a nigga get shot, you'll hear the body drop, and you'll hear a couple shells hit the floor.

RICH KELLER: That's Waah. He's always running the skits the fuckin' day before mastering. The day before we gotta turn this shit in. The label's calling every day. Lyor's coming to the studio to hear the finished album, and we're working on skits, like, overnight. For 48 hours straight. We got two, three rooms going. And one of the rooms, Waah is in there doing skits, and he's bringing dogs and guns and shit into the studio, making noises and sound effects. It's 7 a.m. Everybody's coming back in to get their coffee. We're like, "Let's get the film people and sound-effects library!"

(5)

"LOOK THRU MY EYES"

PRODUCED BY **PK**
CO-PRODUCED BY **DAME GREASE**

DMX: It was me, my man Rob Puentes—he got locked up like a week later; he did nine years—and my man Magoo. We had an apartment in Yonkers, a basement apartment in the projects. I wrote the whole song in like an hour or two. By the time I woke up, like 10 niggas outside my window, like, "That shit is hot, son!"

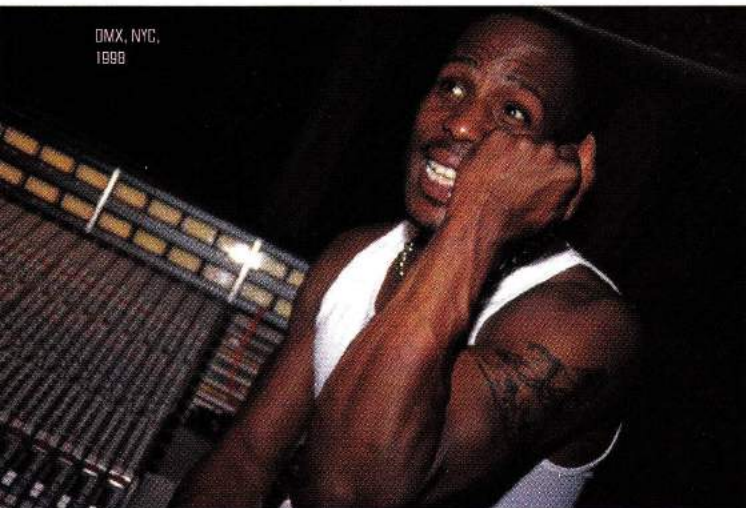
DAME GREASE: PK had made the beat, and the beat was basically the drums and piano. I came in and played all the instruments over on the beat and added all the types of effects, all the strings, to make it a composition, more than just a track. I added in all the sound effects and co-produced all the songs on the album, just to make the album more lifelike. Regardless whose track it was—PK, Swizz, Irv—I'd come in and do my tweaking, just to make sure we had a great album.

(6)

"GET AT ME DOG" (Feat. Sheek)

PRODUCED BY **DAME GREASE**
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION BY **PK**

DMX, NYC,
1998



DMX: That was another joint I didn't wanna do. I did the mixtape with The Lox. That was on the mixtape [DJ Clue's *The Professional*]. Clue was like, "Why the nigga DMX always go last? Why he don't go first?" I said, "Fuck it." So I went first on the joint, shut him down real quick. At the end of [my verse], I was like, "Yeah, you cats know the real. Get at me, dog. *Grrrr, arf, arf!* What the deal?" It just came out. I didn't plan it to be a bark. It was just like, *Ahh!* Just the energy.

And then the president of Def Jam was like, "Yo, you need the same beat with three verses on it, and do the barking thing." Just like that. I didn't want to. I was like, "Yo, I got another song." He's like, "No, I want that one."

DAME GREASE: "Get at me, dog," was always just X. It was like, "Yo, X, what up?" "Get at me, dog." So it was his lingo. It's just how he talked, before anybody got on. X in 1982: "Yo, X, what up?" "Get at me, dog." "Yo, X, where you goin'?" "Get at me." It's his lingo. We just made it into a song.

Based on me producing half of The Lox's *Money, Power, Respect* album, I was the unsigned Hitman for Bad Boy. I actually adapted part of the Bad Boy sound, from doing so much Bad Boy stuff. So I blended the Grease with the Bad Boy. Bad Boy's good for loops. So I blended it with the Grease, which is the rugged drums, the breakdowns and the superfine chops. But I hate loops. Bad Boy do loops. I gotta chop it up and do something creative. And that's what I did with "Get at Me Dog." The

EPMD record ["Get the Bozack"] came to my mind, and I sent people out searching for the original. I said, "I need that. That sample they used, I need that." So I had a couple people on it. PK found me the record [B.T. Express's "Everything Good to You (Ain't Always Good for You)"]. I knew I could take that and make it intense. My whole thing was making music so people get knocked out. It was fighting music.

SHEEK: I remember Dee called me, and they was at some studio in Manhattan, and Irv Gotti and all of them were in there. And they was just like, "Yo, Louch, I need you to just go berserk." We didn't even have no real hook to it. I started bugging out, saying, "Y'all niggas wanna be killers?"

IRV: At the time, The Lox was hotter than X, 'cause they was on Bad Boy and had some shit out already. So I was like, "Yo, let's do a freestyle." So Grease had this beat, and it was just raw. We put The Lox on it so I could give it to Clue, 'cause back then, if you was on Clue's tape, you could blow up. So The Lox do the freestyle with DMX, and, at the end of DMX's rhyme, he said, "Get at me, dog. *Grrrruff!* What da deal?" He ends the rhyme like that. And the freestyle becomes crazy. Everyone is talking about it. He's got the buzz going. So I got to Darrin, and I said, "Yo, let's turn this shit into a song."

X wasn't even in the studio when we made it. Because me and Darrin knew all of DMX's rhyme, it was almost like we didn't even need him there. So we put the whole shit together.

Me and Darrin was in Chung King Studios, and I said, "We gonna use the same beat and put Sheek or one of them from The Lox on the record." It could have been any one of them on there, but it just ended up being Sheek. Darrin came up with the hook. 'Cause we was like, "Yo, we gonna have X say, 'Get at me, dog. And something, something, something. Get at me, dog.'" And Darrin came up with, "Y'all niggas wanna be killas? Y'all niggas wanna feel us? Y'all niggas wanna be the real?" Then we just took different rhymes from old freestyles and put 'em together.

So X comes in, and he didn't wanna do it. X was like, "Yo, I just did this shit on the freestyle. I don't wanna do this shit again." But I was like, "Yo, trust me, just do it. Please, X, just do it for me." So he said fuck it. He goes in the studio, and we was like, "These are the three rhymes to use." These were all rhymes he did years before—that's why he's shittin' on K-Solo on there.



"LET US IN
THIS MUSIC
GAME, AND
LET US GET
SOME OF
THIS MONEY,
OR WE'RE
ABOUT TO
SNATCH IT."
—DEE

(7)

"LET ME FLY"

PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION BY
YOUNG LORD

DMX: That song has a lot of meaning to it, a lot of significance. I felt like people was just tryna control me. Everybody around me—Dee, Waah—like, "Do this." Before I even met them niggas I was nice. Like, let me walk my dogs, son! If it ain't broke, don't fuckin' fix it. You do what you do, I do what I do. Money, I don't need your input. All that control shit—leave me the fuck alone. Let me fly.

DAME GREASE: Young Lord found me the sample, 'cause we'd done a beat together—"Niggas Wanna Act," for Ma\$e's album. I was in his crib, going through his records. The sample on there is from an old Dominican record, "Lo Duro." I didn't even know it was a Spanish song back then. I just heard the beginning and said, "Gimme that."

YOUNG LORD: I remember we did that shit maybe the week after Biggie died. I actually got that sample from an old Spanish record. I think the guy's name was Camilo Sesto. At the time, I was into going through old Spanish records and finding loops and sounds. A lot of cats weren't up on that, and I would raid all of the old Spanish stores and find samples.

RAY COPELAND: I think [DMX's wife] Tashera was pregnant with EJ, the second baby—they lost that to miscarriage. And he wrote that song because he always wanted to be with his friends, hang in the streets and run when we wanted to get some work done. He recorded that song just out of that, saying, "Y'all gotta just be with me. Lemme fly or give me death." I was like, "What do you mean?" He's just, "I'll show you. I'll show you." He wrote the song, and we all were like, "Wow." He just wanted people to know: "Let me fly for a little while. Let me have me for a minute."

DMX: MICHAEL SCHREIBER/RETNA; DEE: KEVIN KNIGHT/COPIBIS

"I JUST WANTED TO
SHOW THE EXTENT
OF MY IMAGINATION."

—DMX



(8)

"X IS COMING"

PRODUCED BY PK

WAAH: That was just like exactly what it says: "X is coming for you." That was a song where we knew we had to get to people to let them know that he was coming and he had what you was missing. It kind of stimulated our introduction into the game, when they had that big upset with the Biggie and 'Pac situation. It kind of left the game empty once those two artists passed away. It was a bad situation, but it opened the door for us, because nobody didn't know how hip-hop would turn out and what was going on. It was a drought. And everybody was trying to figure out what was coming next. Like, "Who is coming? What's coming?"

DMX: "If you got a daughter older than 15/I'ma rape her." I just wanted to show the extent of my imagination. I thought to myself, What would make me wanna kill a muthafucka? I just put the shoe on the other foot, that's all. I'm not, like, *like* that. I don't think like that. I just thought, Damn, that's some sick shit to do. To tell a muthafucka, like, "Take her right in the middle of the floor/Right in front of you."

RAY COPELAND: A lot of people called about that song, 'cause he talks about raping your daughter on the living room floor. So we got a lot of little calls about, "Yo, what is he talking about?" We was like, "It's music, it's art, it's just poetry. It's anger just speaking out." That song caused a lot of little newspaper articles. People protested that song a little bit. People took it really—they was like, "Oh, man, he's dangerous." Sometimes your art form can get you in a little trouble.

(9)

"DAMIEN"

PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

RICH KELLER: I played him, once, a Stravinsky piece... "The Soldier's Tale," that's what it's called. Basically, it's about this soldier who—he's on his way home from war. He makes a deal with the Devil. Kinda like Frank Zappa's "Titties and Beer." Same thing as Stravinsky's "Soldier's Tale," same thing as "Damien." Those are three pieces done by three different artists that are the same. I don't know if Stravinsky influenced Zappa, but I think they each came to it on their own. Kinda like the [Mayans] and the pyramids and the Egyptians and their pyramids. They each came to it on their own. You can look that shit up. Oh, yes, I told X

this, yes. I told him about that. After, X did it, too: having a conversation with the Devil and playing, portraying both characters. That X did. X is the only one who did that.

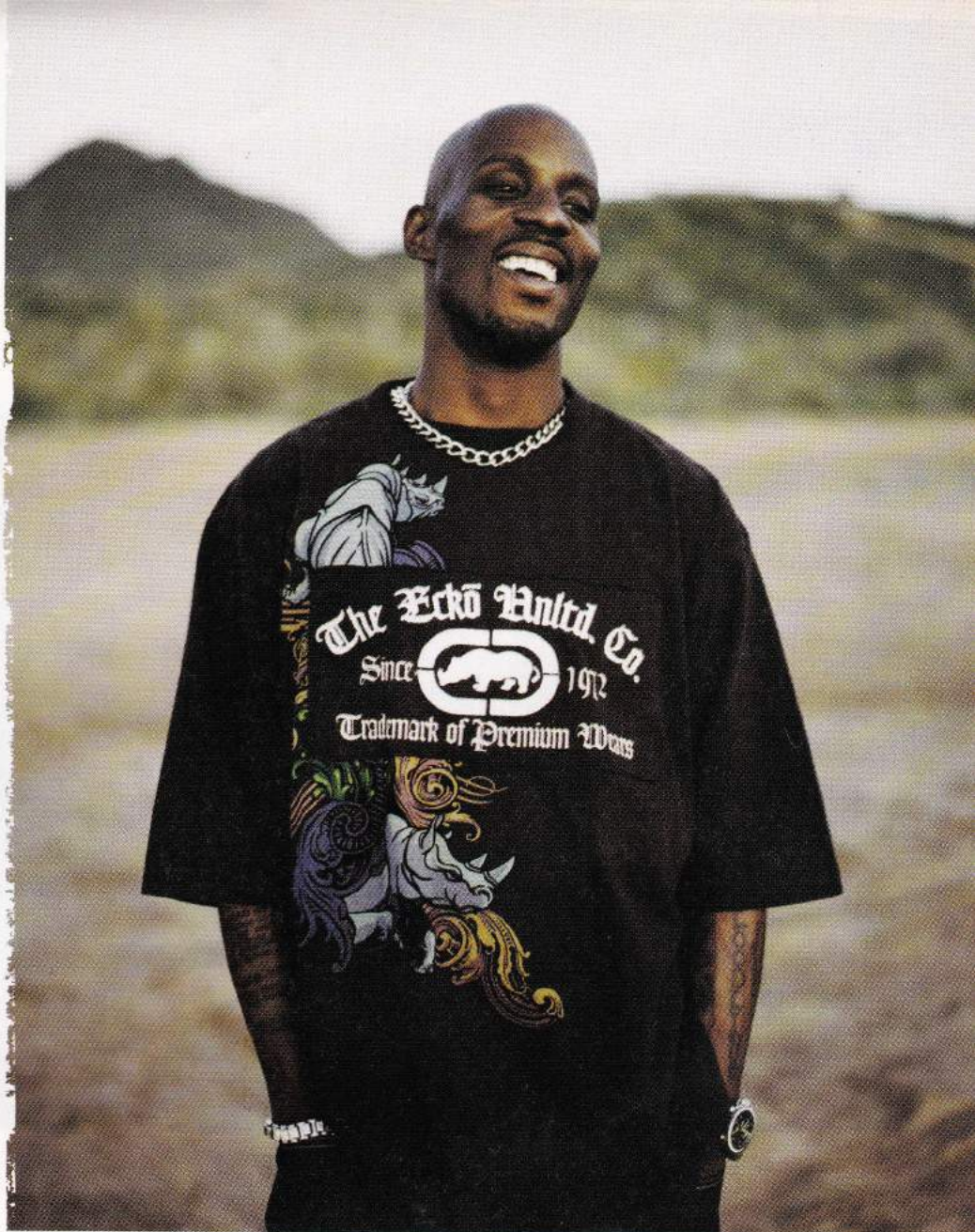
DMX: Damien is the Devil. That's how the Devil do, man. It's real shit. That's how he come at you. I remember it was the first conversation song that I wrote. It was a little scary. It came from real shit—not literally came at me like that, but that's how he comes. Just like God, the Devil comes to people. Like I said, "Every move I make turns out to be a bad one/Where's my guardian angel? Need one, wish I had one." Right when I call out for something, right when I'm in need for something... [Does Devil voice] "I'm right here."

DAME GREASE: He used to always play around with the funny voice. But it was like, "Yo, can you rhyme like that? [Laughs] Can you do that for a little while?" I think he had "Damien" written

already before he had the beat. He had a lotta songs before he had the beats. One time he was locked up, and I think he wrote 200 songs. So it's like we just mixing and matching.

WAAH: That was X's idea. That was some scary stuff. He said, "I'm going to do something about having a conversation with the Devil, man." He did the thing with the two voices. He talks in different voices anyway. One minute he's talking like Earl, the next minute he's talking in a different tone. So we were like, "Who the fuck are you today? What is you doing? Are we dealing with Earl or X?"

JUSTICE JOHNSON: I remember, when we were done, he was passed out in the hallway on the ground.



"IF YOU WAS ACTUALLY AROUND WHILE HE'S DOING IT, IF YOU IN THE ROOM, YOU WILL FEEL THE CHILLS THAT COME FROM IT."

—DAME GREASE



(10)

"HOW'S IT GOIN' DOWN"

PRODUCED BY PK

IRV: PK did the joint, and I made a call, got Faith on the joint, to bring in the female aspect. What I was thinking was, Yo, this is gonna be a single, 'cause we have to get bitches to the table. 'Cause I had peeped something with Snoop and them. They would make records like, [Sings] "It ain't no fun..." Big bitch records. The bitches would sing that shit, and they would love it.

JAZZ YOUNG: The Faith Evans song. It was like, "Oh, he can be

romantic, too?" That's when he got the girl fans. He crossed over. After "How's It Goin' Down," the girls were like, "Oh, really?"

to make sure y'all input is in. [Laughs] Just *make up* a way to get heard."

(11)

"MICKEY"

[Skit]

PRODUCED BY

PK, WAAH AND RAJAH WINN

DMX: I wasn't there for that. I didn't do any of the skits. Nothing to do with any of them. I heard 'em when the album was done, after I laid my vocals. I was like, "What the fuck is y'all niggas doing?!" They're like, "Everybody got skits." I'm like, "Damn, y'all niggas just gon' go out your way

(12)

"CRIME STORY"

PRODUCED BY

IRV GOTTI AND LIL ROB

LIL ROB: I did the beat, and Irv said it was for X... And with X, the stuff that he had been through in his life, he heard the beat and said, "This sounds like a story beat."

IRV: I remember Ice-T had used the shit with the same congas and the drums, but I just felt X's voice for it, so I told him a story. I said, "On any great album,

it's good to have story joints, the storytelling joints." And he just killed it with "Crime Story." How the feds is on him, or whatever, like that. He's robbing banks and everything like that.

Ja Rule's actually on the record. He's the one X calls up on the phone [in the second verse] and says, "Fuck you done did?/ They done ran up in my crib/ Niggas pattin' down my kids."

I did that record. And me, X and Ja was always together. The three of us was always together. So Ja was right there. He was like, "Yo, I'll do that part." Ja and X used to be on the road together back then. Like, Ja used to open up for X and be X's hype man, and shit like that. They was boys. I know it's hard to tell, 'cause of they beef now, but they was boys back then.

(13)

"STOP BEING GREEDY"

PRODUCED BY PK
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION BY
DAME GREASE

DEE: That's talking to cats, like, "Let us in this music game, and let us get some of this money, or we're about to snatch it."

PK: I put on this Diana Ross record from the soundtrack to *Mahogany*, and I was like, "Oh, shit, that's where Slick Rick got that fuckin' hook from"—"Do you know, where you're going..." I was like, "Damn, that's hot!" But I wanted to find some shit that was just crazy. The song was called "My Hero Was a Gun," if I remember correctly. I played it. The song started with the pianos in the beginning, and then the next four bars switched, and I was like, "Oh my God!" I sampled one half, then I sampled the other half. I had the shit looped up, and it was going. And then "Kiss walked in like, "What you doing with that? That's crazy!" I was like, "I just made the shit right here." Everybody came in. Niggas started writing to it. Then, all of the sudden, Dog came up the steps. That's when it just got dark. The lights were already dim. He walked in. Nigga

just started growling to the beat. I was like, "Uh-oh, it's fuckin' on!" He was like, "Killa, what you doing with this?" "Kiss looked at me like, "Come on, man." I was like, "Fuck that. This nigga hot to death."

(14)

"ATF"

PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

WAAH: We did "ATF" in Atlanta. We had to move to Atlanta 'cause it got hot. We went down to my man Grady's house and did a couple joints there.

DAME GREASE: This is a secret: "ATF" and "For My Dogs" is all one song. It's a small part of a score. That whole concept, that whole thing is all me. I told him

I did with Ruff Ryders. I was about 17, and that was the first song that I actually knew was gonna come out and hit the streets. I was mad nervous, but at the same time, I was wild happy. DMX had called me and told me to come down, and he was breaking down the song to me. He was like, "This song right here is that unconditional love." 'Cause DMX, he refers to himself as a dog. So he likes unconditional love. And that's what he wanted on "For My Dogs." He wanted that song to be specifically showing him the love that we got for him. We all did that right away for him, because we all had love for X.

DMX: I did appreciate what was being said, but that song wasn't my idea. That would be kinda big-headed. Like, "I wanna make a song with y'all niggas just showin'

(16)

"I CAN FEEL IT"

[Feat. Nardo]
PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

IRV: That song was based on this Phil Collins joint that I always loved. Although Phil Collins is a little White dude, he made that record and it hit niggas. Like, [Sings] "I can feel it coming..." Niggas always loved that record.

DMX: That's a deep song. I think it used to be on *Miami Vice*. Everybody knew that song.

DAME GREASE: That song is monumental, because that's the first time anybody ever cleared a Phil Collins sample. Lyor Cohen called Phil himself and told Phil, "Listen, Phil,



"THAT WAS KIND OF A TIME EVERYONE WAS SPECIALIZING ON BEING FLY... WE SPECIALIZED IN MAKING SURE WE KEEP IT STREET." —STYLES

exactly what to rhyme about. With that, I wanted to make something that was super-action-packed, super-lifelike, like you could hear it and feel it. And he came in with the "Boom-boom-boom! Open the door! ATF!" And the way he rhymes, you could feel the passion. Like, this nigga's *running* right now! [Laughs] Like, what is that nigga doing in the studio?

(15)

"FOR MY DOGS"

[Feat. Drag-On, Big Stan, Loose and Kasino]
PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

DRAG-ON: That was the first song

me love, son." I think they came to me with it already done, like, "All right, just add your verse."

KASINO: The funniest thing that happened during that session in particular is, you know, you have a bunch of hood niggas in the studio at the same time, it's a lot of bullshit going to take place. When we got to Chung King, we were like, "These niggas got satellite! We should steal the boxes." So X is like, "I don't give a fuck. Take the boxes." So Darrin is like, "If they take those boxes, that shit is going to come out your budget." So X is like, "I don't give a shit if it come out the budget. If they take it and it come out the budget, it's money that I ain't ever see anyway, so how the fuck can I miss it?" Dame was like, "Hold up, hold up. Then I got to get one of the boxes, dog." We ain't steal the boxes, though. We left the boxes alone.

I need this cleared. I need you. This guy is gonna be big, so no matter how it's gonna go, you're gonna make a million dollars off this."

RAY COPELAND: We had to write Phil Collins' company a good six times before we got approval to use that sample. And the last time we called, they said okay because *he* finally got to hear it. The people was rejecting it, and then Phil got to hear it. He said, "Nah, that's cool. Let 'em use it." We was like, *Phew*.

(17)

"PRAYER"

[Skit]
PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

DMX: I wrote that in jail, before I even knew it was gonna be a prayer. I ended up getting 23-hour



"I'D BE LIKE, 'GET 'EM, BOY!' AND X WOULD BE ON THE MIC, AND WHEN THE BEAT PLAY, HE'D BE GROWLING. LIKE, FOR REAL." —**IRV GOTTI**

DMX: I talked to the Devil. Now I gotta talk to the person I really love.

DEE: That's God talking to him. You go through a lot of things. Everybody is conscious of that. Every day the good and the bad. You always get two perspectives on one thing that you want to get done. You get it positively, and then you get it negative. You got an option to take whichever one you want.

lock-in—when they take away your shit. You get nothing but one towel, one sheet, one pencil and one piece of paper. It was cold, too, and I woke up in the middle of the night. I had a dream. I dreamt those words. I woke up sweating, and I just wrote it down. The next day I went to court, and the police put me through the bullshit. They took the paper out my pocket when I went to court and said they lost it—my property. The next day I was saying it to myself over and over, and I remembered it word for word. [I recorded it] like a year later! Two years later, maybe.

DAME GREASE: When it comes down to the prayer time, that's all him. Everybody gotta step back, fuck that. No producers, no label people, just let him do that. I was in the studio, but it's no beats and no music. It's really all his show. And you could see, same as with a hard beat, his voice carries over just as strong. If you was actually around while he's doing it, if you in the room, you will feel the chills that come from it. You actually feel the presence of God. Because what he's saying, and when he do it, there's no falseness in his heart. It's straight pure from his soul.

RAY COPELAND: He said he wanted to do a prayer. And Darrin and them, we never told X, but we felt like, Yo, you sure that'll work? But that became his signature: a prayer on his album and a spiritual moment. Everybody was looking for it. He always kept the booth dark. The lights were dim—candles or something. And he just really got into it. He got emotional.

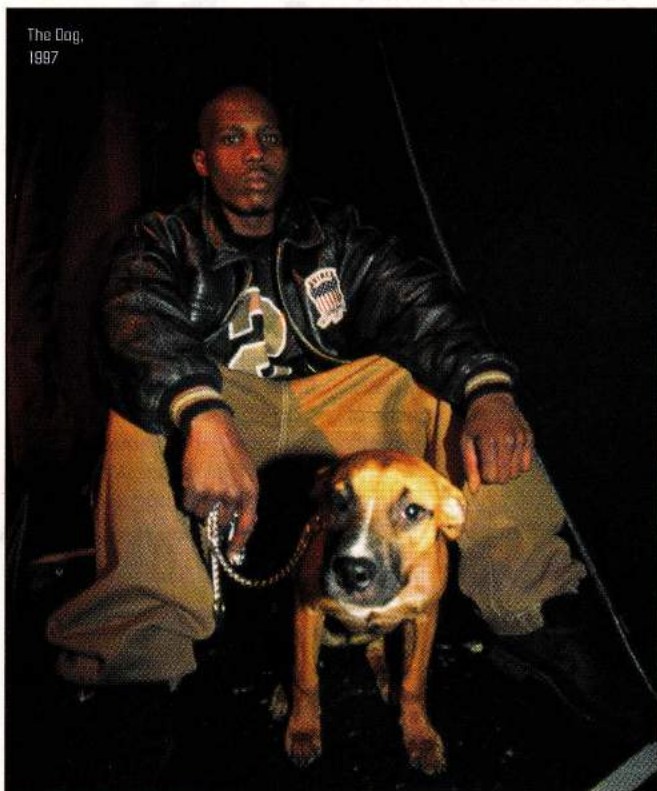
(19)
"NIGGAZ DONE STARTED SOMETHING"
 (Feat. The Lox and Ma\$e)
 PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

DMX: It was always a battle. Anybody come in the studio, it was a battle. It was me, Styles and somebody else holding it down for Ruff Ryders. We was battling some other kids that just came in the studio, and that's how that song came to be. We tore they ass up. We was using that beat to battle, and that's when we came up with the hook: "Niggas done started something/What, what!/Niggas done started something."

SHEEK: All that was before X had really gotten into the game. That was around *Money, Power, Respect*. At the time, Dee and Waah were managing us, before they even had Ruff Ryders. They was managing DMX at the time, too. We got our deal with Bad Boy, and they was just putting DMX on certain songs with us. There wasn't no Ruff Ryders at the time. They was just managers.

DAME GREASE: We all did it in the studio together. Back then, it wasn't none of that, "Send me the tape, and I'll put my verse on it."

STYLES: We was all in the lab and



listening to Dame Grease beats. It was always a hungry vibe in the studio. We all rapped a lot. We always having ciphers and flowing. Our vibe was always, *Get it in*. Kind of a *Put that work in* kind of vibe... Everybody was always in the studio—us three, Ma\$e, DMX, Grease, PK, Swizz, Drag. That was the environment: every day putting in music. Trying to come up with something hard, come up with something good. That was Ruff Ryder studio—a real high, energetic workplace.

We all knew the caliber of MCs that each other was, so... If you're coming in, you best be on your A game. We had our own style, us being from Yonkers... And that was kind of a time everyone was specializing on being fly and all this and that. We specialized in making sure we keep it street.

IRV: When that track came on, I used to rile niggas up. I used to rile X up. I felt like that was one of the things I needed to do. 'Cause, at that point, I was so

competitive that I felt like, Yo, we gotta kill everybody to make sure that niggas know that they can't fuck with us. So every session we went to, I used to get X riled up. Niggas thought we was crazy, 'cause I'd be like, "Get 'em, boy!" And X would be on the mic, and when the beat play, he'd be growling. Like, for real.

What was so good about that track was that they was all cool with each other. That was the fam. Ma\$e was good with The Lox and X. It was a sight to see, with Harlem and Yonkers and all of them niggas who came up together. They been around each other for years, so for them to do that, it was some good shit, man. During that time, it was a beautiful thing. Niggas was together, and it wasn't no egos or nothing. It was niggas just trying to serve the world and get on and get theirs. It was a beautiful time, man. To me, it's still one of the hardest rap nigga tracks. That shit is just hard, yo. It was the perfect ending to the album. 🔥

(18)
"THE CONVO"
 PRODUCED BY
DAME GREASE

IRV GOTTI: JENNIFER GRAYLOCK/AP PHOTO; DMX: ERNIE PANICCIOLI/RETNA