

After a brief stint as a break dancer in the early 1990s, Booba partnered with his friend [Ali](#) to form [Lunatic](#). The duo released a critically acclaimed album in 2000 but disbanded in 2003. Booba has since embarked on a successful solo career, selling more than 10 million discs over his career^[2] and becoming the most legally downloaded artist in French history.^[3] Booba is praised for the quality of his [flow](#) and beats but often criticized because of the controversial nature of his lyrics. He has also established the rap label [Tallac Records](#), and developed a line of jewellery.

Élie Yaffa was born on 9 December 1976 in the outskirts of Paris in Sèvres. His father is Senegalese and his mother is French of Mosellan and Belgian descent.

With his friend Ali they formed the duo Lunatic in 1994. Unable to secure a record deal from a major label because of their controversial lyrics, they created their own independent record label 45 Scientific in 1999. The following year, Lunatic released its first and only album entitled Mauvais œil.

In 2002, Booba released his debut solo album [Temps mort](#). He followed this up with four further albums: [Panthéon](#), [Ouest Side](#) (the most successful),^[4] [0.9](#) and [Lunatic](#). In late 2012, he released his sixth solo album [Futur](#). In whole, Booba has ten disks certified, six Disques d'Or (Gold album), three Disques de platine (Platinum album) and one Double disque de platine (Double-Platinum album).^[5] In 2011, Booba won the "My Youtube" contest, ahead of popular artists like [Rihanna](#), [Justin Bieber](#), [Lady Gaga](#), [Eminem](#), [Jay-Z](#), [Sexion D'Assaut](#), [Shakira](#), [Stromae](#),...^[6]

Booba was influenced by the American hip-hop scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s – [Mobb Deep](#), [Wu-Tang Clan](#), [2Pac](#), and [Biggie Smalls](#). Dark melodies accompanied with raw lyrics, typical of the rap from New York, are present on every album of his. He is often criticized for being an apologist for easy money and murder.

Ngannou was born and raised in the village of [Batié](#), [Cameroon](#).^[19] He lived in poverty and had little formal education growing up.^[20] Ngannou's parents divorced when he was six years old, and he was sent to live with his aunt. At 10 years old, Ngannou started working in a sand quarry in Batié because of a lack of funds.^{[21][22]} As a youngster, he was approached by several gangs in his village to join them.^[23] However, Ngannou refused and instead decided to use his father's negative reputation as a [street fighter](#) as motivation to do something positive and pursue boxing.^[23]

At age 22, Ngannou began training in [boxing](#), despite the initial reluctance of his family.^[23] After training for a year, Ngannou stopped training due to an illness.^[24] He did various odd jobs to make ends meet, until age 26 when he decided to head to [Paris, France](#), to pursue [professional boxing](#).^[25] However upon reaching Europe, he was jailed for two months in Spain for illegally crossing the border.^[26] After he reached Paris, he had no money, no friends, and no place to live.^[20] After living homeless on the streets of Paris, Ngannou found his way to a boxing club where he met coach Didier Carmont (cousin of [Francis Carmont](#)) who was understanding towards his situation. Carmont convinced the gym to let him train at no cost, and introduced Ngannou to the sport of MMA. Additionally, Ngannou became a volunteer at Lo Chorba, a non-profit organization in Paris.^[27] When his boxing gym closed for the summer, Lo Chorba's director Khater Yenbou introduced Ngannou to [Fernand Lopez](#) and the [MMA factory](#).^[28] Being a fan of [Mike Tyson](#), Ngannou was originally interested in learning how to box but Lopez saw his potential in MMA and convinced him to try MMA

instead.^[25] Lopez gave Ngannou some MMA gear and allowed him to train and sleep at the gym for no cost thus starting Ngannou's MMA career.^[25]

Reflecting on his journey across continents and his decision to become an MMA fighter, Ngannou said:^{[20][25]}