Publication: Ego Trip Magazine, issue 12, 1998 Author: Noah Callahan-Bever Title: International God Of Mystery. Subheader: An M.F.'N Look Back With M.F. Doom

“Many Flows. Metal Face. Mic Friendly, Magnetic Field, Money Flow. as well as My Friend and oh yeah—Mutha Fucka.” says M.F. Doom in explanation of the M.F. prefix on his name. “The Doom shit is just mad old. Niggas been callin’ me that since I was a shorty, M.F. Doom’s just a totally new character of myself. It's still me but it's just a different side.”

In the last three years the life of M.F. Doom (the former Zev Love X. frontman of KMD) has endured a lot of change: from his crew's days as teenaged Islamic rap scientists to his recent exploits on one of the past year's best independent hip hop 12"s—"Dead Bent /“Gas Drawls”/"Hey.” But there's been one constant throughout his entire recording career—his Long Island residence.

It's only appropriate then, that Doom recaps his experiences on his hometown’s boardwalk in Long Beach, a stones throw from the Atlantic Ocean. Joining him are Duce (the ex-KMD member formerly known as Onyx) and his long-time friend Quest (a/k/a J. Quest The Boogieman). It’s a clear night in the suburban town and from where we sit both sky and water seem to go on forever in every direction.

“Long Beach isn't as wide as Brooklyn, as long as Manhattan, or as dense as the Bronx.” Doom concedes, “But there's the beach three blocks away and that's a fuckin’ escape. That's the lovely shit.”

But don't get it twisted, Doom ain't some shook kid from the other side of the suburbs. Growing up, he did bids in Manhattan and like many inner-city youths became immersed in hip-hop culture. Graffiti bombin’ and listening to New York rap radio shows were the activities of his teenage years, and along with his younger brother, DJ Subroc, and Onyx, they formed the group KMD.

Recorded on a friend's 4-track, their demo attracted the attention of 3rd Bass MC Serch and Pete Nice, and the trio was invited to record with the white wonders. Fresh off "The Gas Face,” the fellas signed to Elektra and released their 1991 debut, *Mr. Hood*. An amalgamation of Five-Percenter knowledge over uptempo soul-influenced tracks overflowing with cleverness, the LP's linchpin was the ingenious framework which held the songs together: a series of hilarious conversations between the band members and the stiff voice of the anonymous Mr. Hood. Despite critical acclaim and the moderate success of the singles "Peachfuzz” and “Who Me?,” *Mr. Hood* met with disappointing sales, sending the trio back to their lab to regroup.

Officially pared down to the duo of Zev and Subroc, KMD struck back at the world with a most astounding aesthetic realignment. Returning conspicuously more jaded for their sophomore effort (much like their tour-mates and “God Squad” compatriots, Brand Nubian), the darker opus *Black Bastards* still managed to retain its wit. Beautifully constructed from deep bass grooves around a skeleton of vocal samples from original Last Poet Gylan Kain’s *Blue Guerrilla* LP and filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles epochal blaxploitation cinematic masterpiece, *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song*, *Black Bastards* inventive edge was typified by its intro, “Garbage Day 3.” An aural montage of snippets pertaining to the group's changing focus over an erratic bass line, the track’s brilliance was sustained through cuts like, “What A Nigga Know,” “Sweet Premium,” and “Black Bastards and Bitches.”

“With the second joint we really flipped the script,” says Doom. “Like, ‘Okay, this is a real jewel night here.”

“There was always enlightenment,” Duce adds, “but the second album was a warning.”

But shortly after completing this masterpiece, tragedy befell the group when Subroc was fatally struck by a car on the Island. Compounding the calamity was a “Cop Killer”-era controversy over *Black Bastards*’ Zev illustrated cover artwork that depicted their Sambo character symbol in a noose swinging from a tree: an incident that wound up getting the group dropped from their label. Yet despite the bleakness of that period, today Doom is able to maintain his perspective on the big picture: “Elektra spent loot to make the album, they gave us loot to step off the label and now we got the rights to the shit anyway. More than anything, time got lost.”

Having now adopted the identity of a “Super M.F. Villain” Doom is now ready to move on and has a full plate of upcoming releases including his third album, *The Super M.F. Villains*, and a collaborative release with M.F. Grimm and others called the *Monster Island Project*, which uses the themes of movie monsters like Godzilla, Jet Jaguar and Megalon.

“Tt’s all just evolution,” the illusionist says of his forthcoming works. “I’m-a just lay it down on some real hip hop shit. Fuck the distractions.”

Focused on his art, Doom is not wetting C.R.E.A.M. or fame, which is epitomized by his refusal to be photographed. “Super Villains get part of their power from muthafuckas not knowing who they are,” he reasons. “It’s music that we're selling—not my face.”

Besides his two LPs, probably the greatest gem that the Villain will finally bestow upon us is the proper release of *Black Bastards*—on wax on Bobbito Garcia's Fondle ‘Em label. It seems that finally the wrongs that have plagued Doom’s career have been obliterated.

A perpetually elusive master of masquerade, M.F. Doom, the artist has returned to us in full form. And all we can say is—welcome back, muthafucka.

Publication: The Source Magazine, June 1994 Author: Ronin Ro Title: Life After Death Subheader: After a three year hiatus, KMD’s new album *Black Bastards* finds a hardened, reflective Zev Love X still struggling with his brother's untimely death.

Zev Love X seems to be in low spirits. Dressed in black like a mourner, he sits in the dimly-lit conference room, waving a blunt and clouding the air. The smoke makes it hard to see him. His homie sips from an almost-empty 40 of Olde E. It’s one in the afternoon. His label’s offices are in the Time- Warner building; a mortuary, really, for uncompromising ghetto music. The offices are filled with white employees, vampires, creeps and other assorted ghouls blasting the label’s newest grunge band. It’s difficult to feel comfortable sitting in the belly of the corporate hydra which both censors hip-hop records and pimps it in their “upscale” hip-hop magazine.

Zev seems to have more on his mind than self promotion. His brother Subroc, the other member of KMD (Kausing Much Damage), was killed by a car just as the group’s new album was completed. His features seem hardened, his face not as innocent as it was a mere three years ago. Gone are the striped shirts and wire-frame glasses seen in ads for the group’s debut *Mr. Hood*. Instead, Zev affects the paramilitary fashion of the incoming generation’s disenfranchised street soldiers.

“I can’t fuck with all that image shit, being under-somebody’s-coattails bullshit,” he says today, as if to disavow his past. His frown tells me he was unhappy with aspects of how all parties involved were handling his career. Elektra, he implies, under-promoted *Mr. Hood* to ghetto audiences and marketed the group as Native Tonguers, constructing an image around the song “Peachfuzz” as opposed to “Nitty Gritty,” which truly represented the group’s philosophies. “Peachfuzz” was a puppy-love song; “Nitty Gritty” found them dissing all devils with their cohorts Brand Nubian.

“I feel a lot of things changed from our original idea as opposed to now, where we got to keep all the real shit,” Zev says. “Our first time, we didn’t even know how to fuck with it: shit fucking up, everybody getting in between this creative shit...” With *Black Bastards*, he says the group stuck to their guns and produced the music they were making before they were discovered by MC Serch in Long Beach, Long Island. This time, no values were compromised.

Inspired by Last Poet Gylan Kain’s raw Afrocentric spoken jazz (Kain’s *Blue Guerilla* album), *Black Bastards* is an intelligent response to a society where death is usually random, senseless and violent. At times Zev is a centrist, wavering between life affirmation and out-and-out nihilism. One song talks about hitting people with wine bottles (“Sweet Premium”); another boasts of a new .380 (“Get U Now”); two vignettes analyze love-hate relationships with lousy women (“Plumskinz”); one finds him embroiled in the battle over the word “nigga” (“What A Niggy Know”); “Smoking That Shit” and “Contact Blitt” both espouse the virtues of being hip-hop potheads (the former featuring Kurious Jorge, Lord Sear and Earthquake); while the title track isolates MC Parker Lewis and whites who use words like mackadocious. The album is a more powerful, more relevant work-focused, sophisticated and streetwise—without the crossover friendly abstractions. Listeners are instead provided with a street level analysis of a society gone mad. The world has changed and, with it, KMD.

Zev exhales exhales like a dragon, stoically answers questions, saying as little as possible, laughing to himself. He maintains a tight grip on his emotions.

“I wasn’t even with him that day, but the shit was shady,” he says of Subroc. “I don’t know. I don’t wanna get into details really.” What he does say: on the fateful day, Zev was harassed by police officers in front of his home and taken into custody for an outstanding warrant from 1989. “For drinking a couple of beers, trying to take me in for some bullshit. So I’m locked up for four hours and didn’t see him till the next day. I don’t know. That's how it happened really.”

“How did you find out?” I ask, recalling the November phone call I received about my brother Jay. “I felt it. I felt it definitely,” he reflects. “I called my moms up right after that.” I recognized his tone of voice—the numbness, the shock, the disbelief and ultimately, the acceptance that someone is gone forever. When my brother Jay’s wife died of AIDS, leaving him with three children and a mind crammed with bittersweet memories, he began to drink heavily. His eyes were dull; he no longer gave a fuck about living. A year later, I stood by his closed casket. “Shit was real like that,” Zev continues, oblivious to my thoughts. “I forgot who told me in words. I just knew.”

Many KMD insiders insist that Zev is in a state of denial. “Zev used to be able to articulate his thoughts in such a clear way,” one insider says. “But now he’s sullen. Using beer and getting zooted as a crutch instead of facing things and trying to work it out.”

Death has cast a shadow on Zev, yet he pretends it hasn’t. It has made him take a more realistic look at his life, the people in it and what he has to do with it. He realizes you only live once and have no time to please other people by being anyone other than yourself. This whole record shit he knows is temporary. At any minute, label executives can cut him off and send him back to relative obscurity (as they have done to so many others who have proved unprofitable).

“I don’t know,” Zev tells me. “Niggaz be passing away so much. The shit is crazy now. To tell you the truth, you just don’t give a fuck no more. I mean, you give a fuck, you care about what goes on... but to a point where you now know that shit is real.” It has always been real, I tell him.

I ask if listening to, and having to promote the *Black Bastards* album is a bother, if hearing Subroc’s voice doesn’t reopen painful wounds. He leans forward in his seat. His voice grows a little more forceful. “It seems like I’m listening to two different people, to tell you the truth. I'm not even that motherfucker from before. I don’t know. Different times. What I’m doing now, creatively, is totally different. It’s like him-and-me-combined-as-one type shit.” His voice is tense, his answers stiff. I ask if he’s uncomfortable talking about this.

“Nah, I never did before,” he deflects. “Does it sound like I’m stuttering or something? Ask me anything. I wanna talk.”

When he listens to the music, he remembers “the exact time” Sub approached him with new lyrics, when Sub would barge in and say, “Yo check this shit, it’s butter, bust it, I’m’a flip it.” His voice slides into what may be an accurate impersonation of Sub’s enthusiastic tone. “When he was doing it for me,” Zev monotones, his mind possibly filled with pictures of when they recorded home demos on a 4-track and an admittedly lousy Casio sampler. “I remember that shit just like yesterday,” he continues, memories swimming through his eyes like fish. “It seems like one point in time, stuck there, can’t change.”

COON PERSECUTION: ZEV'S SAMBO FIGURE WAS SIMPLY BANNED LAST ALBUM (BELOW). THIS TIME, HE RETURNS LARGER, MORE OMINOUS AND WITH AN EYE JAMMIE.

Their mother is coping, Zev continues, nodding his head and considering her pain. “She went through crazy shit as well,” he nods. “Word.” There is a lull in the conversation, a prolonged silence speaking volumes. This is not the interview I want to be conducting. This is the last thing I need to be thinking about. Life is not going too hot these days.

“It’s like this: the physical body is not us anyway,” Zev continues, equating visiting a grave to “worshipping graven images.” Subroc’s presence is numinous, he tells me. “So the whole ‘physical form’ shit is mad wack.” He pauses, toking on the blunt. He knows that Subroc will live on through the good deeds he did in life, through his music and in people’s loving memories. But still the pain is deep. After a second, he stares into his lap, shakes a Newport out of his pack and says, “I feel like a fucking piece of bullshit.” His face is a mask of torment. “Plus, smoking cigarettes? I know this ain’t me. This can’t be me for real.”

“WHEN I'M GONE, EXPECT ME BACK TO HAUNT” —Subroc, “It Sounded Like A Roc”

The death of a loved one brings unexpected emotions: guilt, anger, hate, sadness. Were we there when they needed us? Were we angry with the other when they died? Did we really treat them right? How could they leave us like this? While we question our own mortality we’re forced to remember death is a natural part of life. Death is the one thing we all must inevitably face. Zev sits there, waiting for the next question. We shift gears.

Why *Black Bastards*?

“I did that on purpose,” he says, “Bold title, bold statement. To make a mockery of this bullshit system of censorship.” I ask about the song “Constipated Monkeys,” about the sample from “Bellybutton Window,” a posthumous Jimi Hendrix release. “Sub put that whole shit together,” he says reverently. “That shit was flavor.”

“What does the ‘Garbage Day 3’ instrumental represent?” I ask, admitting that it is my favorite track on the album.

“Whatever you hear or pick up out of that is mad short instances of big things,” he answers. “That all just fills the whole gap of when people didn’t see us or whatever.” That explains the tenebrous bass, screams, racial epithets, gunshots and the lugubrious female voice that asks: “It’s not the three of us anymore, is it?”

Zev says that the group KMD will endure “just as long as I can make records out this bitch” waving his hands at the corporate walls. His boy Grim Reaper, he foresees, will be joining. “Shit evolves like that, you kno’m saying,” he says, accepting that life is a procession and you're supposed to move on. “Grim and me collaborate on a lot of joints. We're about to come out with some shit in the summertime. But that’s really it. I'm just getting with him. After that, there’ll be no more changes.”

For now, Zev Love X will be at home working on new material and being a father to his two-year-old son. The child, he tells me with a mischievous grin, who brings joy to his life. “He’s two,” he says with a nod. “Yep, bad just like me too. It’s mad fun being a parent,” he continues, his mind off of death and dying, and on life. “Like being little all over again, getting to bug out, play all day.” It’s good to know he has something to make him happy. Death, after all, shouldn’t run our lives.

Publication: The Source Magazine, August 1991 Author: Chris Wilder Title: “I’m is a God”

Ntzoke Shange once told me, “If Black kids in Brooklyn have to call each other God to feel good about themselves, then that’s great. Anything that makes Black kids feel good about themselves is great.” When KMD is teamed up with Brand Nubian they call themselves The God Squad. That must make them feel good about themselves. I know I feel good about myself. I feel good when I’m listening to “Nitty Gritty” and Lord Jamar says, “Stop wearin the Cross/ Do for self/ Kill that yes sir boss.” Or when Derek X warns, “Zig Zag, Zig/ Watch the Blackman get big... bury all the devils/ With KMD I can raise up my levels.”

I'm loving that shit! Damn right, bury all the devils. They’ve been burying us for years. I feel good every time I listen to that. I feel good because I’m a Blackman and Black people is what that song is all about. That's what the God Squad is all about. That’s what KMD is all about.

Kausin’ Much Damage or KMD are Zev Love X, Onyx the Birthstone Kid, and the DJ, Subroc, three kids from Long Island that make dope music. They just dropped one of the most original and innovative albums since *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm*. Their debut LP, *Mr. Hood* (Elektra) overflows with sounds new to hip-hop—like the string loop on “Hard Wit No Hoe”—and gives birth to new concepts like Bert from Sesame Street humming along with KMD for three and-a-half minutes on “Humrush.”

Another new concept is the fact that you're guided through the album by Mr. Hood himself. Mr. Hood is some character that only speaks in samples, and appears throughout the album, sometimes on songs and sometimes between them. Zev said that he is on the album so that he can be “the ignorant kid from around the way.” If they have that, they can teach him (and the listeners) different things throughout the album. They do try to get a message across on every song, so I asked him to explain a couple of them. I started with “Hard Wit No Hoe” because it’s one of the trickier cuts:

Zev Love X: The whole concept is how Black men treat Black Women. If we knew that the Black woman is a goddess, if we knew that she is beautiful, and if we really felt that, then we wouldn’t treat her like we do.

The reason that we treat her like we do is because society is set up to make us think that the Black woman is not pretty. Like Johnny Gill said, “put on your red dress, put on your high heels.” High heels is to make a woman look like she has a rear-end. Lipstick is to make a woman look like she has full lips. The Black woman has all of this. But she has to put that on for him to want her? As beautiful as the original woman is, we should want her for that. If the Blackman is not providing for the Black woman, she is going to cling on to anything that *is* providing for her. Whether it be Welfare or a white man. When we see a Black woman walking down the street with a white man, we get upset, but we don’t have the right to do that, because in many cases *we* messed up [causing] them to mess up. First comes Knowledge then Wisdom. On the song I say, “When you grow up to be a farmer, keep an eye on your yard/ Cause with no hoe it’s hard.” You’ve got to keep an eye on your cipher and see what’s goin’ on, because if you lose that Black woman life is hard, G.

“Preacher Porkchop” is a spoof on [Brand Nubian’s] “Wake Up.” You know where they say “Putting money in the pan/ For the rest of the week now I’m eating out of soup cans/ He’s got a home, drives a Caddy through town.” Preacher Porkchop is a rebel. The Church didn’t accept him because he wanted to see what was true and what wasn’t true, he didn’t want to take people’s money...

Religion is supposed to be for your mind, body and soul, but if you go to church, a preacher will preach one little scripture for hours. It may be good for your soul... the singing and the hand clapping, but what is that doing for your mind? We all are Ansaar [Muslim] including Onyx, whose father is a Christian preacher. The only difference between the Five Percent Nation muslim and Ansaar is that Five Percents believe they are the creator and we believe that there is one creator that created everything in existence but the Blackman is God. Everything else we agree upon: The white man is the devil. We agree he oppressed many different people. We agree that we have to uplift our race. We agree that we're the original man. We agree that the Black woman needs to be respected. We agree that the Black family needs to be saved...

It’s not that hard to break into the white-owned music industry and still

...We believe that there is one creator that created everything in existence, but the Blackman is GOD.

call them devils on wax. You gotta *sneak* up in shit, make ‘em think you down and sneak up and snuff ‘em! I’m sneakin up on niggas, G! I’m not sleepin. I got Serch and them sayin what I couldn’t say on “Gas Face.” I got them sayin “Black cat is bad luck, bad guys wear black/Must have been a white guy that started all that.” I can’t say that and come out with no album. They'd shoot me down from the start. “What's this kid talking about? Oh, that old Black shit. Go back to Africa with that!”

Check it out. The devils is rollin’ together, then they divide us... ”You’re Puerto Rican. You're Jamaican. You're Black.” So they have us all against each other. We all are Nubians. They put different names on shit to try to make us seem different. Let’s all get together and blow shit up!

I'll tell you what else. The devils always make the first move and mess up, and once you try to retaliate, they say you're the bad one. Like, they say Adam was white. Jesus was white. As soon as you say “I have proof the Prophets was Black,” you're the racist. I'm not no racist; it’s a fact. If you didn’t say he was white, I wouldn't have to say he was Black, ‘cause it would be common knowledge.