

**THE
WU-TANG
MANUAL**



THE RZA

WITH CHRIS NORRIS

The book you hold in your hands is not a complete biography or a total philosophy of the Wu-Tang Clan. Instead, it represents an introduction to some of the basic principles of Wu-Tang thought and artistry, a glimpse into some of the ideas and life events that shaped the Clan. Consider it an accompaniment to the album *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers*—every important aspect of the foundation is touched on here, including spirituality, kung fu, chess, and so forth—but to the true student this is only a doorway to a fuller understanding. Sample the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding by dropping into separate tracks, or read the book straight through; this is a path, not the destination. For those who seek, the 36th chamber still awaits. Let the saga begin.

THE RZA
December, 2004



THE WAY OF THE WU: THE RAZOR-SHARP SUTRA

You can break Ch'an Buddhism down to three basic ideas. One is that every person has an inherent Buddha nature inside—anyone can become enlightened. Two, there's no one single path to enlightenment, everybody has to find his own way. Three, it's almost impossible to reach enlightenment solely through the exchange of words.

In 1999, I went with Sifu to the other Shaolin, the one in China. I went to the original Shaolin Temple, the birthplace of kung fu. It's over fifteen hundred years old. I got to be the first MC to perform there. When we went to Shaolin, Sifu said to me, "This is your home. Welcome home." He doesn't always speak great English, but it's like what he says, I already know.

On that trip, we also went to Wu-Tang Mountain in Hebei Province.

That's where I met the Abbot of the *other* Wu-Tang. He hit me with a tape of music from their Wu-Tang. I can't really describe what that trip was like other than to say one word: Enlightenment.

The most important sutra is called the Diamond Sutra. They call it that because the wisdom that's contained in this sutra could cut diamonds—that's how laser-sharp it is. And that sutra says, "What do you have to teach, Buddha?" And Buddha says, "I have nothing to teach." You have to learn it on your own.



RZA receives the other Wu-Tang music.

MARTIAL ARTS



When you see a swordsman, draw your sword. Do not recite poetry to one who is not a poet.

—CH'AN BUDDHIST PROVERB

"Shaolin shadowboxing, and the Wu-Tang sword style

if what you say is true, the Shaolin and the Wu-Tang

could be dangerous"

"Do you think your Wu-Tang sword can defeat me?"

"En garde, I'll let you try my Wu-Tang style"

I read this book *The Five Chinese Brothers* when I was a kid and it really fascinated me—one brother swallowed the sea, one had an iron neck, one couldn't be burned. I don't know what it was, but something about their powers, the way they worked together—it stuck

THE FIVE CHINESE BROTHERS

There are five Chinese brothers, each endowed with a special power or ability. The first one is able to swallow the entire ocean. When he helps a young boy fish by draining the sea, the boy fails to heed his call to return from the dry seabed and drowns when the sea is released. The brother is condemned to decapitation for this crime, but sends his second brother to the execution. This brother has a neck of iron that cannot be chopped off. The remaining brothers foil successive attempts at execution, each by employing his own unique talent until the case is dropped.

with me. So when I finally saw a trailer for the *The Five Deadly Venoms*, I thought, "Oh, they made a movie about those cats?" The seed had been planted long ago. From the point that I saw that movie, it was on.

I got my introduction to kung-fu flicks in '78 or '79. You'd get a triple feature on Forty-second Street for \$1.50. At that point, all of Forty-second Street had kung-fu movies. They'd have three on this side of the street and another three on the other side and they'd rotate them. They'd play them with regular first-run movies. Any given night, you could see *Fright Night*, *Motel Hell*, *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*—plus two kung-fu flicks.

So this first one I saw was *The Chinese Mack*—the character was like a pimp. *The Mack* had been a popular movie in the hood so they came up with that name to sell it to the U.S. The other one was *The Fist of Double-K*.

But it wasn't until I saw *The Five Deadly Venoms*—by the Shaw Brothers, in 1979—that I was really hooked. After that, I was a movie-goer every week. I was sucked in. I cut school for it, it became obsessive. I didn't think it got any better than *The Five Deadly Venoms*, but then another movie took me to a whole other level.

I was maybe fourteen years old and on TV they'd play a Bruce Lee movie and then advertise a kung-fu flick afterwards. This time, they played *Bruce Lee: The True Story*, and at the end they said, "Coming next week, June 6: *The Thirty-sixth Chamber*." It was like a magic moment. I remember that ad to this day. It was June 6: 36. Six—six—thirty-six.

This movie might have been made in 1979, but it was a period piece, based on a true story. It's about this guy San-Te who became a Shaolin monk. First the guy knows nothing, then slowly, painfully, he masters the whole thirty-five chambers in seven years. After he mas-

tered all the levels, he wanted to start a thirty-sixth chamber, which was to teach the knowledge of Shaolin to the rest of the world. But the monks don't believe they belong to the world, so they exile him. But the abbot who exiled him knew that the ones who became the thirty-six chamber students were going to come after him.

I was just amazed by this movie—the action, the moves, the period, and the message it was giving—it was just sublime. On the surface, it was about a revolution against the Manchus. You had the government oppressing all the people, but the young didn't even know that they were oppressed. So this schoolteacher was teaching his students about sacrifice and righteousness and the students ask him if he'd been to the hanging they just had out in town. They're all laughing, and he says, "I'd be laughing if it was the Manchus that were hanging." Suddenly, these students realize the truth. They didn't know they were oppressed, they figured that's how it's always been. I could relate to that on a lot of levels.

The second part of the movie was the training he went through to become a master, to build himself up. That part took me by storm. I actually began doing push-ups and punching walls, going to Chinatown and getting books, the whole trip.

The Thirty-sixth Chamber was the one that opened my mind. The idea of self-discipline, of re-creating yourself. I was around fourteen years old. And it changed me, for real.

ENTER THE PROJECTS: PARK HILL VS. STAPLETON

Park Hill was known for fly niggas and Stapleton was known for stick-up niggas. Park Hill niggas will shoot you, but Stapleton niggas will rob you and beat the shit out of you. A Park Hill nigga will

THE 36TH CHAMBER AKA: MASTER KILLER (1978)

Gordon Liu stars as a Chinese fugitive from the Manchu invaders who hides out at the Shaolin kung-fu temple, trains in its arts, and introduces kung fu to the oppressed people of China—ultimately becoming the legendary monk San Te. It was directed by real-life Shaolin student Lau Kar-Leung, who brought an unprecedented degree of real martial artistry to film. At least half of this film is about training, following the hero's growth from lowly refugee, through his punishing regime of menial chores, and on to his study in the thirty-five chambers of Shaolin mastery. The rest of the film focuses on San Te's foundation of his own thirty-sixth chamber, in which he will share his knowledge with the world and lead an army against the Manchu.

SHAOLIN AND
WU-TANG (1981)

Gordon Liu stars in this tale of the ancient rivalry between Shaolin and their offshoot, the Wu-Tang sword school. Shaolin monk Liu is friends with a Wu-Tang-trained swordsman played by Adam Cheng, but a Manchu prince learns both styles and sets them against each other. Eventually they square off in a death battle arranged by the prince in an attempt to kill off both sides. The abbot had forbidden the teaching of the secret style, but the Wu-Tang felt it was too important to withhold from the outside world. Rebelling against the ancient temple, they decided to teach the Manchus their deadly style, which included the invincible Wu-Tang sword style. With it, the Wu and Manchu joined forces to destroy Shaolin. The film is renowned for its accurate portrayal of Shaolin and Wu-Tang fighting techniques, with Gordon Liu commanding poles and openhanded kung fu while Adam Cheng wields the distinctive Chinese broadsword. Fans consider the film unsurpassed in synthesizing disparate techniques for one deadly and invincible style.

pull up in a Benz, get out looking good, and pull a gun out. A Stapleton nigga will walk up to you with a fucking tank top and a doorag on and fuck you up. It's better to get jacked by a Park Hill nigga because a Stapleton nigga gonna whup your ass, too. Of course, that's just in my generation. In the earlier generation, they said it was the opposite. So things go in cycles. Yin and yang.

About three years after I saw *The Thirty-sixth Chamber*, I was still going to kung-fu flicks, mostly with Dirty. We'd go to a twenty-four-hour movie spot that showed pornos and kung-fu flicks. By that time it was mostly porno on Forty-second Street, but some of the porno places had a small room, maybe the size of a classroom, where bums would sleep and they'd show these kung-fu flicks.

So ODB and I, we were always out at night around Times Square—starting fights, getting drunk, chasing women, going to the Roseland—and this one night, we were really high, we'd been out all night and didn't want to go home. It was cold and we had a couple of 40-ounces and we thought we'd crash at this funky theater at Forty-second Street and Seventh Avenue.

So we went in, at maybe four in the morning, and sat down to watch whatever was on. Some we had seen before, but there was one that we'd never seen: *Shaolin and Wu-Tang*. We walked in near the end of it, and just from the last few minutes I was like, "What the fuck is this?" It ended and another movie came on and we watched that, and Dirty wanted to leave. But I was like "I got to see that movie." We stayed and when it came on, it woke us up. It was the best kung-fu movie I'd ever seen in my life—the fighting, the ideas, the concepts, everything.

I'd never seen that kind of sword fighting in movies before—they made it so beautiful. But something about the Wu-Tang attitude really sparked me, too. The Wu-Tang sword style was invincible and when

the Wu fights the Shaolin monks and defeats them—beats like thirty guys—he gets expelled. But when he's expelled, he says, "I may have been expelled but I'm still the best—Wu-Tang!" In a way, it was like the devil in the Bible: a powerful angel that got a swelled head and got banished. He may be kicked out, but he knows he's bad.

The Wu-Tang were the *bad* guys in a lot of these movies. As you watch more and you notice more, you realize, for example, in *The White Lotus*, those bad guys are the Wu-Tang people. Even in *Kill Bill: Vol. 2*, Pai Mei—he's Wu-Tang. In a lot of movies, the bad guys the Shaolin were fighting were the Wu-Tang because the government hired the Wu-Tang. They conformed. They realized that the times were changing. They were survivalists.

Years later, around '89, Wu-Tang fever was sweeping through the projects. It hit videotape and everyone in the neighborhood was hooked on it. We just started watching it at my house playing hooky. By 1990, it was a slang phrase: "Wu-Tang" was just something that was fly as far as the street level of it. It was happening mostly in Stapleton Projects—with me and Ghostface, we were roommates and partners. And other young guys were using it as slang, too.

**THE EIGHT DIAGRAM
POLE FIGHTER AKA:
THE MAGNIFICENT
POLE FIGHTERS (1983)**

One of the most acclaimed of all kung-fu films, directed and choreographed by Kar Leung and starring Gordon Liu in a tale of the Mongols' campaign to defeat the Sung Dynasty. The film begins with an ambush led by the traitorous Sung general, played by Pai Mei, against the famed family of warrior brothers, the Yangs. The attack kills all but two of the brothers and their father. One brother is left insane while the last goes on to infiltrate a kung-fu monastery to improve his pole fighting abilities and take revenge.

The last movie that formed the Wu-Tang Clan brotherhood is called *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*. That was a movie I saw on tape for the first time with my brothers and sisters. It was a movie about eight brothers who get betrayed, go to war, and many get killed. And my family has eight brothers. I have three sisters and there are three sisters in the movie. So my whole family watched that movie over and over and over. This movie was very special to my family.

So later, once everyone at the projects was fiended out on kung fu—all cutting class, coming to the crib, and watching videos, I decided to show them this one, *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*. Wu-Tang was good for the moves and fighting and the sword style. But *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter* is the story of brotherhood.

So this one day, about eight or nine of us—me, Ghost, and a bunch of Stapleton niggas—are getting high and I put on the movie. Not too long into it, something deep happened. People start feeling it. Some niggas even started crying.

Because that movie is *real*. It's a kung-fu movie, but it's a real story. These eight brothers who go out and they get betrayed and they fight to the death for each other—it hit us. And niggas was saying, "I'm the Fifth Brother!" "I'm the Sixth Brother!" They were relating to it on that level. So we started calling each other by the names of those brothers.

I think what got them was the betrayal and the brotherhood. The general betrays the whole family, and the father gets killed, and all the brothers get killed except for two. One goes crazy and the other gets a chance to be a monk. And he goes and cuts his hair to do it. That scene where this guy cuts his hair . . . Believe me, it's real.

Listen, we're oppressed. It does feel like we as a people were betrayed a long time ago. I can't really describe it any other way. It's

real because the issues are alive with us. You're living in the hood and you've got knowledge and dreams and you got wars between neighborhood and neighborhood and neighborhood. Everybody's backstabbing everybody. And when you know someone who's got your back, that's a life-or-death thing. That's a real bond, a real brotherhood.

Everybody was into the kung-fu films, but I don't know if everybody really knew the true meaning of what we were dealing with, the true meaning of it. I did. Ghostface did. I think that GZA did. Dirty did. And we basically had to educate the rest of the guys on the philosophy. Ghost was the first one to say, "That's Wu-Tang. I'm Wu-Tang."

So in our case, it breaks down like this: From *The Thirty-sixth Chamber* you get discipline and struggle. From *Shaolin and Wu-Tang*, you get the virtuosity, the invincible style and technique—plus, the idea that sometimes the bad guys are the illest. And from *Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*, you get the brotherhood, the soul.

I was a Mathematician and a deep knowledge person. By this time, I recognized the dialogue, what it meant. I realized that Shaolin was the foundation of Wu-Tang. Shaolin is your mind and Wu-Tang is your body. You could be Wu-Tang, and Shaolin is where you come from. That's why I named Staten Island Shaolin. We are Wu-Tang and we come from Shaolin.

Wu-Tang was the best sword style. And with us, our tongue is our sword. So I was like, "The book and the sword are the two things that control the world. We either gonna control them through knowledge and influence their minds, or we gonna bring the sword and take their heads off." That's why we called our first joint "Protect Ya Neck." And that's why I kept the Wu-Tang as the name of our group. I said, "Wu-Tang is us. We are the Wu-Tang Clan. Clan means family. We family now."

STORY OF THE W LOGO



The first logo my man Mathematics did was the guy holding a head by the dreadlocks (see page 41). That one was too gory, but I liked how he wrote the letters, so I had him come up with the sword—because my tongue is my sword. But that didn't reflect everything I was about either. So I told him it needs to represent the sword, the book, and the wisdom. It's like you either go with the book, and have it peaceful, or you got the sword. That's the same idea of the Muslim flag's sword. It's saying, "We gave you the knowledge, the Holy Koran, and we'll cut your fucking head off if you act savage."

So then the logo was the book, with the W on it, and the sword underneath. As time went on I removed the book and the sword, and left the W. The W looks like a sword, but it's also like a bat raising up or a raven or a phoenix. Plus it had some Batman flavor. Not that I meant it to—but it didn't hurt.

Wu-Tang were known for their internal martial arts and their exquisite swordplay. We felt that the tongue, as Caesar said, is a double-edged sword. And so Wu-Tang declared, "Our lyrics are the best—we're invincible."

So we took a martial arts approach to that and said we're using a Wu-Tang style. We always apply that to the music: the warrior aspect, the brotherhood of the art, the challenge of it. Because samurais and swordsmen always walk up and challenge each other and duel. An MC battle is like that to us—a challenge of the sword. We apply that to everything we do—from the sound of it, to the competitive swordplay of the rhyming, to the mental preparations.

The ultimate goal of kung fu, the highest level of t'ai chi as an effective martial art, is as an energy rejuvenator. It rejuvenates your blood, your spirit, it's even supposed to rejuvenate your youth. When we applied the spirit of kung fu to our lyrics, we came with the Wu-Tang.



KUNG-FU STYLES

Box in Hand—A training technique in which the student is to attempt to snatch a box from the master's hand.

Crane Style—A system in which the fighter keeps his arms wide, makes winglike movements, uses high kicking, and employs the crane's beak—a hand weapon made by joining the fingertips tightly together.

Dragon Style—A mercurial style that begins hard and external, and changes into a flowing, defensive art. Its intent is to tire the opponent out by stopping his blows and attack with deceptively fluid gestures.

Drunk Style—During the Tang dynasty Shaolin warriors saved the life of Emperor Li Shimin, and an imperial decree allowed Shaolin monks to drink wine. Since they rarely had, some Shaolin monks became drunk. After some observation of this, one decided that the actions of a drunk person could be used in a powerful new style. Thus they developed Drunk Style—using the slow and sloppy movements of a drunk person to deceive and create a great force for each blow.

Eagle Style—A Shaolin technique derived from the swooping of an eagle after its prey. It uses swift hits from both the hands and legs.

Leopard Style—An intermediate of the Tiger Style (see Tiger Style), it has several major offensive techniques: the chain and whip, and the leopard fist. The fist is used to jab and rake along soft spots on the anatomy. It is an offensive style meant to injure an opponent.

Mantis Style—A technique based on arm and finger strength, which the fighter develops to the point he can pierce stone. Legend has it the style was inspired by a preying mantis's ability to fight off a hawk.

Monkey Style—A technique whose offensive and defensive positions are meant to surprise and disorient an enemy. This style is the first mastered style of a child monk, who is usually initiated by age ten.

Serpent Style—A technique of kung-fu terrorism, used primarily to scare the opponent with the force of tremendously quick, injury-inflicting jabs on pressure points, some of which cause severe internal bleeding but are not life threatening.

Shadow Box—1. To spar with an imaginary opponent. 2. A form of Shaolin fighting where the hands move extremely quickly, like the flick of a shadow.

Tiger Style—A hard external style that meets force with force. Its primary hand weapons are the closed fist and the tiger claw, while the kicking maneuvers are usually low- to middle-range kicks of extreme power. The key to the style is the strong counterattack.

COMICS



From the Nine
Rings of Wu-Tang
comic books

"Egad—a maniac cutting a swath of destruction! This is a job for the Green Lantern, Thundra, or possibly... Ghost Rider."

"What about Superman?"

"Oh, please."

—COMIC BOOK GUY IN THE SIMPSONS EPISODE

"BROTHER'S LITTLE HELPER"

There's no place to hide once I step inside the room

Dr. Doom, prepare for the boom

—RZA, "WU-TANG CLAN AIN'T NUTHIN TO F' WIT,"

ENTER THE WU-TANG: 36 CHAMBERS

Comic books are a main element of Wu-Tang because they're a main element of hip-hop in general. They always have been. Both hip-hop and comics are about styles and personalities. Comics are about special powers. And they're about teams of niggas united in one life-or-death cause. To me, hip-hop is about the same shit.

DR. DOOM
(APPEARED 1962)

Born to European Gypsies, young Victor Von Doom witnesses his parents killed by local troops, studies his sorceress mother's book of black arts, and vows to avenge her death. He grows to amass incredible scientific and supernatural skills and wins a scholarship to Empire State University, where he meets Reed Richards and Ben Grimm, future members of the Fantastic Four. When he's expelled, he travels the world and meets some Tibetan monks who train him and craft for him a suit of body armor that also covers his face. He returns to his ancestral home, overthrows the government, crowns himself king, and begins using his nation's resources in a plot for world domination.

THE SILVER SURFER
(APPEARED 1966)

Norrin Rad is a resident of the peaceful planet Zenn-La when a godlike force known as Galactus threatens to devour his planet whole. In exchange for sparing his planet, Rad allows Galactus to make him his herald, transforming into a spectral silver figure that soars through the cosmos, finding planets for Galactus to feed upon. When he

DC Comics has the Justice League. Marvel has the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, and the X-Men. And ever since the beginning of hip-hop you see that influence, that same way of looking at the world. It goes from DJ Clark Kent up through X-Clan through Wu-Tang and beyond. Hip-hop was always a youth thing and youth read comics. The whole subculture of America—comics, martial arts movies, skateboarding—it's all part of our culture.

We all grew up collecting comics, just about everyone in the Wu-Tang Clan. I think Method Man had the most extensive collection. He had boxes and boxes of comic books he left in my house when he got kicked out. ODB's brother had a big collection. U-God, he had a lot of comics, and I did, too.

Growing up, I used to read comics like a movie. I'd make the music for it in my head, I'd see the choreography, the shots, everything—it'd take me an hour to read one, just plotting it out. I don't know if you feel comics more growing up in the projects or not, but I know you can relate to a lot of the main stories. Marvel heroes especially: they're always tragic. Something happened to these cats that made them strong but fucked them up, too. And a lot of them are about science gone wrong.

I lived in at least ten different projects and I got to see that the projects are a science project, in the same way that a prison is a science project. If you saw it, you would swear Stapleton Projects was a prison, because you got the tiers, and to go to your house, you have to walk past everybody's door on that particular floor. And you have helicopters and cameras—it's definitely jail. Everything around it is based on that same idea, that same science project. And in comics, when a science project goes wrong, it produces monsters. Or superheroes. In Marvel comics especially, every hero has some kind of fatal flaw, some tragic aspect to him. And everyone in the Wu-Tang Clan is the same way.

I was into Marvel mostly. For me, Silver Surfer was my dream hero. His powers were cosmic. He could bring the energy from the universe into his own body and transfer it back out—which is a lot like kung-fu fighting monks, using chi. I used to think of myself as the Silver Surfer. Meth, he was into Johnny Blaze, the Ghost Rider. He thought Ghost Rider was tougher than Silver Surfer, but I was like, "Come on, man."

The Silver Surfer actually appeared in a Fantastic Four issue. His story is, he got stuck on Earth trying to save it. He fell in love with Earth in a way, but his master Galactus made him stay on Earth forever. And then, Galactus went back to the Silver Surfer's planet and ate it. So the Silver Surfer was just fucked all the way around—even though he stayed righteous.

But I was also a big fan of Galactus. When I started to form the Wu-Tang Clan—around the end of my comics collection—I stopped thinking of myself as Silver Surfer and I started to think I was Galactus. Galactus, he's just bad. He's not even a villain, he's beyond that in size and scope. He's like Apocalypse in X-men. Apocalypse—basically, you don't want Apocalypse coming, because that's the end of the world. And in the Transformers, pretty much the same character is called Unicron. What they all do is consume your whole planet. Unicron, Galactus, Apocalypse—they're all Marvel characters. But they're all deeper than that, too. They're like Kronos, the father of Zeus.

As a kid, especially a single-parent kid, the one thing you really feel you need is protection. But nightmares and bad dreams? No one can protect you from those. And most kids wish they had some kind of special powers to protect themselves. It's that wish for power that makes you title yourself a hero. If you've got a lot of brothers and

comes to Earth, the surfer meets young Alicia Masters, and decides to save her planet, boldly defying the awesome Galactus. For this offense he is forever bound by a barrier around the planet—doomed to stay within Earth's sphere, soaring around and witnessing the follies of mankind. Fans have compared his plight to the biblical fall of Adam.

Yo, yo, *The Riddler*, funny bone tickler
Freak Caligula bigger dick sex enigma
Pistol fertilize your stigma

—RZA, "REUNITED,"
WU-TANG FOREVER

THE RIDDLER
(APPEARED 1948)

Edward Nygma is a former childhood champion of riddles, puzzles, and brainteasers who grows up to become a criminal mastermind. Physically unremarkable, he is a match for his archenemy Batman only in his wits. He taunts Batman and the police by giving clues to his planned feats of evil in the form of dense, cryptic verbal mysteries. Although they sound like nursery rhymes or hopscotch chants, the utterances take on a powerful air of menace when known to be from the Riddler—clues to an impending campaign of terror.

IRON MAN

(APPEARED 1963)

While testing high-tech weapons in the jungles of Vietnam, millionaire inventor and arms dealer Tony Starks is nearly killed by a booby-trap explosion that embeds a piece of shrapnel in his body, working its way toward his heart. Captured and ordered to design weapons for the Vietcong, he instead constructs a metallic, transistorized suit that both acts as pacemaker and gives him superhuman powers. He defeats his captors and escapes, but is doomed to remain partially encased in metal until he dies. Starks's cover story for his alter-ego is that Iron Man is his bodyguard. A wealthy patriot with a war injury, Tony Starks has been compared to John F. Kennedy.

GHOSTRIDER

(APPEARED 1972)

Raised in a carnival, young John Blaze is trained in motorcycle stunts by his foster father. When his father gets cancer, John makes a deal with the devil, Mephisto, to save him. Mephisto spares the man's life in exchange for John's soul. Mephisto ends up possessing John's body with the demonic spirit of Zarathos. Living as a carnival owner and stunt rider, John Blaze periodically turns

sisters, like I do, if something comes on TV, you had to be the first one to yell, "That's me!" And you got to be him. "I'm Steve Austin!" "I'm the Incredible Hulk!" Wrestlers, anybody that had more power than you, you wanted to be that person to help you defend your weak situation.

I see that looking at children now. I was playing with my son and he goes "shoo-shoo"—making like he's shooting powers at me. "I'm sending my powers at you!" he'd yell. And the first time he did it, I said, "You know, that really won't hurt anybody."

But the second time he did it, I didn't say that to him. Because I thought about it and realized that if you really have that will and that chi energy, and that understanding, who knows? Maybe you can fuck someone up that way. That thirty-sixth chamber in martial arts, that's the one where the fighter just forces energy at his opponent and knocks him across the room. So I don't want to take that away from a child.

It's imagination. To imagine means to image. And once you make an image, you can make flesh. It's power upon power. And it's real. That power, that force—if you let it, it can move mountains.

THE NINE RINGS OF WU-TANG (APPEARED 2002)

The comic followed the adventures of nine Moorish warriors in feudal China, supremely gifted martial artists who are invincible as a team. The known world became their kingdom, and morality became their highest cause. With them, they would carry the ark of knowledge and the spark for future remembrance. "Ancient Wu-Tang secrets revealed in comic-book series!"

In 2002, the Wu-Tang comic-book line *The Nine Rings of Wu-Tang* replaced *X-Men* as the top comic in the country.

Wu-Tang action figures modeled after the personas from the *Nine Rings of Wu-Tang* comic books became available in 2002.

BOBBY DIGITAL

Yo, you may catch me in a pair of Polo Skippies

Matching cap, razor blades in my gums

BOBBY!

You may catch me in yellow Havana Joe's

Goose jumper and my phaser off stun

BOBBY!

'All might just catch me in the park playin chess

Studyin' math, signin 7 and a sun

BOBBY!

But you won't catch me without the ratchet, in the joint

Smoked out, dead broke, or off point

BOBBY!

—RZA AS BOBBY DIGITAL.

"PROTECT YOUR NECK (THE JUMP OFF)." THE W

Around 1998, I became a superhero in real life. For years, I was really into heroes like Moon Knight. He had no real superpower. He was just a man. His story was that he almost died but survived and came back to life because of some kind of moon energy—it's kind of like the Crow. And also, I'm a Cancer, a moon child, so I felt like him. And the Green Hornet's another one of my favorite characters—and he's just a man, too. So I decided, "Fuck this, I'm gonna become a superhero for real."

Bobby Digital is the character I came up with for myself, my alter-ego. It's mostly a chance for me to live out some of my hip-hop past that got pushed aside by RZA. When Wu-Tang blew up, I was mostly behind the scenes, making beats, running things. So you didn't hear about the personal life experiences that molded me.

into the horrific fiery-headed being known as the Ghost Rider, who tears through night streets on a flaming motorcycle, hurling balls of fire.

Alabama split, hammer slay quick
That David Banner gamma ray shit
—U-GOD "PROTECT YA NECK
(THE JUMP OFF)." THE W

ROBERT BRUCE BANNER (APPEARED 1962)

Nuclear physicist Robert Bruce Banner is at work on a top secret G-bomb when an accident exposes him to the bomb's deadly gamma radiation. He develops a condition wherein fits of rage transform him into a huge, green, virtually indestructible creature of limitless strength known as the Hulk. Comics have produced several incarnations of the Hulk, each one with varying levels of intelligence. The most famous version, the "Green" or "Savage" Hulk, has the mind of a child. While the Hulk's tragic dilemma, split personality, and awesome physical power might make him a natural icon for hip-hop appropriation, he's not such a popular character with MCs—possibly because his verbal dexterity is limited to statements like "Hulk smash!"



CHESS

Chess is . . .

. . . everything: art, science, and sport.

—ANATOLY KARPOV

. . . a black and white jungle.

—GARRY KASPAROV

. . . like a swordfight. You must think first, before you move.

—INTRO SAMPLE,

"THE MYSTERY OF CHESSBOXIN'."

ENTER THE WU-TANG: 36 CHAMBERS

Chess is a very important element of Wu-Tang. It's an important element of life. It teaches you how to exist in the world. It teaches you to think multiple moves ahead, to strategize. It teaches you how to attack, how to defend.



It's one game niggas like to play just to test the mind—it's very relaxing and a good way to release stress. To me that's a perfect afternoon: playing chess all day, watching kung-fu movies, smoking a few blunts, and making a beat—I'm in heaven.

But chess also gets very, very serious. You talk with any true player, he takes it like a life-or-death experience.

I learned chess when I was eleven years old, from a girl. The same girl who took my virginity, she also taught me how to play chess. I started to love the game as a game—it's fun, it's a thinking game. When I was growing up, I used to go to Wall Street and hang at the park and play the old men, get whipped, start playing for money. But as I got older, I realized that chess was more than a game.

It's a strategic game that helps to calculate life, business, power moves. A good chess player can think three to four moves ahead. If you can do that, you can really manipulate a situation so that you're winning.

I was one of the original players in the group and at first I was the best. The only ones playing were me and GZA and Killa. I was the man for a few years. Then GZA became the man, then Killa became the man. But now it goes around. And as time went on, other Clan members became interested by watching us doing it so much. And so Deck picked it up, U-God got into it. But still, now, I play my best games with GZA and Killa.

If it's quiet and just me and you, one on one, that's when you know: If you beat me that day, you beat me. That's very rare.'

... in its essence a game, in its form an art, and in its execution a science.

—BARON TASSILO VON HEYDERBRAND

... a kind of mental alcohol ... unless a man has supreme self-control. It is better that he should not learn to play [it].

—HENRY BLACKBURN

... a work of art between minds, which need to balance two sometimes disparate goals—to win, and to produce beauty.

—VASILY SMYSLOV

Another reason chess is part of the Wu-Tang essence is because it's a game of war—it's about a battle. And Wu-Tang was formed in battles, from challenging each other. In MCing, the Wu-Tang Clan was always powerful because we were challenging each other all the time. At any moment, anybody in the crew could be the best MC that day.

I remember reading about Stanley Kubrick keeping a chess set on every film set—to keep his mind focused, but also to see if anyone would ever want to challenge him. That was his way of letting everybody know that he was the one in charge. It was like hustling in the park. But he would just keep it around so if you ever had any doubt who the man is, step to the board.



We look at chess in terms of the group. That's why we made the video "Chessboxing." In that video GZA and I were the captains, and everyone else was pieces. Somebody was a bishop, somebody was a rook. In chess,

GZA ON CHESS

My growth in chess shows lyrically. When I did *Words from Genius*, I didn't say anything about chess. I wasn't playing so much. I did *Liquid Swords*, and I speak about chess numerous times. One song I say, "He got swung on, his lungs were torn/the kingpin just castled a rook and lost a pawn." It's not like it's coincidental. It's something that's a part of us, of what we do. Instead of running around saying, "I rhyme about what I live, it's all real," it'll show in your words. You don't have to say it.

It's like RZA, he mentions something about chess, he says something about "My thoughts be sneaky like a crook from Brooklyn/ When he ain't lookin' I take the queen with the rook and..." It's part of it. Chess just opens up and unlocks many different doors. It's a part of what we do.



THE
WU-TANG
MANUAL

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there's only three characters—bishop, knight, and rook—and you got two of each. Then you got the queen, king, and pawns. But we never point out who's who. You might hear Raekwon say in a rap, "I'm a bishop," or "I'm a castle." But they change it up. And, you can't really say Ol' Dirty Bastard is a rook or a king or a bishop—he's in a class by himself.

At parties chess was considered nerdy at one point. Now it's considered cool. Other rappers play it, lots of brothers are into it. You'll hear it, a chess game sound like a game of street basketball. The other day, when GZA was playing Melquan, when he took his queen he said, "Hey, your bitch chose me"—that is some pimp shit. That's just how we flip it.

... a game in which are revealed your intellect, character, will.

—BORIS SPASSKY

... a universal game that cuts across all of those artificial boundaries we set up to segregate ourselves from our fellow human beings.

—STEVE LOPEZ

... an art appearing in the form of a game.

—A SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA

MATHEMATICS OF CHESS

I look at chess in a metaphysical way. There are sixty-four squares on the board. Throughout Mathematics and throughout history, sixty-four is a deep number. The sixty-four squares are in eight columns, which relates to the eight points of the sun. And 1964 was the year when the Father first came and brought the lessons. Plus, sixty-four squares is similar to the *I Ching*, which has sixty-four hexagrams total,

and the *I Ching* is how to calculate the universe. Sixty-four is also a very creative number. When the sperm meets the egg and they have meiosis, it splits into sixty-four separate cells—two to four, four to eight, then eight to sixty-four. That's one life cell. Sixty-four is the basic number of creation.

People say, "Chess is life," and that's real. It really is about life at the most basic level. That's why I have a rap that says, "Sixty-four lines up into eight columns, we meditate, we calculate life's problems." Life has a lot to do with the sixty-four squares. It's black and white, yin and yang. White always goes first—you don't have to work too hard to connect that to human history: Whites have been antagonistic by nature; Africans are more humble by nature.

Chess also teaches you not to respect all your men, all your soldiers by the same criteria, especially the ones that aren't such obvious players. Power comes from surprising places. The knight, for example, isn't the most obvious power piece, but it is the most Mathematical. It moves in a right angle of two steps up and one left. It's also close to God because its course traces a number seven on the board. You have to be super careful around the knight. To me the knight and the rook are the two most dangerous men on the board. If I have my knights and my rooks, I'm still a very formidable foe. If you take my queen, I'm still a come at you. And the queen can do every other pieces's move, but she can't do the knight's.

There are eight pawns, but the pawn is the only piece on the board that has the power to be anything at all. In all reality, whether it's the knight, the rook, or the queen, they're all on a mission to protect the king. A lot of people say that the most powerful piece on the board is the queen, but it's really the king who's the most powerful. You can kill the queen and the game still goes on.



CHESS

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THE WU-TANG SACRIFICE

There's one move I used to do a lot. It was a sacrifice technique I used to use that won a lot of games in the early days.

Basically, it's when your knight hits the king's pawn. At C2, shall we say. In the first five moves on the game. So the king's knight—say black knight, because I'm working from the black side—hits the king's pawn at F2. Usually, your opponent will kill your knight. He'll take it with his king—which is the only piece he can take it with. So that's a pretty serious loss early in the game: your knight. But it draws the king out of a castling position. I used to win a lot of games like that. Once the king is out of a castling position, I had a certain attack designed that was coming down on you after that. But basically the idea is this: Sacrifice for a position. You let that knight go to lure that king out to where he can't castle, because it's harder to defeat the castle defense.

That particular move is an opening move. I'd probably use that on somebody with a low chess rating. It's more a beginning phase, but people figure it out. I first developed that idea back in '94. It's still a good one to bring out early, when you're just trying to test someone's skills.

THE WU-TANG MANUAL

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Popa Wu says that a lot of players protect their queen at all costs. Which is also like life—a man loses his woman, he flips out, acts stupid. So a lot of players, they tend to identify themselves with the king. But if you're a master player you realize that you're not the king either. You're actually playing God. That's how I see it anyway. You're not any piece on the board. You're all the pieces. If the king dies, you don't die. So in a way what that should teach you is, don't take it so serious.

... 99 percent tactics.

—RICHARD TEICHMANN

... 99 percent calculation.

—ANDREW SOLTIS

... ruthless: you've got to be prepared to kill people.

—NIGEL SHORT

Chess is a martial art. So in that way, it's about the flow of chi, the ebbing and flowing of universal energies. Because when you got a good streak in chess, you probably got a good streak in everything you're doing. You're just pushing energy forth. When I'm feeling really really good, and my confidence is really up, you're not going to beat me in the game of chess. Or in anything. That's why it's my season, my moment. Chess is a good measurement. When I'm on a streak, I'm on a streak in everything. Even in my own crew, there are days when you know—"Man, I ain't fucking with him today. He'll whip me three games in a row."

But it can keep you a humble warrior, too. It teaches you to stay on point no matter what. You never know if you're truly skilled in chess because I could come across a seven-year-old kid that could

beat me because he has the wits and foresight. I've won a lot of games in my life, but I lost a few, too, and had a few crushing defeats. One kid caught me on tour. It was after my show and he caught me off guard. I did one of my amateur moves—a move that, you know, "He fall for this one, maybe you know you be aight." It was a sacrifice move. But he was too good for that. He came and defeated me. At the end, I had to respect him. He was super good—computer good.

Chess also taught me never to give up. That's one of my main tactics: Never count me out. It's the same with the greatest players. They play right up to that last move, and they never give up. I've won many victories just when you thought I was about to lose.



CHESS

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ORGANIZED CRIME

At the time we were coming up, most of us were outlaws, for real. We had our own experiences in the street game, especially Ghost and Rae. But also, at that time, Staten Island was one of the main homes to the Gambino crime family. Castellano was the boss before Gotti, he lived on Staten Island, and his kids went to school there. We'd see him there, we'd come across kids from his family.

Even after the Wu-Tang Clan became famous, I still knew a few guys I had met from that family, and I met a few new ones. I guess they came by to meet us out of respect. So we took on that name. It just seemed to flow.

Raekwon brought the whole idea of the Wu Gambinos to the forefront during the *Cuban Linx* album, but it was always there, in the background.

When Raekwon came with *Cuban Linx*, he started everyone in hip-hop fiending for that mafia shit. It was an explosion. The album was a lot like the crime movies in the way it mixed parables and drama and fantasy with real-life stories from Rae and Ghost's time in the street game. Rae and Ghost—those two are the biggest criminologists in Wu-Tang. They know it—for real—but they're amazing MCs and amazing storytellers. Rae had every MC who was on that album take a new name for it, starting with him, Lex Diamonds. You can't tell where one stops and the other begins. That's kind of the beauty of it.



Some kinds of movies you love because they're just great movies. Other movies hit you deeper. You love them because they show you something you recognize from life, from the shit you see every day. All of us, together and separately, we were fans not just of *The Godfather* trilogy, *Goodfellas*, and *Scarface*, but all the crime movies—*Mob Wars*, *Cotton Club*, *Gang Wars*, *Once Upon a Time in America*, *Billy Bathgate* to way before that. Plus, there's all the Chinese crime movies—John Woo joints and all those before him. Basically, if it's a crime movie, a nigga wants to see it.

It's not that they're all necessarily great movies, but they reflect what we see around us in a way you don't see in other films. Some films hold that essence, they dramatize realities, shit that you see played out in the street game every day.

CARLO GAMBINO



Possibly the most intelligent and powerful mob boss in history, with a rare ability to see two moves ahead and act without hesitation. In his reign from 1957 to 1976, he turned a moderately successful crime family into the richest, most powerful criminal empire in the United States. Its net worth is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions, its criminal workforce to include more than eight hundred men, and its empire to range from New York City to Las Vegas to Sicily, Asia, and Kuwait. For many years, the Gambino and Genovese families divided control of the New York and New Jersey waterfront. Brooklyn and Staten Island fell into the Gambino domain.

In the '80s, Carlo Gambino appointed Paul Castellano as his successor, making him the most powerful Mafia boss in the United States. Castellano lived in a mansion in Todt Hill, Staten Island, valued at \$3.5 million. Its nickname was the White House.

ORGANIZED
CRIME

It was a validation of everything I believed in. It was basically the way I saw the life.

—SALVATORE "SAMMY THE BULL" GRAVANO,
ON *THE GODFATHER* (YEARS AFTER SEEING THE FILM,
GRAVANO WAS INDUCTED INTO THE GAMBINO FAMILY FOR REAL)

The Godfather and *Scarface*, in particular, are very serious. They're almost biblical, in terms of their importance in life. I studied *The Godfather* over and over and over while making the Wu-Tang Clan.

If you look at Vito Corleone, he was a great godfather because he was ruthless and he was fair. And when he was ruthless, his ruthlessness was part of his fairness. I may have caught that lesson first in the movie, but believe me, I saw it over and over and over again in real life. I wanted to be Vito Corleone and I modeled myself after him in a lot of ways.

When I went in to shop the Wu-Tang Clan to labels, I was going in to make them an offer they couldn't refuse. It wasn't that they'd get whacked if they turned me down. It was that I was too strong, had too much intention. I was too certain to be refused. I was sure about what I was doing. I knew we were invincible as MCs and that the plan would work.



Vito Corleone

Also, Vito Corleone had this cool to him, he was logical. He kept his priorities straight. Even when they killed his son, he didn't destroy the whole business that he made. When they killed Sonny, he didn't get emotional and go kill everybody on some wild maniac shit. He kept his business in hand and really planned and let his family live on. And eventually, his family became worth six hundred million dollars—legally. You see that in *Godfather III*. That's very inspirational, the

whole story, and I knew I wanted that for my family, and for the Wu-Tang Clan.

Scarface, that was about doing anything necessary to make it to the top. *Scarface* is every hip-hop nigga's dream, becoming a millionaire by living the street life. But the film also shows you a very important lesson about the game of life. *Scarface*, Tony Montana, made one basic error.

His error was not seeing that a moral-less man cannot choose the time in life to get morals. In the movie, Tony Montana caught morality at the wrong time. He caught morality over the women and children he didn't want to blow up. So he fucked up his man for that. He blew it. You can't suddenly get morals—that will kill you. It even says that in the Holy Koran, when the people go to hell, they called out to the saved people to help them. And Abraham wanted to help them, but God didn't. So basically, you might as well enjoy it because you're not getting out of it.

Tony Montana might as well have blown up that car, killed those women and children, and stayed loyal to his team. Because he was gone already, already in hell. He had a limitation to his wickedness—he wouldn't kill any children. But that limitation was artificial, it was arbitrary on his part. And it was the end of him. The point is, you better go all the way. You can't serve two masters. You better serve God or serve the devil.

I control twenty-six thousand men. Except for dope, we operate in every aspect of organized crime. And if there's one thing I'm sure of, it's that drugs destroy your mind and destroy your home. In the end, it will only lead our country into ruin.

—FROM 1995 JAPANESE CRIME FILM *CRYING FREEMAN*,
SAMPLED IN INTRO TO GHOSTFACE KILLAH'S "FISH"

In a way, we took some of the structure of the Wu-Tang from a mob chain of command. They've usually got a don, who's the boss, and a consigliere, and then they got an underboss and capos, who are generals to the street soldiers. They all answer to the underboss.

The thing about Wu-Tang, it isn't just me and eight lackeys, it's nine generals. Each one of the main generals has other niggas they control. So when we came together it was like everybody held up a pillar.

Wu-Tang started out as a dictatorship. Then it went to something like a democracy. That's when everyone became generals, with a lot of guys under them. They can all function independently, although they're organized under one umbrella, one family.



In the end, the most important value you take away from crime movies and from mafia tales is loyalty. You gotta have your team. The idea of family, the code of honor, we live by that. Even to this day, we live by that. This is why when someone gets on the radio and says something, everybody gets involved, everybody's gotta check in.

Everybody called me, for instance, when U-God was on the radio saying some angry things. Basically people called asking me how I felt. If I would've felt funny about it, it would've been something. But I didn't. I didn't want to make it serious.

When Dirty signed to Roc-A-Fella, I got e-mails calling him Fredo. Fans were saying that he turned on us. But I didn't necessarily see it that way. I look back to *The Godfather*. Didn't Luca Brasi go and join that other family for a while? He had his reasons. You learn more, you grow. You can't always worry about how it looks to outsiders.

We've all got serious history together, we've been around each other for years and we've got a code of honor. And that's what following the mafia instilled in us. We're family, and we're not gonna let each other destroy that. Before I destroy Wu-Tang, I'm going to go live on a mountain. If I realize that I'm the problem, then I need to handle it.

That one critical scene in *The Godfather*, when the guy goes in the tub and cuts his own wrists—that was a big scene to us. If you want to go out, that's the way. He showed his loyalty to the cause and to his own family.

