

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

MF Doom Is Viktor Vaughn. Or Is He?

The voice on the other end of the phone says his name is Viktor. "I'm stuck in New York. There was a mistake with this damn machine. Something with the quark dispenser."

It's the world-renowned inventor and inter-dimensional battle MC Viktor Vaughn I'm speaking with. The time machine he uses to transport himself between realities has broken down and trapped him in modern-day New York.

"I'm trying to fix it right now. Time travel is tricky, man. You can get stuck somewhere for a long time. But it's a good way to make money if you perfect it."

This phone call actually happened. Viktor Vaughn, you see, is the latest guise of MF Doom, one of hip-hop's most flamboyantly unclassifiable figures. "I like to keep my identities separate," Doom explained to me a few moments earlier. "So you might hear from Viktor in a minute."

While rappers with alter egos are nothing new, no MC has ever redefined himself quite like Doom. Originally known as Zevlove X, of Long Island-based hip-hop collaborative KMD, the artist born Daniel Dumile went into extensive seclusion in 1994 after the death of his brother and rhyme partner, Subroc, and a fallout with their label, Elektra.

As KMD's controversial, and at the time unreleased, *Black Bastards* LP (it finally saw proper release in 2001) elevated the group to legendary status, Dumile essentially dropped off the face of the earth and turned his back on the reputation KMD had built. One part of his life was now over.

Dumile re-emerged in 1998 with not only a new name, but with a delivery and approach so different from his Zevlove personality, he was hardly recognizable on record. Co-opting the identity of Marvel Comics villain Dr. Doom to fit his life-long nickname ("Doom" is short for Dumile, and not to

be confused with Kool Keith's "Dr. Doom" character), Doom made all appearances in a mask and made no effort to clue audiences to his real identity.

Where Zevlove was a topical MC who often confronted racism and hypocrisy, Metal Face Doom's debut, *Operation: Doomsday*, was typified by abstract, free-form verses and cartoon-like imagery (check how he flips Scooby-Doo on the album's standout track, "Hey!")

"I wanted to start clean," Doom recalls. "I like to get accurate feedback and, to get it, I wanted there to be no connection to the past. Those who will know, will know. And those that are just coming up have never heard of KMD, so they'll be like, 'Oh it's a new dude.' Give fresh listeners a fresh start."

Doomsday also featured a couple of tracks blessed by the original flow of one King Geedorah, a raw,

experimental extension of Doom. That record marked the first appearance of The Monsta Island Czars, a loose-knit conglomerate of MCs with identities lifted from Japanese monster films.

After releasing numerous white-label singles, an EP with MF Grimm, and a series of instrumental records for High Times, Doom has re-invented himself in perhaps his ultimate incarnation with Geedorah. In classic Wu-Tang, multi-faceted, industry take-over style, the aforementioned King Geedorah already has an album out on Big Dada Records, while Viktor Vaughn's debut LP, *Vaudeville Villain*, has just been released separately on Sound-Ink Records.

While Geedorah's *Take Me To Your Leader* is classic Doom abstract-storytelling-style, Vaughn is something totally different. For the first time,

Doom worked exclusively with outside producers, allowing him to elevate his lyrics to that next level without worrying as much about the make-up of the tracks. The album is also a breakthrough for Sound-Ink producers Heat Sensor, Max Bill and King Honey, whose crisp, moody beats steal the show at times. The result is a cohesive concept album that rivals Kool Keith's *Dr. Octagon* and Prince Paul's *Prince Among Thieves* in terms of sheer, off-the-wall creativity.

"The best way to get all my ideas across and explore different styles is if I use different characters," Doom says of his need to switch up guises. "I got a few more kicking around."

Says Sound-Ink's King Honey, "Doom will be remembered as this millenium's Nostradamus. There will be whole cults devoted to interpreting

his rhymes, line by line, word for word. There's nobody else out there doing this."

It's usually a sign of a great artist to be able to successfully reinvent one's self and continue to be successful in a completely different style from which your reputation was built. Like past music icons from David Bowie to Prince, Doom has crafted alter egos that allow him to explore different creative paths, and it's worked brilliantly. Some would classify that talent as genius. Some as instability. MF Doom is a little of both. **□**

Watch for two more releases in the coming year: a new MF Doom album, MMM... Food on MetalFace/Rhymesayers, and Mad Villain, a collaboration with Lootpack's Madlib.

