

*I'm Immune to all Viruses, I Snort the Cocaine it Cleans out My
Sinuses*

By James Hooper

“WU-TANG, WU-TANG, WU TANG!” The sound was roaring. 10,000 people had turned out tonight to see Bobby and his crew, the infamous Wu Tang Clan. The eight members were backstage, getting psyched up, waiting to perform verses from their extensive catalogue. It was a spectacle that Hip Hop was in dire need of. Bobby knew this would be big. It was their first tour for five years. Five years of dirty laundry, physical and verbal fights, lacklustre solo albums, prison sentences and people gradually forgetting they even existed. But now they were back, the original Hip Hop dynasty. The crew that put a defiant middle finger up to the industry and did it their way. The group that took back that dirty unapologetic sound of the American East Coast and put their own unique spit-shine on it. It was their time. Time for the men born Bobby Diggs (The RZA), Gary Grice (The Genius), Eugene Turner (Masta Killa), Clifford Smith (Method Man), Corey Woods (Raekwon), Dennis Coles (Ghostface), Jason Hunter (The Rebel) and Lamont Hawkins (Golden Arms) to assume their stage and take back their crown.

On stage, the DJ was getting warmed up, spinning tracks by today's 'popular' rap artists, 50 Cent in particular, to the disapproval of the crowd. 50 Cent records were not popular among Wu Tang Fans due to the war of words he had with Ghostface in the mid 90s. The crowd was beginning to get tetchy, uninterested, and ready to start a riot.

“Okay fellas they've been waitin' on us for two hours, it's time to hit 'em with the hot stuff,” Bobby said. He was itching to get out there, and feel that rush of energy, something you can't get from a drug. He gave the nod to the promoter, who in turn nodded at the DJ. He reached into his crate and pulled out a dusty vinyl, with a battered sleeve and span the record. It was preceded by an introduction from a Kung Fu film, a trademark of Wu Tang Records. “A game of chess is like a swordfight. You must think first before you move.” The introduction immediately lit

a spark in the crowd. If it was deafening before, the sound was *excruciating* now. The Clan flooded the stage, one by one. It was as if they hadn't been apart. Like nothing had happened in the last five years. The chemistry was still there, and the fans still loved them. Lamont was first to assume his Wu-Tang persona; "RAW IM'A GIVE IT TO YA WITH NO TRIVIA RAW LIKE COCAINE STRAIGHT FROM BOLIVIA!" The crowd knew all the words. The song still had the power to throw oil on the fire. It was like a mosh pit at a rock concert, except no one was getting hurt. Bobby was still in the background, letting the other seven clansmen rip the show. He was observing, soaking up the atmosphere. He was relieved. All of the anxieties about the gig were dispelled. He knew the world was ready for them again. But something wasn't right. One piece of the puzzle was missing. There had been a few frantic phone calls before the concert. Dennis, Lamont and Clifford all tried to get hold of the ninth member of Wu Tang Clan. But the best they could do was leave him voicemail messages. He wasn't picking up his cell phone. He hadn't turned up. It was expected to expect the unexpected from Russell Jones, (Ol' Dirty Bastard) but not turning up to a show that he had organised and paid for was a little too much out of leftfield for some of the clansmen to handle.

"Where the F*** is Ol' Dirty?" Lamont blasted into his mic. "If y'all want to see the Ol' Dirty Bastard let me here it loud and crystal!" The crowd began chanting in unison, "DIRTY DIRTY DIRTY!" The ninth member of the crew was missing. The media had labelled him the "Left Ventricle of the Clan." Critics and fans alike had blasted the last two albums that they put out for being too serious, too dull and too dark. Both of these records were Ol' Dirty-less. He'd spent the best part of five years dodging the law or imprisoned in the, "belly of the beast." He had been in jail. And on the night of his group's reformation, he was nowhere to be seen.

"Ok then if Ol' Dirty Bastard can't show up to his own God-damn show, then F*** him. F*** Ol' Dirty Bastard!!" The effects of these words were awkward. The crowd didn't really second Lamont's opinions and the Clan didn't know what to say. They just carried on with the show. The next song they performed was "Can it be all so simple?" They had been on-stage for forty-five minutes, and the promoters were threatening to pull the plug, so Bobby decided to wind down the show with some of their more mellow tracks.

Bobby smoked a cigarette backstage after the show. The Clan had dispersed, gone

their separate ways to separate locker rooms. "Where the hell was he? What was more important than this?" The same question had been whirlpooling his head for the last hour. He pulled out his cell phone, looked under the R section in his address book and dialled the name Russell Jones (Ol' Dirty Bastard), his cousin.

"...Hello?" A gravelly, tired sounding voice said.

"Where was you tonight man?" said Bobby.

"I had a headache, I wasn't feeling too good."

Bobby sighed, "Man it was off the hook, and the crowd was really digging us."

"That's cool man, I wish I could'a been there." Russell replied with what Bobby interpreted as an air of lethargy.

"Well are you gonna make the recording session tomorrow?"

"Yeah I've taken some aspirin man, that should clear it up. What we doin' tomorrow?"

"We're gonna remix that track you did last week Thursday. I don't like the third verse you spat on that."

"Ok man just make sure they got it all ready so I can go in and come out real quick."

"Aight man. I meet you there at 12 ok?"

"Ok man I'll be ready"

"Aight peace"

"Peace"

Russell hung up. He was alone in his hotel room and was feeling pretty rough. It was getting dark but he didn't want to switch the lights on out of fear of aggravating his headache. He was quite high up in the building, on the 9th storey. He could see the lights of the city from his room but they were also kind of piercing his head, even though they were so far away. He sipped a glass of water. It cleared some of the phlegm stuck at the back of his throat. He hadn't felt this rough since he got out of the joint. He decided to turn in for the night; he had two important meetings the next day, and he didn't want to be tired and sick at the same time.

Russell was feeling a lot better. The early night must have helped, he thought. He didn't want to go to the studio today. It had lost its appeal to him. He wasn't even writing his own material anymore. Instead, he was getting aspiring younger rappers

to pen verses for the album he was working on. He often asked himself why he was still doing this. Every time, he came back to the same conclusion. He had children to

feed. He needed the money. He got himself washed, dressed and ready to go in half an hour and made his way to Bobby's studio, 36 chambers in Staten Island. Walter Reed (Killah Priest) a member of a group signed to his record label, 'The Brooklyn Zoo' was already there and ready to record. "Wa'sup," said Russell as he made his way to the most comfortable chair in the studio. "Ain't nuthin man, just ready to do these vocals you know." Russell felt guilty about the group having to wait nearly five years to put any new material out, so he was giving them plenty of opportunities to shine on his solo album through guests appearing on some of the tracks. Bobby was already there, in the studio working on some music for Russell to rap over. It was 12.10pm and Russell had an appointment with someone he hadn't seen in a long time in two hours. He didn't really care to see them; he was more interested in what they were selling. "Yo, I saw you come in man. I hope you're ready to drop those vocals, Walt wrote some ill stuff in there, I think this track could even be the first single off the album." Russell looked up at Bobby from his chair, but diverted his eyes from his cousin. "Yeah, the beat sounds knockin. Listen I gotta go meet my girl at two so I need to do this quick."

"Okay son u know the deal with me, one take and one take only."

One hour later and the track was done. Russell was listening to the final mix of the song with Bobby at the studio console. It sounded good. You couldn't tell that he was ill at the time of recording. The track reminded Russell of his earlier days in the music business, days he would rather forget. He sat back in his chair and reflected on the time he rushed the stage at the Grammys after losing out on an award for best rap album to Puff Daddy. He also thought about the time he was shot by the Police after staggering out of a drug-fuelled party in Brooklyn. But the time he spent in the psychiatric hospital before his prison sentence drifted it's way to the forefront of his thoughts once again. It haunted him. He often woke up in cold sweats over it. He hated it more than prison. He couldn't do anything. The drugs that they gave him to cure his 'condition' left him catatonic for hours at a time. He wasn't allowed to read or write. It was there that he lost his passion for rap music. He didn't care for the politics of the business anymore. Rap music had changed so much since his heyday.

Back then it was all about witty unpredictable talent and natural game. Now, it's all about how big your marketing budget is. He was close to completion of his album now and he knew that it meant having to assume that Ol' Dirty Bastard costume again for the media. That crazy hip-hop joker who's all about the good times. He couldn't express a socially conscious message like some of his earlier records because people weren't interested in that anymore. It was about putting on a fake smile to meet radio DJ's out of hope that they would spin your record. But, he needed the money. He wanted to make sure that if he were to die tomorrow, his kids' future would be secure.

So he was willing to work hard to this end. He decided he wanted to record another track today to get even closer to meeting his release date. The quicker he turned his album in to the record label, the quicker he can make a profit off of it.

"Hey Bobby you think I could go and meet my girl now? I'll be back in half an hour and I think that I could record something over that track you cooked up last week."

"Oh for real? Ok man I was gonna mix down some more of these tracks from last week but recording another track would be cool. What time you gonna be back?"

Russell looked at his watch, "I'll be about half an hour."

"Ok man I'll have everything ready before you get here."

"Cool I'll be as quick as possible." Russell left the studio and made his way up the block. It was cold and dull outside. Really depressing. It took him about 10 minutes to get where he was going. He came up to a familiar dark alley. He could see that his important date was already waiting there. He walked down the alley and pulled his hood over his head. "Never thought I would see you again man," said the hooded man. He was quite tall and kept his face wrapped up to keep it from the cold. Russell couldn't even remember his name.

"You got the stuff man? Like I said I want nothing but the finest."

"I got that, the purest fish scale cocaine from Bolivia."

"Ok man here's the dough. I'll let you know when I need some more. *IFI* need some more."

"Yeah whatever man. You was never one of my regular customers anyway." And they parted ways.

Russell made his way back to the studio. It only took him 5 minutes this time; he was

walking a lot quicker. He got in the studio and didn't say a word to anyone. They didn't even notice he had got back. He moved quickly to the toilet and locked himself in the cubicle. He put the seat down on the toilet, and carefully pulled the bag of coke out his pocket. He measured out a line and cut it with his credit card. Pure white powder, laced into a thin line. A rich man's high. He didn't smile. He wasn't happy to be doing what he was doing. But he *needed* that rush. That adrenaline coursing through his veins. The fuel for his neurotic 90s recordings. He pulled out a 50 dollar note from his pocket, rolled it up to make a tube and positioned it in front of the cocaine line. He said to himself, "Be somebody," and snorted the line.

He walked out of the toilet and back into the studio. He was spaced out. It was like all the time he had been clean the drugs never left his body. He was buzzing with psychedelic energy. He truly was the Ol' Dirty Bastard again. He walked over to the pool table where Walter was playing solo. "You want to go one on one?" Russell said excitedly. "Yeah man cool let me just set up the table real fast."

"Yeah let's do this."

The colours of the studio were all blurring into each other. Russell noticed different shades of red and green. But he could still focus. He could still play pool and beat Walter. "Alright man, break," said Walt. Russell lined up a shot. He carefully focused on the line down his cue. Checking his frame. He pulled back on his cue, and a sharp pain thrashed through his chest. Like someone had cut out his heart. He grabbed the left side of his torso. A gasp escaped his mouth. He couldn't breathe.

"What's wrong man you aightht?!" Walt shouted. Russell was breaking down. He was on his knees now, hyperventilating, and then collapsed on the front side of his body. Walter dialled 911 on his cell phone and then rushed to get Bobby from the studio. Bobby ran over to where Russell was collapsed. There was foam coming out of his mouth. "Oh shit son he took something! Russell can you hear me?! What did you take?!" But Russell kept shaking. His eyes had rolled back in his head. He was totally oblivious to the world now and his life rested in the hands of God. The ambulance reached the studio quickly. The paramedics rushed in and administered an adrenaline shot. It did nothing. Bobby and Walt stood back, helplessly. The sight of Russell, lying on his back, eyes closed, surrounded by paramedics, was sobering. It was like time had slowed down for Bobby.

"Clear!" Bobby looked on, as his cousin was shocked with resuscitators. A far cry from the energetic stage presence of Ol' Dirty Bastard. Russell's body wasn't shaking anymore. It was still. Deathly still. He was flat lining. The paramedics couldn't revive him. Russell was dead. Bobby was gob smacked. He couldn't say anything. A coroner came to collect the body. "We will announce the results of the post mortem in ten days." Bobby stayed rooted to the spot. He hadn't moved since the paramedics arrived. The coroner nodded even though there was no response and carted the corpse out of the studio. Bobby pulled out his cell phone and called Russell's mum. He had been through a lot of tough challenges in his life, such as jail, being shot in the back. But this was going to be the hardest thing he had ever done. Russell's Mum picked up the phone. "Hello?"

It was a fortnight after Russell's death. The post mortem on Russell's body revealed death by, 'accidental intoxication of aspirin and cocaine.' Bobby was at a radio interview with New York DJ Funkmaster Flex at Hot 97 FM. He didn't care anymore about releasing another album; he just wanted his cousin back. Plans to reform the Wu Tang Clan were shelved, as was Russell's solo album. It was a drab day. Much like the day Russell died. What made it worse was the excuse for Hip-Hop music that Funkmaster Flex had been playing all day while Bobby was there. Bobby thought to himself, "He must have played that same Goddamn 50 Cent junk three times in the last hour." It made him ponder the lack of originality in today's cookie cutter rap music. It was mediocrity that he'd hoped to destroy with Russell's album. "Everyone would have to step their game up after this drops," he thought. But now that hopes of releasing it were dead, the music on the radio was going to get worse and worse. Bobby was bored of being in studios. He hadn't been back to 36 Chambers since Russell's death and was planning on taking the next few months out to spend time with his kids. He missed Russell. Funkmaster Flex asked Bobby; "So if you were to use one word to summarise the way Ol' Dirty lived his life what would you use?" Bobby looked out the window at the rain. He could see a rainbow, far in the distance that was partially shrouded by a project building. It reminded him of a time, about 12 years ago in Brooklyn when Russell was walking down the block with Bobby and some of their other cousins. It was a carefree time. Russell was the ringleader, all the other cousins were just laughing at his jokes and stories. He had seen a lot of crazy stuff in his time. Then a car of gang bangers rolled up on them and

pulled out a shotgun. Back then, Russell and Bobby were famous in their neighbourhoods for their rap music. 'Gimme the loot muthaf**as.' Said one of the hooded gangsters. The group all pulled out their wallets, ready to hand over what cash they had. When Bobby looked up from taking the cash out of his wallet Russell had the same shotgun pointed back at the car. "Get the f** outta here with that bullshit, we run New York!" The car drove out of there faster than it arrived. The flashback brought a smile to Bobby's face. He couldn't think of anyone else who would do such a thing. Bobby looked back at the DJ and said, "...Unique."