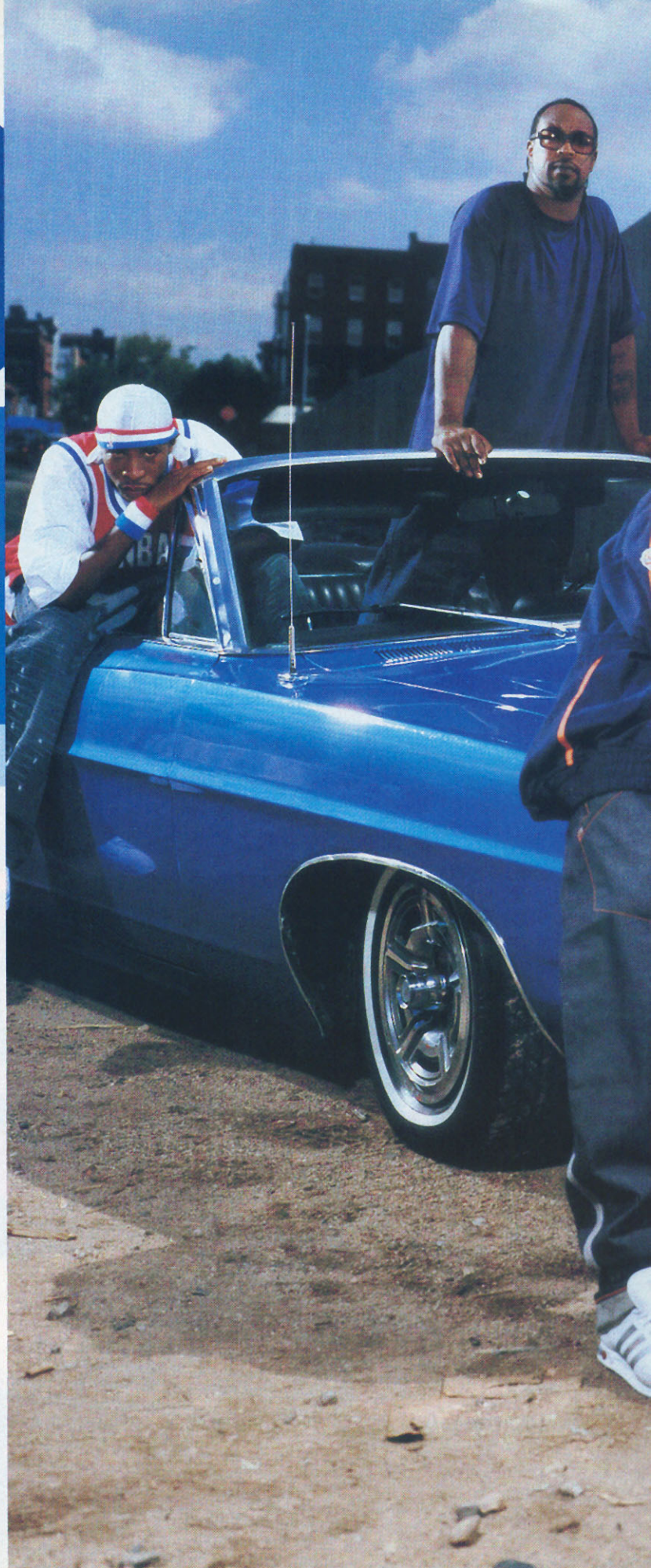


MISTAKEN

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THE BOOT CAMP CLIK SAY JANSPTS  
AREN'T THEIR THING. FOR A TIME, HARMONY  
DIDN'T SEEM TO BE THEIR CUP OF TEA,  
EITHER. BUT REUNITED AND REFOCUSED,  
THEY'RE SET ON RECEIVING THE  
PROPS THAT HAVE LONG EVADED THEM.

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he Boot Camp Clik aren't happy with their label. "We ain't really no backpacker niggas," asserts Ruck, the irrational half of the Heltah Skeltah duo, as he adjusts his knee-high socks. "We came from that era, but we ain't on that." Buckshot, front man of Black Moon and co-CEO of Boot Camp Clik's label, Duck Down, chimes in as he dribbles a B-ball, a prop from their album cover shoot. "When we had book bags on, we was coming from Franklin Ave. in Brooklyn and they were filled with stolen 2-liters, T-shirts, baby shoes, incense and oils," he says. "We never had rhymes in our backpacks!"

Buck's frustration comes from the mismanagement of his own words. The year was 1992, hip-hop's dark, medieval age. Black Moon inadvertently lay the foundation for a subculture with the anthem "Who's Got da Props?" from their 1993 debut *Enta da Stage*. Over a loop of Ronnie Laws's "Tidal Wave," Buckshot declared that he was "booming like a speaker, with my \$100 sneakers/ Baggy black jeans, knapsack and my beeper" as he swung from a chain-link fence in their \$6,000 video. The beeper and \$100 sneakers made the transition into hip-hop's subsequent "flossy" era, but the BCC, with their knapsacks and camouflage, were relegated to the outskirts of the mainstream.

**"AFTER BLACK  
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—BUCKSHOT

Being an underground group stained Duck Down and all of the affiliated groups: Black Moon, Cocoa Brovaz (Smif-N-Wessun), Heltah Skeltah and OGC. But the tree-blowin', collar-poppin' Clik insist they've been misrepresented. "If you wanna pop a bottle, pop a bottle," jokes Tek. "I shoot dice in the 'hood. We got little whips and I fuck with the train." There is something between a thug and a baller called an everyman—that's who makes up the majority of fans and MCs. This "average joe" contingent doesn't only consist of baggy-jeaned, Puma-rockin' radical idealists, either. Rather, it's made up of the working-class man who lives next door to you. That's who BCC rep. "We're understream mainground niggas," declares Starang Wondah. "But once we get people to listen, it's over."

For the past three years, getting folks to listen has been harder than a man on a Viagra overdose. After enduring years of legal drama with their first label, Nervous, BCC settled in at distributor Priority Records in 1995, which was then home to acts like Master P and Ice Cube. After seeing respectable independent sales of Black Moon's *Enta da Stage* and Smif-N-Wessun's *Dah Shinin'*, Priority had high hopes for the Camp, especially Ruck and Rock of Heltah Skeltah. The group's debut, *Nocturnal*, moved 30,000 units in the first week, delighting Priority. "We was makin' them albums dirt cheap," recalls Rock, who no longer maintains a working



(L-R) Steele B, Buck, Tek, Starang, Louisville, Top Dogg, Ruck



relationship with Duck Down but is still part of Heltah Skeltah. "We was takin' show dough and puttin' it back into Heltah Skeltah, so [Priority] was never comin' out they pocket." With Ruck and Rock contributing outside funds to their album, the duo was quickly profitable for Priority.

But efficient spending didn't loosen Priority's grip on Duck Down's budget. In 1997, Duck Down co-CEO Dru Ha attended a Lyricist Lounge show featuring a skinny white boy named Marshall Mathers. Dru set up a meeting the next day with Mathers's manager, Paul Rosenberg. The objective was to sign the blue-chip rhymers to Duck Down, but Priority wouldn't front the money to make the deal happen.

"[Duck Down] had a cool thing going on and we were looking for someplace for Em to get down," Rosenberg recalls. "Back then, before Em had an association with anybody, it didn't seem that weird."

BCC's relationship with Priority continued to erode after the ill-fated Boot Camp compilation, *For the People*. Despite scanning double what Heltah Skeltah did in its first week, word of mouth spread that the album wasn't what fans had expected. That trademark Boot Camp Clik sound provided by production team Da Beatminerz was MIA.

"They wanted to experiment and I can't get mad at that," says Evil Dee. "People wanted the jazzy feel, rumbling basslines and Jamaican influences. When they got the keyboards [fans] got mad. Of all groups, you didn't expect Boot Camp to come with keyboards."

Not even a return to the boom-bap on Black Moon's 1999 sophomore LP *War Zone* could salvage the Camp's rep. Faster than you can say "boom bye-bye," BCC were dropped by Priority, though the label kept Heltah Skeltah on board for a while and recorded a Rock solo album. In the end, Heltah was also dropped, but the unkindest cut was internal. Priority's favoring of Rock created friction between him and the rest of BCC.

"Dru was getting points on my project and Priority didn't want him to have it," Rock says flatly. "They were saying he was getting too many points for someone who isn't getting involved. That's when he became a thorn in my side." Rock's relationship with the rest of the Camp remains ambiguous. "Them niggas is still my family, but the majority of them niggas ain't my friends no more."

Ill feelings proved contagious. In 2001, Rock's longtime partner, Ruck, went on the PF Cuttin' mixtape and rhymed over Jay-Z's "Izzo" beat: "I'm rhymin' for dolo 'cause I got homos for frizzends." Ruck defends himself: "I meant exactly what I said. At one time I wasn't feelin' a few of these niggas. I got over it, though. I'm grown. Time heals all wounds."

"We were Wu-Tang before Wu-Tang," Buckshot shouts in what, until you hear him out, can be interpreted as a bout of temporary insanity. "After Black Moon, it was mandatory to come out and represent your squad right away. We never get props for that!"

Listening to the former MCA intern, it's obvious that he feels neglected by hip-hop's historians. "We were the first to have



(L-R) Shucky Ducky, DJ Logic and Dru Ha

wrapped vans. In 1992, we had the Duck Down van and 20 identical remote-controlled minivans. In 1995, muthafuckas ran with it. I was the artist/CEO before Jay-Z, but we just did it on a smaller level."

The Damon Dash of Duck Down is the unassuming Dru Friedman, aka the "ill Caucasian." The White Plains, New York, native cut his teeth as an intern at EMI/SPK promoting 5th Platoon. He passed on law school to promote Black Moon for \$75 a week at Nervous Records, and eventually became their manager. But all that holds Dru Ha to the seven MCs who he keeps in line is trust and a tenacious business sense. No binding contracts have ever been signed in

terms of management—a gentleman's word sufficed. "Everything we've done has been on our verbal agreement," Steele reveals. "Dru Ha's word is life to me. When you preserve love and respect, that's more than what money and record sales can do for anybody."

With no label home and a diminished image on the streets, Dru rallied the troops to do 12" singles to generate buzz and revenue. Cocoa Brovaz's "Super Brooklyn" landed them a deal at Rawkus Records, and Sean Price (aka Ruck) dropped "Don't Say Shit to Ruck," a prelude to his rambunctious solo LP, *Monkey Bars*. Buckshot got a distribution deal for *The Beady-Eyed Thug* through K-Tel, but K-Tel filed for bankruptcy three weeks after the album's release. Buck pocketed the advance and pumped it back into Duck Down.

In 2000, a glimmer of light came at the end of the Tunnel nightclub. "Buck met Dr. Dre one night at the Tunnel and he was like, 'I wanna fuck with you,'" recalls Dru Ha. "He sent us two tickets to come to LA and we spent four days out there. They sent us some beats from this dude Abnormal and asked us to make demos. We did the records and sent them to Mike Lynn, who works with Dre. They called Buck to come back to LA but nothing ever developed. Last thing we heard he signed Rakim."

The BCC still have a problem with labels. Tired of closing doors, the camp regrouped and obtained a distribution deal for Duck Down through Koch Entertainment. Their new album, *The Chosen Few*, is a symbol of their lyrical relevance and developing business savvy, which found them capitalizing on their mistakes. Though not a throwback to 1992, it contains one long-missed element. "It has soul," says Evil Dee.

Buck, however, is just as impressed with their corporate triumph. "You don't need a Lyor Cohen or a Steve Stoute to have a hot record," Buck says defiantly. "These niggas is bustin' they asses putting on suits and ties to get their records played and a fuckin' 'My Neck My Back' is smackin' 'em in the face! It's all about the music and the track." Cognizant of the sour-grapes "Mad Rapper" shtick, Buck falls back on the facts. "There is not one artist on Def Jam who has a P and D deal—pressing and distribution. If you find one artist on Def Jam who has a P and D deal, I'll give you my BMW. Murder Inc. doesn't own they shit; therefore you don't have a label. I can take my masters and burn them if I want to," he concludes. Feelings now on ice, Buck ends things matter-of-factly: "If you wanna be famous, join a major. I want to make money."