

PREFACE

Liberty Hall, Lawrence, Kansas, August 7, 2000

As the band prepares to take the stage, 1,050 music lovers stand watching in anticipation. Tonight's headliner, the Wu-Tang Clan, is among the most legendary rap groups of all time. Its eight living members have not performed together in years. This concert has already been postponed once, and rumors circulate that Wu-Tang is not even in town. Regardless, the venue is packed with local celebrities, musicians, DJs, journalists, glitterati, wannabes, and hangers-on. For rap music fans in the Kansas City region, the Wu-Tang show is the hottest ticket in town.

The opening act is DVS Mindz, a four-man rap group from Topeka known for their raucous live shows. DVS Mindz has been together for five years, slowly converting audiences one concert at a time via performances that crackle with energy and high-wire verbal gymnastics. DVS Mindz's debut album dropped a few weeks ago to positive reviews, and the Wu-Tang show is poised to take the quartet to the next level. Backstage, the promoters are already floating ideas to DVS's manager about regional and national tours, as phone numbers, business cards, and CDs trade hands in a flurry.

DVS Mindz knows how to open a show. The band begins their concerts theatrically, sometimes employing props and costumes. The group rarely takes the stage en masse but each member joins the song and the performance one at a time. Every show is unique.

Tonight, I'm standing right there on the side of the stage, just out of view of the audience, video camera in hand, watching and waiting. The floodlights shimmer in shades of red and blue, while dry ice creates an eerie atmosphere. The members of DVS never reveal how they will open a concert, and I am eager to see what they've come up with tonight—their biggest show ever.

I'm surprised when they don't begin with a spectacle. Rather, the group members gather on the side of the stage, where De'Juan, one of the rappers, aims a wireless microphone at his mouth and addresses the crowd. "Is Lawrence, Kansas, in this motherfucker?"

The audience roars its approval. The room is vibrating, bursting with excitement for the Wu-Tang.

De'Juan is unmoved. He implores louder, "Is Lawrence, Kansas, in this motherfucker, *what?*"

More applause.

"That ain't enough noise," the rapper says.

The crowd is amped up and ready to hear some music, but De'Juan continues. "How many of y'all know about the *Pitch*? Who read that shit?"

A few people clap, but the question mostly generates confusion. De'Juan continues anyway, ranting about a local newspaper story that is the focus of his ire.

It is the biggest night of the band's career, and all anyone can wonder is what will happen next.