

[00:00:00]

Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

Music: “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Some albums are good. I love a good album. Others? Not so good! No thanks; not for me. But then an elite few are great—so significant is their impact on music, on style, on culture, they deserve to be enshrined in *Bullseye's* pop music canon. We induct them in a segment we call “Canonball”.

Transition: “Cannonball” by the Breeders, which ends with a series of cheers and a splash of water.

Jesse Thorn: This week, we'll hear from Skiz Fernando. He's a writer, emcee, producer, and record label owner. He's written for *The Source*, *The New York Times*, and many other outlets. He has a new book, and it's a biography of the late rapper MF Doom, who's one of the most revered emcees of all time. It's called *The Chronicles of Doom: Unraveling Rap's Masked Iconoclast*.

Doom released countless great records during his career, including *Mad Villainy*, *Mm..Food*, *Vaudeville Villain*, but for Canonball, Fernando chose Doom's first effort, the legendary *Operation: Doomsday*. Here's Skiz.

MC Skiz Fernando: Hey, this is Skiz Fernando, the author of the new book, *The Chronicles of Doom: Unraveling Rap's Masked Iconoclast*. And I'm here to talk about *Operation: Doomsday* by M. F. Doom.

Music: “Doomsday” from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

Mic check.

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: MF Doom is probably one of the greatest emcees to ever rock the mic. He's also one of the best producers out there. And unfortunately, he left us way too soon at the age of 49. This book is a tribute to his life and his artistry.

Operation: Doomsday was MF Doom's first solo record as MF Doom. The man known as MF Doom is really Daniel Dumile, who's a young man who grew up in Long Beach, New York. When he was still a teenager in high school, he and his brother formed a group called KMD.

Music: “The Gas Face” from the album *The Cactus Album* by 3rd Bass.

3rd Bass'll express, KMD

Three blind mics on sight

Zev Lover, gave it the first light

A grin shows a trick up a sleeve (Ha-ha)

What a tangled web they weave

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: He ended up on the first 3rd Bass album, *The Cactus Album*. Through his exposure through 3rd Bass, he and his brother got a deal for their own group, KMD, with Elektra—which was a major label back then. And after Doom's brother passed away, and he lost his record deal in the same year, he kind of disappeared from the scene for a few years. And he came back several years later, out of the blue, reinventing himself as MF Doom, the supervillain.

Music: “The Time We Faced Doom” from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

Mr. Fantastic: Why don't you tell them about the time we faced Doom?

Invisible Girl: Alright! Well, as I remember, Doom had threatened the world leaders with the destruction of every major city on Earth!

(A phone rings, matched by a dramatic musical stinger.)

Headquarters!

Doom: Good evening.

Invisible Girl: Would you believe it!? It's Doom on the phone!

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: He went through many years kind of in the wilderness, as I like to say. Kind of plotting. And because of his nickname, Doom—which his mother first called him, you know, based on his last name, D—he kind of developed an affinity for the Marvel character, Doctor Doom, who was the villain in the *Fantastic Four* series.

Music:

Mr. Fantastic: What's on your evil mind?

Doom: Hold your insulting tongue and mark my words well. I have plotted my revenge on you. Now I shall have it. Bid farewell to your friends!

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: When he came back, he had already had his first brush with fame as a teenager. And he didn't like it. So, he said, "Next time I come out, no one's going to know my identity. I'm going to wear a mask." And he created a whole legendary mystique behind the metal-face villain, MF Doom. He basically created this whole mythology about how he had been kind of (*sensor beep*)ed over by the music industry.

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And now he was coming back as a whole different character. He developed this whole different identity. No one had ever really done that in hip-hop. There's a lot of examples of people taking names of famous drug dealers. For example, Nas Escobar or Biggie Smalls was based on a character from the movie *Uptown Saturday Night*, this drug dealer.

Doom took it to the extreme. Whereas normal emcees talked about their drug dealing and their criminal activities, Doom—since he was portraying a fictional character—could just go to any ridiculous length. That's what he did in his lyrics. Like, the supervillain could basically do anything.

Music: "Tick, Tick..." from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

Walk the path of Jesus, witness if Hell freezes

The mind teases reality, crack the pieces

Nothing eases; being chastise with blood baptize

Guys revise, acknowledge past lives

Statements will be made, acknowledge me (Acknowledge me)

My mind is Heaven's gate, so enter me (Enter me)

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: I really like the track "Tick, Tick...", which is his collaboration with MF Grimm. And that track samples a piece of the Beatles' "Glass Onion" from the *White Album*.

Music:

Measure pleasure through financial progress

When it come to currency, love is nonexistent

Foes modify, friends become so distant

Some hope you die, backstab in an instant

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: Doom could be so bold to sample the Beatles, you know what I mean? The track is so cool, because the sample speeds up and slows down. And it's called "Tick, Tick...", because it's like a metronome goes tick, tick, tick.

Music:

Cause I'ma slow it up, speed it up, slow it up, speed it up

Metal Fingers feed beats, Grimm Reaper eat 'em up

Speed 'em up, slow 'em up, speed 'em up, slow it up

Brainsick, tick, tick, tick, MF blow it up

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: But the thing with Doom is his choice of samples was very unique. Because where other producers were sampling a lot of jazz and soul and funk, Doom kind of went off, and he was sampling a lot of '80s R&B. At that time, not really considered a cool sample source. People were looking for really obscure music, obscure beats from the '60s and '70s. And here comes Doom sampling like Atlantic Starr from the late '80s or SOS Band. Stuff that you wouldn't necessarily think was funky, but somehow Doom made it funky. You know?

And I think that was part of his skill, part of his talent: taking something that you wouldn't normally associate with hip-hop and making it hip-hop.

Music: "Kiss of Life" from the album *Love Deluxe* by Sade.

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: A classic example of a Doom beat is the title track, “Doomsday”, from *Operation: Doomsday*. Here you have him sampling two very disparate elements. You've got Sade's “Kiss of Life”.

Music:

There must have been an angel by my side...

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: Which is a very kind of mellow, almost a ballad. And he pairs that with the drum track of Boogie Down Productions’ “Poetry”.

Music: “Poetry” from the album *Criminal Minded* by Boogie Down Productions.

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: Which is kind of a hard drum track from 1987/’88. One thing that was never done back in hip-hop, especially in that ‘90s crate-digging era, you would never sample another hip-hop record.

Music: “Doomsday” from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

When I was led to you

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: On the track “Doomsday”, he samples the whole “Poetry” beat from BDP scratching and all.

Music:

Come through, dig the sound

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: That would have been considered taboo back in the day by hip-hop heads.

Music:

Crowd around

I used to cop a lot, but never copped no drop

Hold mics like ponytails

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: *Operation: Doomsday* was kind of like the blueprint for many albums to come out in the early aughts, because it was such an eclectic album. The choice of beats, Doom's lyrical wizardry. It just really stands out amongst a lot of the records that came out in that time.

[00:10:00]

Music: "Rhymes Like Dimes" from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

Ayo, yo, y'all can't stand right here

In his right hand was your man's worst nightmare

Loud enough to burst his right eardrum, close-range

The game is not only dangerous, but it's most strange

I sell rhymes like dimes

The one who mostly keep cash but brag about the broker times

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

MC Skiz Fernando: "Rhymes Like Dimes" is Doom talking about him selling his music, basically. "I sell rhymes like dimes." A dime bag, you know, a dime bag of weed. And you could also interpret it, his rhymes are like dimes—another slang definition of dime is a girl who's a ten. He's saying my rhymes are like dimes.

Music:

I sell rhymes like dimes

The one who mostly keep cash but brag about the broker times

Better rhymes make for better songs, it matters not

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: If you're an old Doom fan like myself, who's well familiar with the KMD catalog—when I first heard *Operation: Doomsday*, it was almost like hearing a different person on the mic. Because he changed up his whole style. You know, a lot of emcees could have really just said, “Oh, I'm just gonna keep the same style and keep that same name recognition. You know, I've already been in the industry. People know me.”

But he actually went out of his way to come up with an entirely different style and delivery. And even the content of his lyrics are different. There's much more of a darkness.

Music: “Hey!” from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen

("Hey!")

I'd like to thank you all for joining us this evening

Let me know if y'all with me, y'all

("Hey!")

Just a couple of things I wanna say

I only play the games that I win at

And stay the same with more rhymes than there's ways to skin cats

As a matter of fact, let me rephrase:

With more rhymes than ways to fillet felines these days

Watch the path of the black one: Supervillain

He wrecks clubs

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: The opening skit, “The Time We Met Doom”, samples dialogue from the movie *Wild Style*, which was really one of the first hip-hop movies. It follows a graffiti artist.

Clip:

Z-Roc (*Wild Style*): Yeah, and when she does—and she puts his picture on the paper, that's gonna be the end of graffiti.

MC Skiz Fernando: Seminal movie by Charlie Ahearn. A lot of the original breakdancers, like Rock Steady Crew is in there. A lot of the original graffiti artists are in there. A lot of the original DJs are in there. Grandmaster Flash.

Clip:

Music: Cheerful, orchestral music.

Phade (*Wild Style*): When this reporter babe get here, she's gonna be on our tip, man. You know she's gonna want to write about me and my man here, all kinds of long articles.

Robot: (*Echoing.*) Flash Message Top Secret Ultra.

Z-Roc: Yeah, and when she does—and she puts—

MC Skiz Fernando: By using snippets of *Wild Style* as the intro to his album, it's basically tying himself to the pioneers, to the originators, and just showing that he's adding onto hip-hop. You know.

Music: “Go With the Flow” from the album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom.

Enough is enough

Enough is enough

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, ho

Go with the flow

Ayo, I'd like to set this microphone 'fore I start right quick

Microphone check 2-2-1-2-1-2

Big up all the Monsta Island massive

And beware before I triple dare you like the last kid

Who asked me what we don't got that you got son

For one flow that's elementary, my dear Watson

Secondly, ever since I was little

(Music fades out.)

MC Skiz Fernando: He was original, he was innovative, he was groundbreaking. I think that *Operation: Doomsday* is one of the greatest records of all time. Because it is so original, and it's so different from everything else that came out at the same time. It represents an artist who has really gone through a lot of tribulation, trials and tribulations in his life. And you can hear like the hunger in his voice. You can hear that he's just going for it all on this album. You know? After all that he had been through, this was a chance for him to get back into the game and make his mark again. And it was an opportunity that he was not going to squander, you know. So, every cut on *Operation: Doomsday* is all killer, no filler.

Jesse Thorn: Skiz Fernando on the game-changing album *Operation: Doomsday* by MF Doom. Skiz's book on Doom is great. It's called *The Chronicles of Doom: Unraveling Rap's Masked Iconoclast*. Get it at your local bookstore or at Bookshop.org.

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* was created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun as well as at Maximum Fun headquarters overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California.

[00:15:00]

You know what we've been eating lately? Baleadas. It's a Honduran specialty. It's sort of like a fluffier quesadilla with a little bit of extra stuff in it and Honduran cheese. We get those at Doña Bibi's, AKA Bibi's Restaurant right by our office. Great spot.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video editor, Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our pal Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can download music from *Bullseye*, pay what you will, and enjoy it at DJWSounds.bandcamp.com. Our theme music was written and recorded by the great band, The Go! Team. The song is "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team; thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—where you will find video from just about all of our interviews, including the ones that you heard this week. So, pull your phone out of your pocket—or you know, pull over your car; don't do it while you're driving—and search on YouTube for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*, and hit subscribe. Or do the

same thing on Instagram or TikTok right now. Okay, I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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(Music fades out.)