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## Wu-Tang Clan

Wu-Tang Clan is an American hip hop group formed in Staten Island, New York City in 1992, originally composed of RZA, GZA, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Method Man, Raekwon, Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck, U-God, and Masta Killa. An important act in the East Coast hip hop and hardcore hip hop styles, Wu-Tang Clan are regarded as a highly influential group in hip hop. Their debut album, Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers), released in 1993, is considered one of the greatest hip hop albums of all time.

Wu-Tang Clan has released four gold and platinum studio albums. The group has introduced and launched the careers of a number of affiliated artists and groups, collectively known as the Wu-Tang Killa Bees. In 2008, About ranked them "the No. 1 greatest hip hop group of all time".[10] Kris Ex of Rolling Stone called Wu-Tang Clan "the best rap group ever". In 2004, NME hailed them as one of the most influential groups of the last ten years.

### History

### Founding

In the late 1980s, cousins Robert Diggs, Gary Grice, and Russell Jones formed a group named Force of the Imperial

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Master, also known as the All in Together Now Crew. Each member recorded under an alias: Grice as The Genius, Diggs as Prince Rakeem or The Scientist, and Jones as The Specialist.[citation needed] The group never signed to a major label, but caught the attention of the New York City rap scene and was recognized by rapper Biz Markie. By 1991, The Genius and Prince Rakeem were signed to separate record labels. The Genius released Words from the Genius (1991) on Cold Chillin' Records and Prince Rakeem released Ooh I Love You Rakeem (1991) on Tommy Boy Records.[citation needed] Both were soon dropped by their labels. Embittered but unbowed, they refocused their efforts and on new monikers; The Genius became GZA (pronounced "jizza"), while Prince Rakeem became RZA (pronounced "rizza").

RZA began collaborating with Dennis Coles, later known as Ghostface Killah, another rapper from the Stapleton Houses in Staten Island. The duo decided to create a hip hop group whose ethos would be a blend of "Eastern philosophy picked up from kung fu movies, Five Percent Nation teachings picked up on the New York streets, and comic books." Wu-Tang Clan a\*sembled in late 1992, with RZA as the de facto leader and the group's producer. RZA and Ol' Dirty Bastard adopted the name for the group after the film Shaolin and Wu Tang.[16] Their debut album loosely adopted a Shaolin vs. Wu-Tang theme, dividing the album into Shaolin and Wu-Tang sections.

The group developed backronyms for the name (as hip hop

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pioneers such as KRS-One and Big Daddy Kane did with their names), including "We Usually Take All Niggas' Garments", "Witty Unpredictable Talent And Natural Game", and "Wisdom of the Universe, and the Truth of Allah for the Nation of the Gods".

# 1992-96: Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers) and solo albums

Wu-Tang Clan became known in 1993 following the release of the independent single "Protect Ya Neck", which helped gain the group a sizable underground following. Though there was some difficulty in finding a record label that would sign Wu-Tang Clan while still allowing each member to record solo albums with other labels, Loud/RCA finally agreed, releasing their debut album, Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers), in November 1993. The album received critical acclaim, and to date is regarded as one of the greatest hip hop albums of all time.[18][19][20] The success of Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers established the group as a creative and influential force in mid-1990s hip hop, allowing Ol' Dirty Bastard, GZA, RZA, Raekwon, U-God, Method Man, and Ghostface Killah to negotiate solo contracts. RZA spoke on the Wu-Tang Clan's unorthodox business model:

We reinvented the way hip hop was structured, and what I mean is, you have a group signed to a label, yet the



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infrastructure of our deal was like anyone else's [...] We still could negotiate with any label we wanted, like Meth went with Def Jam, Rae stayed with Loud, Ghost went with Sony, GZA went with Geffen Records, feel me? [...] And all these labels still put "Razor Sharp Records" on the credits [...] Wu Tang was a financial movement. So what do you wanna diversify...? [...] Your a\*sets?

#### -RZA

RZA was the first to follow up on the success of Enter the Wu-Tang with a side project, founding the Gravediggaz with Prince Paul and Frukwan (both of Stetsasonic) and Poetic. The Gravediggaz released 6 Feet Deep in August 1994, which became one of the best known works to emerge from hip hop's small subgenre of horrorcore.

RZA held the role of primary producer for the first wave of the group members' solo albums, producing out of his basement studio in Staten Island. In November 1994, Method Man's debut album, Tical, was released. It was entirely produced by RZA, who for the most part continued with the grimy, raw textures he explored on 36 Chambers. RZA's hands-on approach to Tical extended beyond his merely creating the beats to devising song concepts and structures. The track "All I Need" from Tical was the winner of the "Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group" at the 1995 Grammy Awards. After the release of Tical, Ol' Dirty Bastard was the next member to launch a solo career. His debut

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album, Return to the 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version, was released in March 1995, and is considered a hip hop classic.

Raekwon's debut studio album, Only Built 4 Cuban Linx..., was released in August 1995. Cuban Linx was a diverse, theatrical epic that saw RZA move away from the raw, stripped-down beats of the early albums and towards a richer, cinematic sound more reliant on strings and classic soul samples. The album is noted for reviving the mafioso rap subgenre. Cuban Linx featured all but one Wu member, and featured the debut from Cappadonna. The album also featured rapper Nas, who was the first non-Wu-Tang-affiliated rapper to appear on a Wu-Tang Clan album. GZA's debut album, Liquid Swords, was released in November 1995. It had a similar focus on inner-city crime akin to Only Built 4 Cuban Linx, but it was far darker, both in GZA's grim lyrics and in the ominous, foreboding production that saw RZA experimenting more with keyboards than ever before.

Liquid Swords features guest appearances from every Wu-Tang Clan member, and is linked together by excerpts from the 1980 movie Shogun Assassin. Almost a year after the release of Liquid Swords, Ghostface Killah released his first solo album, Ironman, in October 1996. The album struck a balance between the sinister keyboard-laden textures of Liquid Swords and the sentimental soul samples of Cuban Linx, while Ghostface himself explored new territory as a lyricist. Ironman was critically acclaimed and is still widely considered to be one

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of the best of Wu-Tang solo albums. Although the 1994—1996 albums were released as solo, RZA's presence behind the production, and the large number of guest appearances from other Wu-Tang Clan members has rendered them to be mostly allround group efforts.

# 1997-2000: Wu-Tang Forever, diversification and second string of solo albums

With their solo careers firmly established, the Wu-Tang Clan reassembled to release their second studio album, Wu-Tang Forever, in June 1997; it debuted at number one on the Billboard charts. The album's lead single, "Triumph", is over five minutes long, features nine verses (one from each member plus Cappadonna and excluding Ol' Dirty Bastard who appeared on the intro and bridge), and no hook or a repeated phrase. The sound of the album built significantly on Enter the Wu Tang (36 Chambers), with RZA using more keyboards and string samples, as well as a\*signing some of the album's production to his protégés True Master and 4th Disciple. The group's lyrics differed significantly from those of 36 Chambers, with many verses written in a dense stream of consciousness form heavily influenced by the teachings of the Five Percent Nation.

Following Wu-Tang Forever, the focus of the Wu-Tang empire

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largely shifted to the promoting of emerging affiliated artists. Killah Priest, a close a\*sociate of the group, released Heavy Mental in March 1998. That same month, Cappadonna released his debut album The Pillage. Affiliated groups Sunz of Man and Killarmy also released well-received albums, followed by Wu-Tang Killa Bees: The Swarm—a compilation album released in 1998, showcasing these and more Wu-affiliated artists, and including new solo tracks from the group members themselves. The Swarm sold well and was certified gold. There was also a long line of releases from secondary affiliates such as Popa Wu, Shyheim, GP Wu, and Wu-Syndicate. Second albums from Gravediggaz and Killarmy, as well as a greatest hits album and a b-sides compilation, also eventually saw release.[citation needed]

The second round of solo albums from Wu-Tang saw second efforts from the five members who had already released albums, as well as debuts from all the remaining members, with the exception of Masta Killa. In the space of two years, RZA's Bobby Digital In Stereo, Method Man's Tical 2000: Judgement Day and Blackout! (with Redman), GZA's Beneath the Surface, Ol' Dirty Bastard's Nigga Please, U-God's Golden Arms Redemption, Raekwon's Immobilarity, Ghostface Killah's Supreme Clientele and Inspectah Deck's Uncontrolled Substance were all released (seven of them being released in the space of seven months between June 1999 and January 2000). RZA also composed the score for the film Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai,

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directed by Jim Jarmusch, while he and other Wu-Tang members contributed music to a companion "music inspired by the film" album.

The avalanche of Wu-Tang product between 1997 and 2000 was considered by some critics to have resulted in an oversaturation that was responsible for Wu-Tang's decline in popularity, or at least in critical regard during that time period.

# 2000-01: *The W, Iron Flag* and the turn of the millennium

The group reconvened once again to make The W, though without Ol' Dirty Bastard, who was at the time incarcerated in California for violating the terms of his probation. Despite this, Ol' Dirty Bastard managed to make it onto the track "Conditioner" which featured Snoop Dogg. Ol' Dirty Bastard's vocals were recorded via the telephones used for inmates to talk with visitors, while in prison. The W was released in November 2000, and was mostly well received by critics, particularly for RZA's production, and also gave the group a hit single with the uptempo "Gravel Pit", part of a trilogy of videos where the group would visit different eras with a time traveling elevator, which also included "Protect Ya Neck (The Jump Off)" and "Careful (Click, Click)", which were then followed by "I Can't Go to Sleep" featuring Isaac Hayes. The

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album would go on to reach double platinum status.

In 2001, Wu-Tang Clan released Iron Flag, an album which made extensive use of outside producers and guests. Its crossover vibe and features, including Ron Isley, Flavor Flav, and prominent producers Trackmasters, marked it as a lighter fare; while critically praised, it gained a less than stellar reputation with fans.[citation needed] While originally featured on the cover of Iron Flag, Cappadonna was airbrushed out of the artwork and absent from the album entirely. This may be related to tension that arose within the group when it was revealed that Cappadonna's manager was, or had been, a police informant, a revelation that also brought on the manager's subsequent firing.Cappadonna would however, continue collaborating and touring with the group in the proceeding years.

Around this time, Method Man began his acting career, along with close collaborator Redman, by starring in the stoner comedy film How High (2001).

# 2004: Legal issues, death of Ol' Dirty Bastard and resurgence

In early 2004, U-God apparently left the group in disgust. A DVD titled Rise of a Fallen Soldier was released detailing his problems, which were mostly with his treatment by RZA, who he claimed had hindered his success as a solo artist.[citation]

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needed] He formed a group of young protegés called the Hillside Scramblers with whom he released the album U-Godzilla Presents the Hillside Scramblers in March 2004.[citation needed] The dispute culminated in a heated phone conversation between RZA and U-God on live radio, which ultimately saw the two reconcile. He has since returned to the group.[citation needed]

2004 saw the unexpected return of the Clan to the live stage. They embarked on a short European tour before coming together as a complete group for the first time in several years to headline the Rock the Bells festival in California[citation needed]. The concert was released on CD under the name Disciples of the 36 Chambers: Chapter 1, and they also released a music-video greatest hits album, Legend of the Wu-Tang Clan.

#### Death of Ol' Dirty Bastard

Ol' Dirty Bastard's career in Wu-Tang was marked by erratic behavior. At the 1998 Grammy Awards, he protested the Clan's loss (to Puff Daddy in Best Rap Album) by interrupting Shawn Colvin's acceptance speech for her Song of the Year award.[28] In addition, Ol' Dirty Bastard's run-ins with the law were well publicized—he was arrested several times for offenses including a\*sault, shoplifting, wearing body armor after being convicted of a felony, and possession of cocaine,[29] and he missed multiple court dates. In late 2000, Ol' Dirty Bastard

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unexpectedly escaped near the end of his rehab sentence, spending one month on the run as a fugitive before showing up on stage at the record release party for The W in New York City. He managed to escape the club but was later captured by police in Philadelphia and sent to New York to face charges of cocaine possession. In April 2001, he was sentenced to two to four years in prison.[30] Once released from prison, he signed a one million dollar contract with Roc-a-Fella Records.[citation needed]

On November 13, 2004, Ol' Dirty Bastard collapsed at Wu-Tang's recording studio, 36 Chambers on West 34th Street in New York City, and was pronounced dead later that night.[31] Wu-Tang paid him homage a number of times: in August 2006, one of his sons came out at a Wu-Tang concert at Webster Hall and rapped "Brooklyn Zoo", along with his mother, and during a concert at the Hammerstein Ballroom the Clan brought his mother out on stage for a sing-along to "Shimmy Shimmy Ya".

# 2006—10: Fourth round of solo albums and 8 Diagrams

2005 saw the release of RZA's first book, The Wu-Tang Manual,[citation needed] the release of U-God's second album, Mr. Xcitement[citation needed] and the long-awaited collaboration between GZA and producer DJ Muggs, entitled Grandmasters. The collaborative record received good reviews

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and played fairly well with fans, who by and large had been waiting for the group to improve the quality of their releases.[citation needed]

On March 28, 2006, Ghostface Killah released Fishscale, to much critical acclaim and some commercial success. The entire Clan, including Cappadonna and the deceased Ol' Dirty Bastard, appeared on the track "9 Milli Bros".[citation needed] The album also offered an expansion of Ghostface's traditional sound, precipitated by the moderately successful club song "Be Easy" and battle rhymes in the Just Blaze-produced "The Champ".[citation needed] After its reception from fans, label Def Jam asked Ghostface Killah to release another album that year; the result, More Fish, excited fans and critics somewhat less.[citation needed]

On June 25, 2006, Inspectah Deck released a street album[clarification needed] entitled The Resident Patient, a prelude to his upcoming album, titled The Rebellion, which is said to be his final solo album. Late summer of 2006 saw the release of Masta Killa's second studio album, Made in Brooklyn, to lukewarm reviews,[citation needed] as well as Method Man's 4:21... the Day After, on which the rapper endeavored to make up for the poor response to Tical 0: The Prequel.[citation needed] Around this time, Method Man was heavily featured in the media due to his displeasure with Def Jam's handling of his previous project.[citation needed] Despite what the rapper felt to be little promotion compared

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to other Def Jam artists, 421... debuted in the Billboard Top Ten, and received much greater reviews than those of his previous album.[citation needed] Method Man also made the decision to fall back from Hollywood, and to only do acting work on films being handled by close friends.[citation needed]

The summer of 2007 was the original release date scheduled for Raekwon's long-anticipated sequel to his 1995 debut Only Built 4 Cuban Linx... Pt. II. The album was initially intended to be released on Dr. Dre's Aftermath Records, but was eventually released on Raekwon's Ice H20 Records, and EMI on September 8, 2009, after numerous delays.[citation needed]

Ghostface Killah released his seventh full-length album, The Big Doe Rehab, in December 2007, and exactly one week later, Wu-Tang released their fifth group album, 8 Diagrams, on Steve Rifkind's SRC Records, whose now-defunct Loud Records released the group's four previous albums. This album marked the inclusion of Cappadonna as an official member of the group. In an interview with MTV.com, Ghostface Killah stated that he was upset with RZA for starting the 8 Diagrams project while he was in the middle of writing and recording The Big Doe Rehab, and further upset with RZA for giving 8 Diagrams the same release date as The Big Doe Rehab, for which RZA rescheduled a release date one week later. The final outcome of 8 Diagrams received mixed views from both fans and critics, and is regarded as being RZA's most experimental work to date. Both

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Raekwon and Ghostface Killah were unhappy with the album, and proposed recording a group album titled Shaolin Vs. Wu-Tan without RZA production.[41] That album would eventually become Raekwon's fifth solo album Shaolin vs. Wu-Tang.

In the summer of 2008, RZA released Digi Snacks, which was another Bobby Digital album.[citation needed] He used the album primarily to put over lesser-known Wu-Tang Clan affiliates such as Freemurder, Killa Sin, Black Knights, and others.[citation needed] The summer of 2008 also saw the release of GZA's album, Pro Tools.[citation needed]

Almost a year later, U-God released his third solo album, Dopium, which features guest appearances from several Wu-Tang members, and affiliates, among others, and was met with mostly lukewarm reviews.[citation needed] Released one week later was Wu-Tang Chamber Music, a side project executively produced by RZA, featuring live instrumentation from a Brooklyn soul band called The Revelations.[citation needed] The album features appearances from five Wu-Tang members, along with New York City mainstays AZ, Kool G Rap, Cormega, Havoc, Sean Price, and M.O.P..[citation needed] The first single from Chamber Music was a track titled "Harbor Masters" featuring Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck, and AZ.[42] To clear up confusion, RZA spoke about the album to Billboard.com: "I think the Chamber Music title is very fitting. This music is totally in the chamber, or in the mind-frame of Wu-Tang like in the [Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)] days. But it's not a Wu-Tang album.

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The whole Clan's not on this album. But it couldn't be in any other category but Wu-Tang.

September 2009 saw the release of Raekwon's Only Built 4 Cuban Linx... Pt. II, which features guest appearances from several big-name artists, and Clan members, with Ghostface being the most prominent, and also production from RZA, Dr. Dre, Pete Rock, and J Dilla, among others.[citation needed] The album debuted at number 4 on the Billboard 200 and at number 2 on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, and has been praised by most music critics.[citation needed] Several weeks later, Ghostface released Ghostdini: Wizard of Poetry in Emerald City, which is a hip hop/R&B album.[citation needed]

Talk of the album Shaolin vs. Wu-Tang re-surfaced in July 2009; originally planned as a full-on Wu album without RZA's input. The project evolved to include RZA from an MC standpoint, without contributing to production. Raekwon stated "[It'll] be alter egos challenging each other, really allowing RZA to fall back on the production and allowing us to give him a flashback memory to the things we know we need from the abbot [RZA]. We want him to be involved [with the album as an MC], but the concept was for him not to be involved production-wise".[citation needed] Speaking to MTV.com, Method Man revealed his, Ghostface Killah's and Raekwon's plans to record a separate album as a trio: "I don't want to say it's written in stone, but it's in discussion. I want some feedback from the fans to see how they would take that. RZA produced

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tracks, some other outside producers, of course, and we gonna have Wu-Tang members on the album, but it'll be a Rae, Ghost and Meth album."[45] Soon after, Ghostface Killah cemented the details: the record, featuring other Wu-Tang Clan members, will consist primarily of him, Method Man, and Raekwon. The title, as announced in three separate trailers (directed by Rik Cordero) promoting the upcoming release, is Wu-Massacre. Speaking on their willingness to complete the album, Ghostface said the three would begin recording within the next few months and estimated the release date to be the end of 2009 or January 2010. It was then announced[when?] that the album would be pushed back from December to March 30, 2010; the single, "Meth vs. Chef Part II," was released after the announcement. Produced by Mathematics, it is an update of the song "Meth vs. Chef" from Method Man's first solo album, Tical, featuring verses by only Method Man Raekwon.[citation needed] It had been confirmed by Raekwon that Shaolin vs. Wu-Tang would in fact be his next solo album[48] and that Wu-Massacre is a separate project, while the rapper[who?] stated that he himself had petitioned to have Wu-Massacre's release date postponed in order to yield more studio time.

On February 25, 2011, Wu Tang Live At The Palladium NYC was released through the group's official Facebook page as a collectors digital download. This included exclusive, unreleased freestyles.[citation needed] It was limited to 100

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downloads before the page was disabled after this figure was reached.

#### **Business deals**

In September 2008, RZA announced that he had inked a deal with digital music company The Orchard to release the Wu-Tang Clan's back catalogue worldwide digitally, for the first time.[citation needed] In addition to forthcoming material, the Wu-Tang Clan's catalogue includes 13 previous releases that have been previously unavailable digitally, including recordings by the group as a whole, U-God, Wu-Syndicate, Killarmy, Shyheim, West Coast Killa Beez, Black Knights and others, and would be available online beginning September 23.[citation needed][clarification needed] "The time is right to bring some older Wu material to the masses digitally," said RZA, de facto leader of Wu-Tang Clan. "Our fans have been dedicated and patient and they're hungry to hear the music that has set us apart from so many others. Hip-hop is alive in Wu Music, and with The Orchard, we've got a solid partner that understands our audience and is committed to doing all they can to help us reach the fans. I'm definitely looking forward to working with them to see what else we all come up with. There's much more to come."

#### A Better Tomorrow

On June 29, 2011, Raekwon announced that the group were working on a new studio album, still in early stages.

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Ghostface Killah later said that the album should be released in May 2012.

Members went back and forth on the issue. While GZA hinted that a new album was unlikely, the RZA said a new Wu-Tang Clan album might happen after all, on the occasion of the group's 20th anniversary, though Raekwon doubted it.

On January 9, 2013, work on the sixth Wu-Tang Clan album was announced via the group's official Facebook page. In early March 2013 Method Man announced that the Clan was working on a sixth studio album and it would be released during 2013 in celebration of their 20-year anniversary since 36 Chambers. Cappadonna has said the album is in recording process taking place in New York, Los Angeles and the Wu mansion in New Jersey. RZA has also said he had talked to Adrian Younge about working on a song for the album. On April 11, 2013, it was announced via a press release that their upcoming sixth studio album would be titled, A Better Tomorrow and was set to be released in July 2013. During late April 2013, the Clan performed at the 2013 Coachella Valley Music and Arts On May 17, an unreleased Wu-Tang song titled "Execution in Autumn" was released for purchase through RZA's record label Soul Temple Records. They performed at the 2013 HOT 97 Summer Jam at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, twenty years after they performed at the first annual Summer Jam concert.[ On June 5, 2013, the first promotional single "Family Reunion" featuring Masta Killah, Method Man, Ghostface

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Killah and RZA was released via the Soul Temple Records website.

In June 2013 RZA said so far every member of the Clan except Raekwon and GZA had put in work on the A Better Tomorrow album and that recording was being done at the Wu-Mansion, and the Wu-Mansion West. Unreleased verses from Ol' Dirty Bastard will also be featured on the album. [He also stated he was hoping to release the album in November 2013. In July 2013 Cappadonna indicated the album was half way finished. Once November 2013 arrived, RZA gave an update on the album, saying that not every member had been significantly working on the album. He gave credit to Method Man, Cappadonna, U-God and Masta Killa for working hard on the album, while saying he needed more effort from Ghostface, Raekwon and GZA. Shortly after Method Man stated that Raekwon had not worked on the album at all, and Ghostface had only recorded two songs for the album so far. In late November, RZA suggested that the album was approximately six weeks from completion. In January 2014, the group posted a message on their Facebook page, saying: "The new Wu album 'A Better Tomorrow' coming soon." After several disputes between Raekwon and RZA about the direction of the group and album, they reconciled, with the latter agreeing to record verses for A Better Tomorrow. On October 3, 2014 it was announced that the album will arrive December 2, 2014 courtesy of a new deal with Warner Bros. Records. The album was released late 2014.

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### Once Upon a Time in Shaolin

In March 2014 it was reported that in addition to work on A Better Tomorrow, a Wu-Tang Clan compilation album entitled The Wu - Once Upon A Time In Shaolin had been recorded, with Wu-Tang-affiliated producer Cilvaringz as the primary producer instead of RZA. The album, a double album consisting of 31 tracks, will not be given a conventional commercial release and only one copy has been produced; this copy will be toured in museums, art galleries and music festivals before being sold at a high price to a single individual. In August 2014, a reporter from Forbes traveled to Marrakech to meet Cilvaringz and hear a 51-second snippet of a song from the album, which featured Cher. The snippet was subsequently put on their website. The album is encased in a handcrafted silver-andnickel box made by British-Moroccan artist Yahya and features never-before-heard music recorded over years. RZA stated he has been receiving multiple million dollar offers for the album. Despite the album's exclusivity it made an appearance in electronic dance music producer Skrillex's music video for his song "Fuck That" even though he did not purchase the project. The album was sold through Paddle8, an online auction house, for \$2 million to Martin Shkreli. When the FBI arrested Martin Shkreli on December 17, 2015, they did not seize the Wu-Tang Clan album. Following the victory of Republican candidate Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Shkreli broadcast excerpts from the album on streaming platforms Periscope and Hitbox.tv.

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### The Saga Continues

The group's latest album The Saga Continues was released in 2017. It features all members of Wu-Tang Clan except U-God, who sued the group for over \$2 million in royalties in November 2016.

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