

EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW

RON ARTEST: WHEN KEEPING IT REAL GOES WRONG

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**LUDACRIS &
DTP** BLOW UP
THE SPOT &
HIT THEIR OWN
JACKPOT

IS **EMINEM**
REALLY
TRYING TO
SQUASH
THE BEEF?

DEF JAM'S
BOSS GETS
JAY-Z TO
JUSTIFY
HIS THUG

T.I.: THE
GRAND
HUSTLE
CAPTAIN
PICKS HIS
TEAM

PLUS:
AFRIKA
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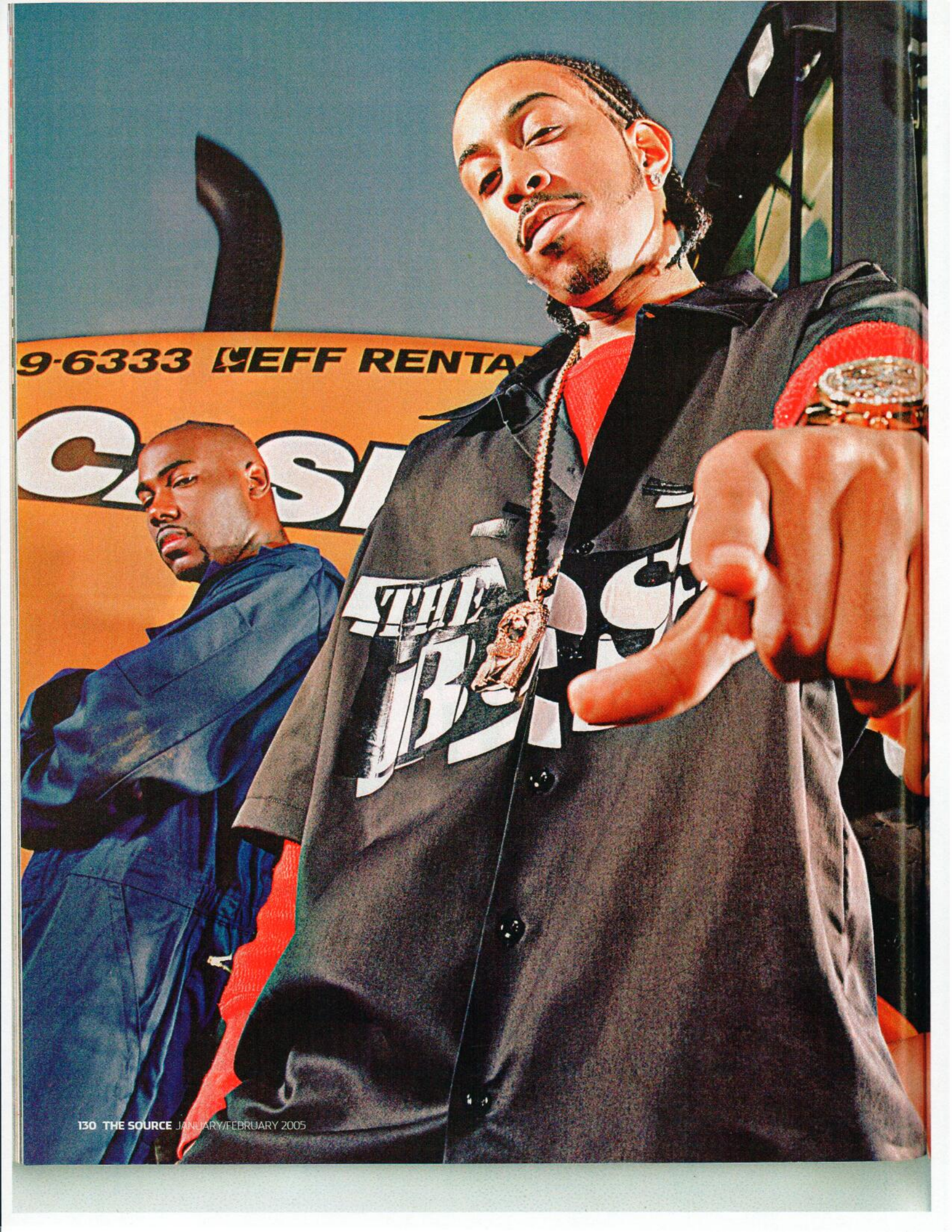
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CASH

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UNDER

LUDACRIS' MULTI-PLATINUM SUCCESS PAVED THE WAY FOR OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS DISTURBING THA PEACE CREW TO HIT THE JACKPOT. BUT HAS THEIR FOUNDATION BEEN ROCKED BY CHINGY'S DEPARTURE?

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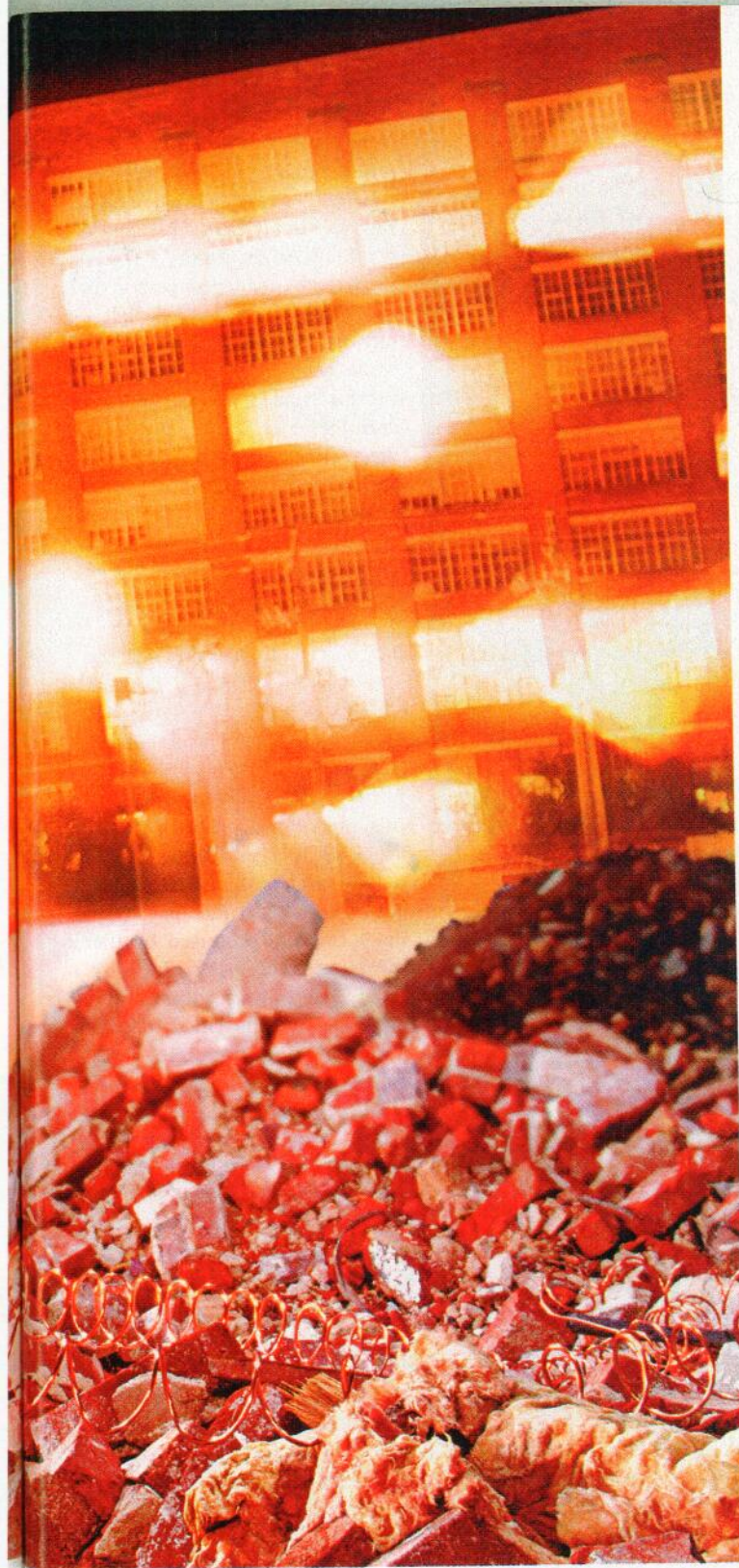
CONSTRUCTION



Disturbing Tha Peace is standing on shaky ground. During a breezy November photo shoot on a dilapidated lot in downtown Atlanta, Ludacris, Shawnna and I-20—the most visible faces of the DTP clan—pose precariously atop a pile of rubble. Like survivors in the aftermath of an explosion, the threesome stands confidently upon a crumbly mound of bricks, cement chunks and pieces of metal. Luda hunches over what resembles a TNT fuse box, pushing down on the metal T-bar with

intensity. At his side, Shawnna balances a sledgehammer over her shoulder, while a stoic I-20 looks on.

This scene is supposed to evoke the notion of reconstruction, a process that has become necessary with the recent departure of rap rookie Chingy from the fold. In addition to coping with his exit, DTP must figure out how the rest of the clique will carry on the extraordinary legacy of its superstar founder. So far, Shawnna and I-20 have been the first to follow Luda's lead with their solo albums, *Worth tha Weight* and *Self-Explanatory*, respectively.



Despite promising starts, the two rappers have yet to reach the level of success that put DTP on the map. These are the kinds of issues that create dissension within a group, but Luda maintains that his crew isn't afraid of challenges.

"We wouldn't sit up here and lie and say everything is always all good, 'cause it's not," Luda admits. "We have our disagreements, but it's just like brothers and sisters. Once you get past that, you start understanding each other better. That's what makes us stronger."

When they're together, Luda, Shawnna and I-20 act like sib-

lings. They exchange jokes about who can beat down who ("I be fucking them niggas up!" brags Shawnna), and laugh about their struggling days in "K-3," the one-bedroom, College Park, GA apartment once shared by I-20, Luda and fellow DTP member Lil' Fate. Over the years, they have maintained their family-like structure within the camp. Even when it came to Chingy.

But last November, Chingy voiced a series of grievances, including negligent management and unfair deals, against his former label in quite a few articles published around same the time his album was released. DTP CEOs Luda, Chaka Zulu and Jeff Dixon were stunned by the public accusations. They claim that they had been working to resolve the situation with Chingy in private for months, and even had accountants representing both sides review the books. All agreed that no money was owed, but the young star has refused to address the issue with his former associates face to face.

"I'm just very disappointed in him as an individual," Luda says carefully. "This is a person that continues to say he's gonna talk to us about this. As a man, all you have is your balls and your word. Over the past year, while all these rumors were floating around, he never came and talked to [Chaka and Luda] personally. We always had to hear things from other people."

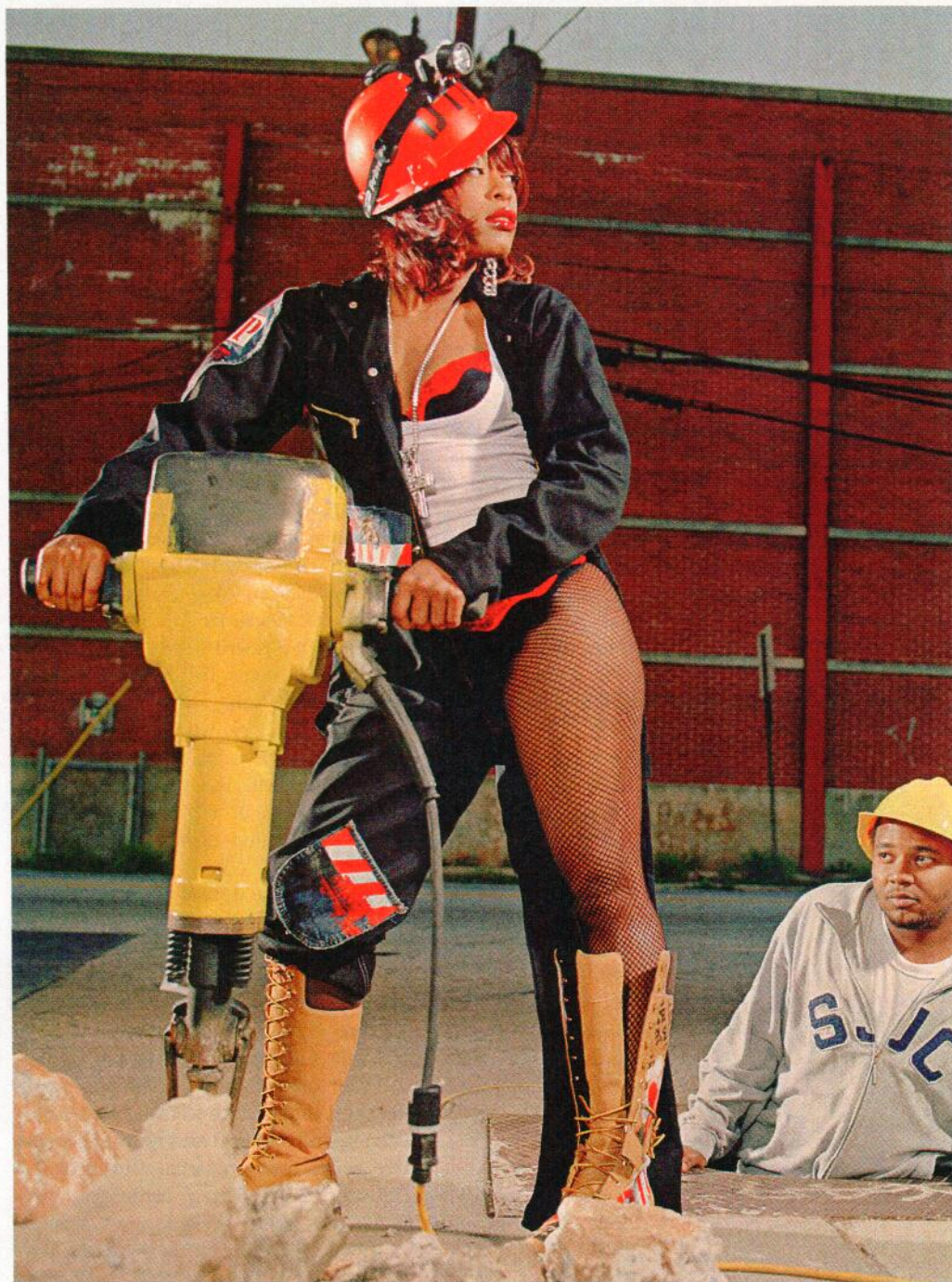
Chingy, who declined to be interviewed for this story, was first brought to DTP in 2002, after Chaka heard the St. Louis teen on some songs produced by two St. Louis beatmakers, Shamar "Sham" Daugherty and Alonzo "Zo" Lee, Jr., collectively known as Trak Starz. Chingy had a production deal with Trak Starz, who were also managed by Chaka's EbonySon Entertainment. Chaka liked the music and decided to work with the budding MC. Using his own money, he pressed vinyl copies of "Right Thurr," shipped them out to radio stations and created enough buzz to land Chingy a deal with Capitol Records.

Chaka says that he gave Chingy the option of joining DTP at that point. "I wasn't gonna straight sign him to DTP because he was already signed to Trak Starz," says Chaka, who asserts Chingy agreed to let Trak Starz contract with DTP for the use of his music. Chaka alleges that Chingy and DTP purposely never entered into a formal agreement so that the MC wouldn't be bound to their services in the future. "By me managing Trak Starz," continues Chaka, "I was just gonna help them put out the project and generate money and capital from working with them."

Chingy's *Jackpot* debuted in July of 2003 and went triple platinum. Still, he alleges there were money problems. During Luda's *Chicken & Beer* tour in February 2004, Chingy contends he was pulling in \$10,000 a show, but says he would earn between \$30,000 and \$40,000 for shows he did on his own. He also says Chaka would want large portions of the money Chingy would make doing songs with other people.

An unnamed representative from the William Morris Agency (Chingy's former booking agent) confirmed the MC made \$10,000 to \$20,000 per show during the tour, but says he didn't start earning \$30,000 or more until the tour was over. By that time, Chingy had built a considerable amount of star power. "Honestly, when he went out on tour with Ludacris, that was the greatest opportunity for him," asserts the rep, who says all checks for Chingy's performance fees were made out to his company, Slot-a-Lot Touring. "It allowed him to build his fan base. Successful artists take shorts in the beginning. It's about development and setting yourself up properly. He was a new artist at the time."

Chaka says that even before the Capitol deal, he advised Chingy to get a lawyer and an accountant and to prepare for the "buckets" of money that were to come. He even handpicked



Chingy's entourage and urged him to get his own management.

"When I suggested that [Chingy] get his own manager, he said, 'No, I want you to manage me,'" explains Chaka. "Then I said to him, 'Okay, I'm going to make sure that I keep a clean and clear line. I'm only gonna commission money that I earn you outside of DTP. I would never give you a DTP advance check and be like, you know, 'I'm your manager, give me 20 percent.'" The only thing we commissioned was shows, outside records, any other deals, whether it was TV deals, publishing deals, sponsorship, anything outside of what he made off the records from DTP. All his money was cut to him or his companies. No check was ever cut to DTP. So any check he wants to dispute or anything he wants to say about some money missing, he can go back to his books, go to whoever cut the checks, and look at it."

Luda also refutes another claim that he was jealous when

Jackpot outsold *Chicken & Beer*. "I want everyone to be way larger than I am," he declares, raising his voice slightly. "That's my role as a CEO. If I wasn't a good CEO then maybe I would want to be the biggest person on the label. I'm happy as hell if anyone gets more exposure. I want people to be more successful than me, because my main goal is to sit the fuck down and have a roster of artists that will sell a lot of records so I can take the back seat eventually."

According to Chaka, Chingy is still legally obligated to DTP, though he can't discuss the specifics. But you won't see the DTP logo on Chingy's current LP, *Powerballin'*. "That was by [our own] choice," says Chaka.

IN THE BACK ROOM OF A sleek tour bus, the man born Chris Bridges is bobbing his head while watching the video for his latest single, "Get Back," a raucous, fight-ready anthem produced by the Medicine Men. Directed by Oscar-nominated filmmaker Spike Jonze, the video follows Luda—bearing oversized, lobster-like arms—and a posse of plus-size dancers on a surreal romp through the streets of L.A. It's the sort of off-kilter visual humor Luda is known for.

"That's what *The Red Light District* is about," says the 27-year-old, explaining the theme of his fourth album. "People will think it's about a place in Amsterdam where stuff goes on that's illegal in the States. But it's about freedom of expression,

freedom to be yourself and be creative. Having fun."

While the album is mostly a carefree affair, Luda occasionally exposes his serious side. He explores maturity and fatherhood on "Child of the Night" (featuring Nate Dogg) and discusses the drawbacks of having money on "Large Amounts." Then, on "Number One Spot," Luda takes a swipe at conservative critic Bill O'Reilly, whose high-handed moral censure in 2003 cost the rapper an endorsement deal with Pepsi. Now that the tables have turned and O'Reilly was slapped with a scandalous sexual harassment lawsuit (which he has since settled), Luda feels more than a little smug about the talk show host's ordeal.

"That's karma at its finest," says Luda. "Now he knows exactly what it feels like to have his name [dragged] through the mud in a negative manner and have people judge him who do not even know him—the exact thing he always does to other people, what

he did to me. It's completely flipped on him."

Experiences like the O'Reilly debacle only fuel Luda's dogged ambitions. To date, Luda's albums have sold more than 9 million copies, and his popularity continues to grow. Last year, he won the BET "Viewer's Choice" award for his collaboration with Lil Jon and Usher on the summer smash, "Yeah," and took home three Source Awards (Live Performer, Artist of the Year-Male Solo and R&B/Rap Collaboration). He has also appeared in print and TV ads for Boost Mobile, participated in the "Vote or Die" campaign, and worked on two movie projects that'll be out this summer. He stars in *Crash*, a star-studded film he says examines modern day discrimination. Luda will also appear in the John Singleton-produced flick *Hustle & Flow*, in which he plays a rap star named Skinny Black.

Luda works hard for these kinds of opportunities, but he regrets that his busy schedule keeps him away from his three-year-old daughter Karma. Immediately after Luda's promo tour, he hit the studio to begin recording his fifth album, *Release Therapy*. It will be the last album he records under his contract at Def Jam.

"Soon I won't be having to move around as much and I'll be able to spend more time with her," he says. "As a parent, the best thing you can do for your child is invest time and energy in them. That's what it's about."

DTP'S FIRST LADY, SHAWNNA, CAN RELATE to the sacrifices that come with being a parent in showbiz. The Chicago-born mother of two and daughter of famed blues guitarist Buddy Guy was pregnant when she signed both her first and second record deals. "I don't know being in the industry without being a mother," says Shawanna, as a makeup artist lines her almond-shaped hazel eyes. "My children are my sanity. I demand to see them often."

As half of the Chicago-based rap duo Infamous Syndicate, Rashawanna Guy, 26, fully understands the obstacles women face in the music industry. In 1998, she and her partner Teefa signed with Relativity Records and met Chaka shortly afterward through mutual friends. Later, while promoting Infamous Syndicate's 1999 album *Changing the Game*, Shawanna connected with Luda at Atlanta's Hot 97.5, where Luda hosted the "Chris Luva Luva Show" before he blew up. Then in 2000, Relativity folded into Loud Records and the group was let go. Shawanna, now solo, bounced back from the disappointment when Luda asked her to appear on "What's Your Fantasy."

"The rest is history, because by the time we were performing 'What's Your Fantasy' live on *106 & Park*, that same day we were at Def Jam negotiating a deal," she recalls.

Yet it would be four years before her solo debut, *Worth the Weight*, would see the light of day. Though she holds her own on the Timbaland-produced single "Shake dat Shit," featuring Luda, sales for the slept-on album have been sluggish. Still, Chaka remains hopeful. "Shawanna is poised to be the top female in the game," he insists. "And we're gonna bring that dream to fruition."

Far from discouraged, Shawanna believes female rappers should

band together to become a force to be reckoned with. "Girls get dealt a bad hand in the game," she says. "That's why it's time for [women] to help each other out and provide opportunities for each other when men don't. When a dude comes out with a nice sound, you looking for his crew. But a girl can't do that. She gotta get in where she fit in and then hope she survives." Along with MTV's LaLa, Terror Squad's Remy Ma and DJ Lazy K, Shawanna is also a part of the Murda Mams collective, a network of females in the music industry who provide a support system for each other.

TRUTHFULLY, WHETHER YOU'RE MALE OR female, launching a music career is hard—especially when you're trying to establish an identity in the shadows of a multiplatinum act.

"I'm in the best and worst position," says I-20, a.k.a. Bobby Sandimanie. (His surname means "born to lead" in his parents' Liberian tongue.) "When you're coming behind a very successful artist, people listen to your music looking for what's wrong instead of [what's right]. It's like people can't believe that someone else can come from the same camp and be as talented as the premier artist."

I-20, named after the interstate highway that runs through ATL, got his first chance to shine on the riotous "Move Bitch" from DTP's 2002 group LP *Golden Grain*. Led by the Lil Jon-produced "Break Bread," 20's solo LP, *Self-Explanatory*, debuted this past October to modest response despite several positive reviews. He says the disappointment only inspires him to work harder.

20 got a taste of the rumor mill during a beef with fellow ATLien T.I. over what 20 says was a lot of "he-say she-say talk." The conflict began years ago during Luda's DJ days at Hot 97.5. T.I. came on the "Chris Luva Luva" show and proclaimed himself the "King of the South." Afterward, 20 did a drop for the show crowning himself the South's king. Naturally, that sparked a rivalry. The two camps spent the following years hurling occasional disses at each other on tracks, but later sat down and settled their differences.

"The whole T.I. thing had to be squashed because it was never nothing," says 20. "It should've never been that serious. Niggas respect each other as men and ended it instead of letting it become something that it never needed to become."

THOUGH FRUSTRATING, DTP's recent drama has only strengthened the company's resolve to take over the world. They've got new artists—Lil' Fate, Playaz Circle (Tity Boi and Dolla Boy), Norf Clk, Field Mob and R&B songstress Sharifa—and big plans to venture into movies, television and fashion. They also launched a rock division and signed Lazy Eye, a male group out of Atlanta. At press time, DTP had just closed a \$20 million joint venture deal with Island Def Jam. It's been a long and tough journey, but it's finally paying off, and they appreciate the lessons learned.

"Change is a part of life," says 20. "Families break apart and people go their separate ways, but the foundation remains the same. I guarantee you, this foundation right here is gonna be the foundation to last from now until everything's said and done." **S**

"AS A MAN, ALL YOU HAVE IS YOUR BALLS AND YOUR WORD. OVER THE PAST YEAR, WHILE ALL THESE RUMORS WERE FLOATING AROUND, CHINGY NEVER CAME AND TALKED TO CHAKA AND ME PERSONALLY. WE ALWAYS HAD TO HEAR THINGS FROM OTHER PEOPLE."

—LUDACRIS