

Taleban Dooda has the type of voice you remember. High-pitched and piercing, the Tampa rapper's delivery has always caught listeners by surprise. With a knack for delirious melodies and an unshakeable bravado, he's used that sound to become a rising star with chaotic charm, penning spirited stories that shine thanks to his uniquely reedy vocals. Earlier this year, he released "Spin," a dizzying track that interrogates the tension between the life he feels like he's forced to live and the one he's chasing. "God forgive me every time I sin," he raps. His emotional instrumentals and delicate voice work in tandem to paint a fully realized and intimate picture of his life. He knows he's onto something special. "I don't sound like anybody from where I'm from," he says.

Last year, the 20-year-old released his debut album, *Fallen Angel*, an offering of elaborate beats and paranoid bars. When you've lost as many loved ones as Dooda has, that paranoia has a way of coloring how you view the world. That record, as well as a string of solemn singles that includes 2021's "Call 100 Times," became a safe space for the grief he has nowhere else to put.

Dooda's journey to the top of Florida's rap scene has had its twists and turns. In high school, he tried his hand at football until he realized his voice would probably take him further than sports could. He was known around school for his singing, so fellow students pointed out his talent to a chorus teacher, who pulled strings to get him in the choir—mainly to keep him out of trouble. When he wasn't performing in shows at school, he was recording freestyles, à la Soulja Boy, and posting them to YouTube and Instagram. He leveraged the student body at his school, and neighboring high schools, to bolster his audience. Still, the chorus couldn't keep him away from what he describes as East Tampa's gravitational pull for trouble. Legal issues forced him to take afternoon classes, which meant there was less time to make music, so soon he dropped out altogether.

With school out of the picture, Dooda set his sights on his music, releasing early hit "Dreams & Reality" in 2019. The song found the artist on the cusp of his big break. "Slidin' in Toyotas, soon to be ridin' in the Wraith," he raps. Shortly after, he released his breakthrough single, "Tru Colors," and signed to Rostrum Records before making the debut that took his music beyond East Tampa.

*Fallen Angel* was crafted as a testimony to the course his life could've taken without music. It is a remembrance of the lives of lost loved ones, and a promise that their stories will be inspirations as he continues on his journey. "Broken Soul," for example, catalogs his growing gifts and basks in the praise of his mother, even though loneliness still lurks in the margins.

With new music on the horizon and a new record deal with Warner, fans can expect the rapper to experiment with sounds other than the gritty, bombastic beats that have become his signature. "You have to adapt," he says. "It can still be the same cadence, but you have to approach it from a boss level." Dooda has come a long way since the school chorus, and now, as his first viral song foreshadowed, his

reality is finally catching up to his dreams. "I just want everybody to see I ain't here for a little bit," he says. "I'm here for a long time. I ain't done yet."