



(PROP STYLING) LEE HERTSMAN

MANTRAS TECH N9NE

While prepping his latest album, *All 6s and 7s*, the self-proclaimed "King of Darkness" explained his independent hustle and how he gets it in with groupies.

Maintain creative control.

I need complete autonomy. When I was on a major label, I had a song called "Fuck Your Religion." Just because of the title, the label didn't want me to do it. I didn't like having people who didn't know shit about music telling me how to write my life. I can't fabricate my life. The beautiful thing about having my own label and being vice president of Strange Music is I can say whatever the hell I want and put it out whenever the hell I want.

Always give your fans what they want.

I remember this one red-headed chick in Denver. I signed her inner thigh. The next time I came back, she got on my bus. We were in the back lounge, she pulled up her skirt, and said, "You owe me for this." It shocked me that she had my autograph tattooed on her inner thigh. I fucked the shit out of her. I got fined for ripping the carpet. I was pushing so hard that my traction made the rug come up.

Put your everything into your stage show.

I rehearse for weeks in front of mirrors at our Strange Music warehouse in Kansas City. A lot of artists can't perform, but when you go see Tech N9ne, you're expecting to see Kiss. Also, tour to places where people don't know you. We didn't know where Bend, Oregon was, but we went. A few people were there, the next time it was more, and then we were selling out. The same thing in Denver, Seattle, and Switzerland.

Don't get caught up with drugs.

I've done 15 Ecstasy pills in one night and almost died from dehydration. One day my little girl, Rainbow—she couldn't have been more than three at the time—was looking at me, and it felt like she knew I was high. I was like, Man, I cannot die on this drug. Business was getting way more important, and I had to be here. My partner, Travis, got us a lot of money, and it would have just been a waste. I've been clean for over four years.

AS TOLD TO INSANUL AHMED
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAIMIE WARREN