

IS PLASTIC SURGERY HIP-HOP'S NEW WORKOUT PLAN?

# THE SOURCE

THE MAGAZINE OF HIP-HOP MUSIC, CULTURE & POLITICS

## Nas

GOD'S SON COMES  
DOWN TO EARTH  
AND REPS THE BEST  
OF BOTH WORLDS

## MOBB DEEP

QB'S FINEST  
GO AFTER THAT  
BRITNEY MONEY

## B.G.

IS THERE REALLY LIFE  
AFTER CASH MONEY?

## VIDEO GIRLS

RAP THEIR LIPS  
AROUND THE MIC

**PLUS:**  
TWISTA,  
DO OR DIE,  
& HOW  
TO LIVE  
LARGE  
IN MIAMI

FEAR OF AN INDEPENDENT PLANET  
& THE PLIGHT OF

# BLACK HOLLYWOOD

featuring spike lee

AUGUST 2004 • NO. 173  
US \$3.99 CANADA \$4.99



WWW.THESOURCE.COM



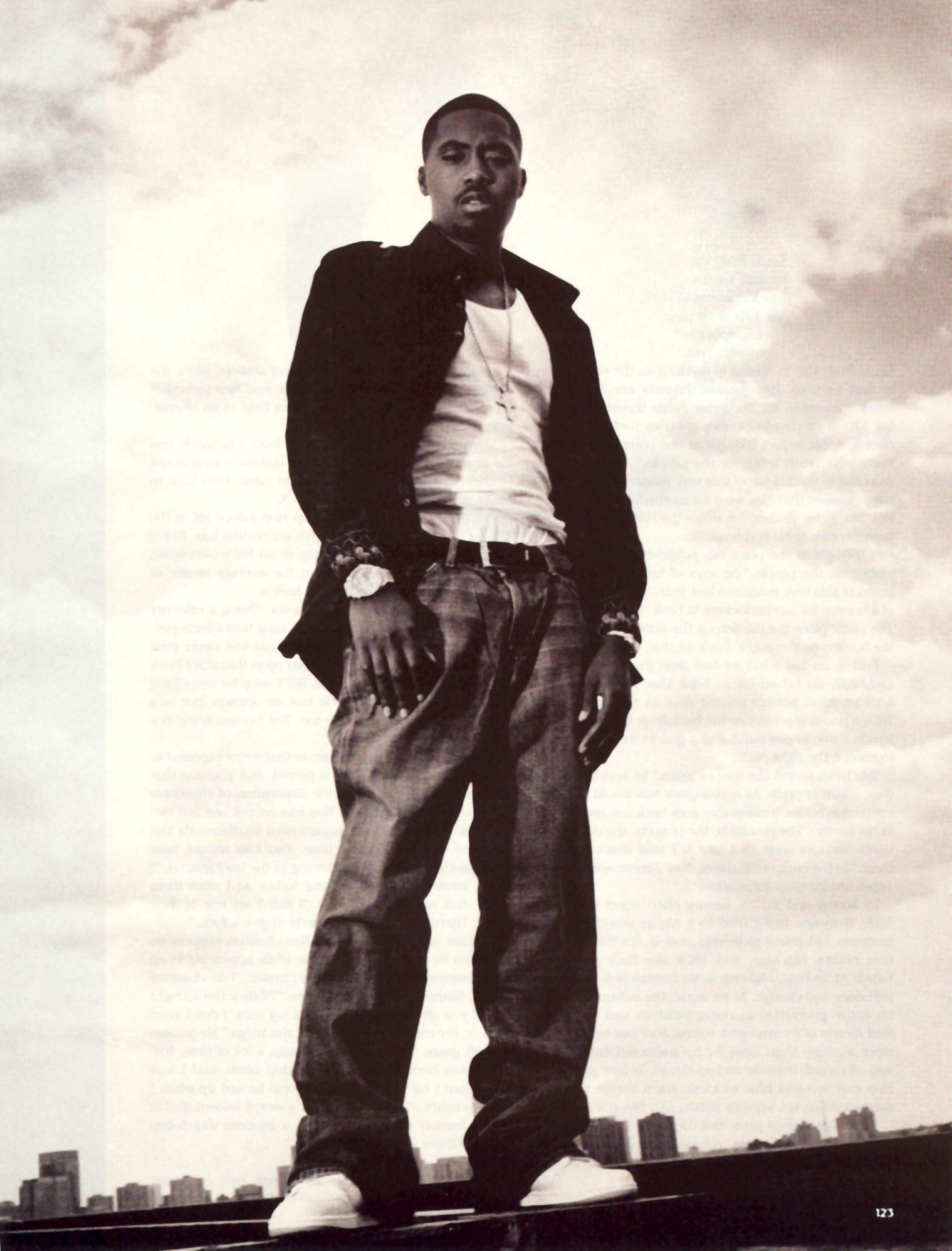


# Quiet Storm

*Artistically, Nasir Jones is a lyrical deity, but he continually  
finds himself embroiled in mortal combat.  
With the winds of change in Hip-Hop, the sky is his only limit.  
But can he stand the reign?*

Words by Jerry L. Barrow ~ Photography by Phil Knott









On a windy day in NYC, Nas is living on the edge, trying to find balance. His bejeweled wrists are flexed in a mock Spiderman pose as a stiff breeze threatens to send his 170-or-so pounds off a downtown rooftop. While a photographer captures the Supa MC's antics, he smiles nervously. Truth be told, he didn't want to get up this morning to do this shoot. And a year ago no one would have guessed that Nas would be posing for *THE SOURCE*. But like Peter Parker, he understands that with great power comes great responsibility.

"I thought at one point rap publications wasn't doing justice for the people," he says of his infamous media arson of this very magazine last year. "But it's too much of a burden for motherfuckers to have. Where is the fun? The mags place the burden on the artists, and we place the burden on the mags. Fuck all that, let's have fun."

Fun is on his mind as Nas flips through a copy of *Blokhedz*, an urban comic book that features an MC with mythical powers named Blak as the protagonist. With a housing project as the backdrop, the cover figure wields a mic in one hand and a gun in the other, trying to choose the right path.

"My lyrics sound like how he looks," he says with more than a hint of pride. As a youngster Nas would draw his own comic books, a talent that goes back two generations in his family. "The pyramids, the projects, the doves from *God's Son*...as soon as I saw it I said that's me right there." In the back of the comic, Nas' *Illmatic* and *The Lost Tapes* are listed as inspiration.

In fiction and in life, heroes often reject their gifts when it means being held to a higher standard. They motivate, but refuse to be role models. It's this dynamic that makes Hip-Hop, and MCs like Nas loved and hated. At its best, Hip-Hop is an unmatched vehicle for influence and change. At its worst, the culture can mire an entire generation in commercialism and misogyny. And as one of its strongest voices, Nas has come under more scrutiny than most for his indiscretions, both on and off record, because he has shown us how great Hip-Hop can be—and how reckless. It's a theme that Nas delves into on his seventh studio CD, *Street's Disciple*.

"Disciples weren't pure, but they were tryin' to be," he says, of "Nazareth Savage," a song on the double disc that chronicles Nasir's battle between his id and his ego. "Disciples was savages on the low."

Hustlers, killers, murderers, drug dealers, even the skippers; Jesus walked with them. And Nas feels that "conscious" MCs like him have been held to an unrealistic double standard for too long.

"James Brown can sing, 'Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud,' then he turned around and did a song about bitches with fat asses. He has that right. He's here to make music, not to be a Malcolm X."

But the difference is that in Hip-Hop a dope MC is the closest thing to Malcolm that this generation has. Every word is a first-person expression in an MC's own voice, so they hold more weight than the average singer or even politician. But Nas doesn't budge.

"We're human beings," he protests. "Being a celebrity is fucked up because you can do a song that affects people in a social or political way, and that was never your intention, but now you have to own up to that title? Fuck no! A lot of people were mad at Bill Cosby for everything he said about *Soul Plane*. He has an opinion, but he's had his transgressions in life too. The human being is a contradiction."

Indeed, part of being human is that we're expected to mess up eventually. No one is perfect. But knowing that can make us lazy. In a subtle illustration of Hip-Hop's "dowhatchalike" mentality, Nas has on not one but two watches today. Both are sugarcoated in diamonds but only one tells the correct time. You can almost hear Ghostface and Raekwon bickering in the background. "I didn't know which one to wear today, so I wore them both," Nas says with a shrug. "I didn't set one of their times. There's too many diamonds to give a fuck."

It's that arrogance that lets Nas chastise rappers on the radio for rhyming about rims while appearing in an advertisement for a rim company himself. "I do whatever I want. Nothing matters," he snaps. "I'll do a rim ad right now if you give me rims for all of my cars. I don't have rims on my cars now, but I was a rim nigga." He pauses to shift gears. "I was an angry nigga a lot of time, too. And I was horny when I fucked that bitch, and I was high when I hit that blunt, and I was fucked up when I went to court..." he trails off into a sleepy lament that is all confession with no remorse—a modern day b-boy blues. "There is life before music."

IRONICALLY, NAS' LIFE BEFORE MUSIC WAS STILL ALL ABOUT









music. On Sept. 14, 1973, a nine-pound Nasir Jones was born at Brooklyn Jewish Hospital. Despite Nas' obvious connection to the Queensbridge Projects, it was in the borough of Kings that he drew his first breaths. Years before he breakdanced under the name Kid Wave and rhymed with the Devastating Seven, Nas was more Miles Davis than Larry Davis.

"I thought that he would become a great trumpeter because he was playing to audiences in the streets of Brooklyn when he was three or four," his father, jazz musician Olu Dara, remembers of their days on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. "He used to draw a lot of crowds. It was fascinating to me. But his lip was becoming distorted so I made him quit. I remember him being very disappointed when I told him to stop playing."

Nas probably pouted because he knew that being a musician was his birthright. His grandfather Charlie Jones II was a schoolteacher from Mississippi who sang in a jazz vocal quartet, performing in tent shows around 1952. His great grandfather Charlie Sr. was a folk singer. This musical lineage is explored on a song called "The Bridge" that Nas recorded with his father for *Street's Disciple*.

"I'm Mississippi Jones, that's one of my aliases," Nas says with a smirk that would make David Banner proud. "That's where I spent a lot of summers. I was just out there lookin' at that river, thinking about the history. That's what makes me who I am. My grandma Ella runs down my family history. She's the last grandparent I still have, so she opens up the wisdom on me. I never took the time to reflect on that in my music, but at this time in my life I had to recognize that. If I can go any further in this, I need to know where I came from."

ON THE DAY OF THE 2004 BET AWARDS, NAS IS HELD UP IN ONE OF NEW YORK'S luxury hotels. In a few hours, he'll meet his fiancé Kelis for an afternoon of leisure. While the rest of the urban music industry swarms to Cali for the live broadcast, he'll be watching from his crib, if at all.

"I'm like the guinea pig in Hip-Hop," he begins. "BET was like, 'Come and perform "I Can" on the awards show.' That record was out two years ago and that was the time when you needed the world to see it, when it wasn't the thing to do. Now they are telling me it's the most important record because rappers are talking with content."

Nas' gripe is legitimate. After catching flack from critics for making songs like the pedestrian "You Owe Me," Nas received no special accolades for a responsible, child-friendly single. It's the kind of double standard that makes it easy to turn against the system.

Though he won't speak on the specifics now, Nas' rage against the machine is well-documented. In June of 2002, he went on a one-man rampage against New York radio station Hot 97 for not allowing him to bring gallows onstage to symbolize the lynching of his then nemesis, Jay-Z. Feeling betrayed, Nas went to rival station Power 105.1 to vent on Hot 97's management and on-air

personalities. He ended his tirade with this succinct challenge: "Yo, my next album that's coming out is gonna school a lot of rappers on how to be a man. Because these brothers let Flex and them dictate what's supposed to be hot."

To build suspense for the upcoming *God's Son* album, Nas formed an alliance with Ja Rule and Irv Gotti, performing on the remix to "The Pledge," and fueled the rumor mill about his alleged signing to Murder Inc.

"I met with them and said, 'Let's do a record to create a frenzy,'" he remembers. "They're good brothers trying to make some noise but it wasn't clear to me exactly what they were doing, so I told them to go fuck with Shyne 'cause nobody was thinking about him. Irv went to go see him and Shyne called me and said he appreciated that. That's that."

Evidently, Shyne was on Nas' mind so much that *The Lost Tapes* featured a song called "Purple" with a less than subtle jab at his boy P. Diddy: "The whole city is mine, prettiest Don/ I don't like the way P. Diddy did Shyne with different lawyers..."

Sean John was not pleased.

"Diddy was like, 'Nigga, where you at. I'm comin' to see you right now,'" Nas laughs. "Wherever you drivin' stop the car." *The Lost Tapes* was put together by my A&R at the time. They put songs on and I cared less, just give me my check and keep it movin'. It came out on a mixtape and dudes was like, 'Oh, you shitted on Puff.' And I told them to go fix it but it was too late. I forget how this shit be looking. We talked, that's my dude."

When *God's Son* finally dropped it was a triumph for Nas. The lead single "Made You Look" and its remix resurrected a throw-back sound that Nas and most of Hip-Hop's heavyweights had abandoned. It was also one of his most personal albums, including several dedications to his late mother Fannie Ann Jones, who died of breast cancer in April of 2002. Several weeks after *God's Son* debuted, Nas proposed to R&B singer Kelis at her mother's house on Christmas Eve. Life was good.

By the middle of 2003, Nas had reconciled with Hot 97 and performed on stage at their Summer Jam with one of his idols, KRS-One. "That was like a dream come true," says Nas. "He's counseled me over the phone and been one of my mentors. I didn't know whether to finish the show or just watch him."

It's that era of Hip-Hop that keeps Nas motivated. Everything from the break-beats to the Five Percent teachings is still part of his lyrical DNA.

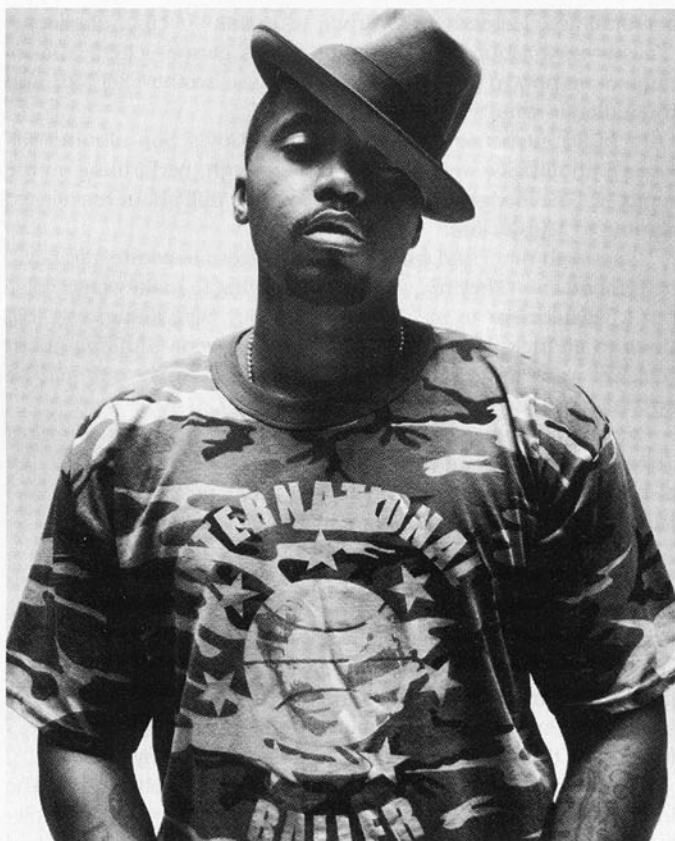
"I was building with Busta Rhymes the other day and I realized how much of the lessons I've forgotten," he admits. "It's like when you in the streets and you learning the weight of the planet Earth. It was mind-blowing."

A few minutes later the meaning of "Old Earth" is explained (or re-explained) to him and Nas' eyes widen. The connection between the ocean and the womb has inspired an unlikely collaboration. DJ Premier is doing a song for Jill Scott and wants Nas to do a verse. Though Dr. Knockboot is concerned about the stigma of neo-soul,

---

*"I'm a guinea pig in Hip-Hop. BET was like, 'Come and perform "I Can" on the awards show.' That record was out two years ago and that was the time when you needed the world to see it, when it wasn't the thing to do."*

---



*"I'm still one of the guys that loved [hip-hop] better in the '80s. There weren't as many people listening. You could sell 200,000 records & be chilling."*

he thinks his newly acquired knowledge would fit quite well in a rhyme for the earthy songbird. Score one for the backpackers.

"It may sound selfish, but I wish so many people didn't listen to Hip-Hop," he says from the passenger side of his Range Rover as he skips through a beat CD from Alchemist. "I do what I do, but I'm still one of the guys that loved it better in the '80s. There weren't as many people listening. You could sell 200,000 records and be chilling."

Evidently, Nas yearns for his old days just as much as the hundreds of underground fans who snatched up 9th Wonder's remix project, *God's Stepson*. "There were some good beats on there," Nas says. "I'd like to work with him." In fact, he has committed that his final album for Columbia Records will be produced entirely by DJ Premier. Of course, the fans have heard that one before.

But Nas is making music in a different era now. The emphasis is on the "harm" in harmony. Sensationalism sells records. But Nas has resolved to use his power for good. It's not worth the drama. Snoop Dogg recently went on Allhiphop.com casting dirt on Nas' much-reported final meeting with Tupac, alleging that Pac was less than conciliatory with Nas. But he

doesn't allow it to faze him. "Nobody punked anybody. That's absurd. I don't even believe Snoop said that shit," Nas says dismissively. "Unless I heard that from his own mouth Snoop is still my nigga."

Last fall Nas had to stand in a line-up because of an alleged war of words at Kelis' album release party. Nas allegedly ran out of ammo and started throwing bottles. "We were dressed up. I had on hard-bottom shoes. I was with her mom and them," he recalls. "Then somebody gonna point me out of a line-up on some stereotypical bullshit. Shit like that happens. My daughter saw it on the news. I'm supposed to be going to trial for that soon. It's a very small thing though. It's bullshit."

IN A SECLUDED CORNER OF NEW YORK CALLED "POETS WALK," NAS finally finds his balance. The country boy in him chews on an ice cream bar, spitting out the chocolate shell between bites to "cut down on the calories." The lactose will wreak havoc on him later, but still he eats. Much like his career, the one thing he enjoys doing can make him sick. So he retreats to places like this to regroup.

While most of the tourists in the park today ask Nas for directions, one finally recognizes the MC and asks for a photo. Despite his statements earlier, the burden of being an artist is something he can't escape. But after spending half of his life as an MC, he has learned to do it on his own terms.

"Nas is a genius on the low," offers Large Professor, whose song "Live At The BBQ" gave birth to the street's disciple. "He's studied to pass the test of time. He thinks about things carefully and uses his heart and mind to relay his message on songs."

His skills *have* sold, truth be told, but lyrically he doesn't want to be lumped in with Talib Kweli. Nas brings the light like Common Sense, but if you piss him off he'll lose all common sense.

"If I was another artist, I'd look at Nas and be like what the fuck," he declares. "That nigga ain't got to sell his ass and he speaks his mind. I may not like him but he doesn't get in my way. There is no other artist I'd ever want to be." **S**

## THE GENESIS *On the road to riches and diamond rings, Nasradamus did real things*

**1939** "OB SINCE 1933?" NOT QUITE. IN 1939 NYC ERECTED THE QUEENSBIDGE HOUSES, AMERICA'S LARGEST HOUSING PROJECTS STARTED OUT AS 26 SIX-STORY BUILDINGS.

**OCTOBER 1997** THE FIRM ALBUM IS RELEASED, BUT THE CREW WAS NOT ALLOWED TO RECORD UNDER THAT NAME; IT WAS COPYRIGHTED BY GUITARIST JIMMY PAGE.

**WINTER 2000** DID HE HAVE THE WORST FLOW ON THE WHOLE FUCKING SONG? YOU BE THE JUDGE. BUT "OOCHIE WALLY" WAS A COMMERCIAL HIT FOR JUNGLE, WIZ, NAS AND HIS BODYGUARD.

**JUNE 3, 2003** AT HOT 97'S SUMMER JAM 2003, NAS BRINGS KRS-ONE ON STAGE DURING HIS SET. SOMEWHERE, MC SHAN IS HATING.

**SPRING 1994** AT THE AGE OF 20, NAS RELEASES THE 5 MIC CLASSIC *ILLMATIC*.

**FEBRUARY 1999** ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS ARE ANNOUNCED AND SOMEHOW, SOMEWAY, NAS WAS OVERLOOKED FOR HIS WORK IN *BELLY*.

**SEPTEMBER 24, 2002** FULFILLING EVERY BACKPACKER'S WET DREAM, NAS RELEASES *THE LOST TAPES*: A COMPILATION OF HARD-TO-FIND AND RAMPANTLY BOOTLEGGED MATERIAL.

**AUGUST 2003** GOD'S SON COLLABORATES WITH THE GOD, RAKIM, ON ALICIA KEYS' "STREETS OF NEW YORK."