

# CORMEGA

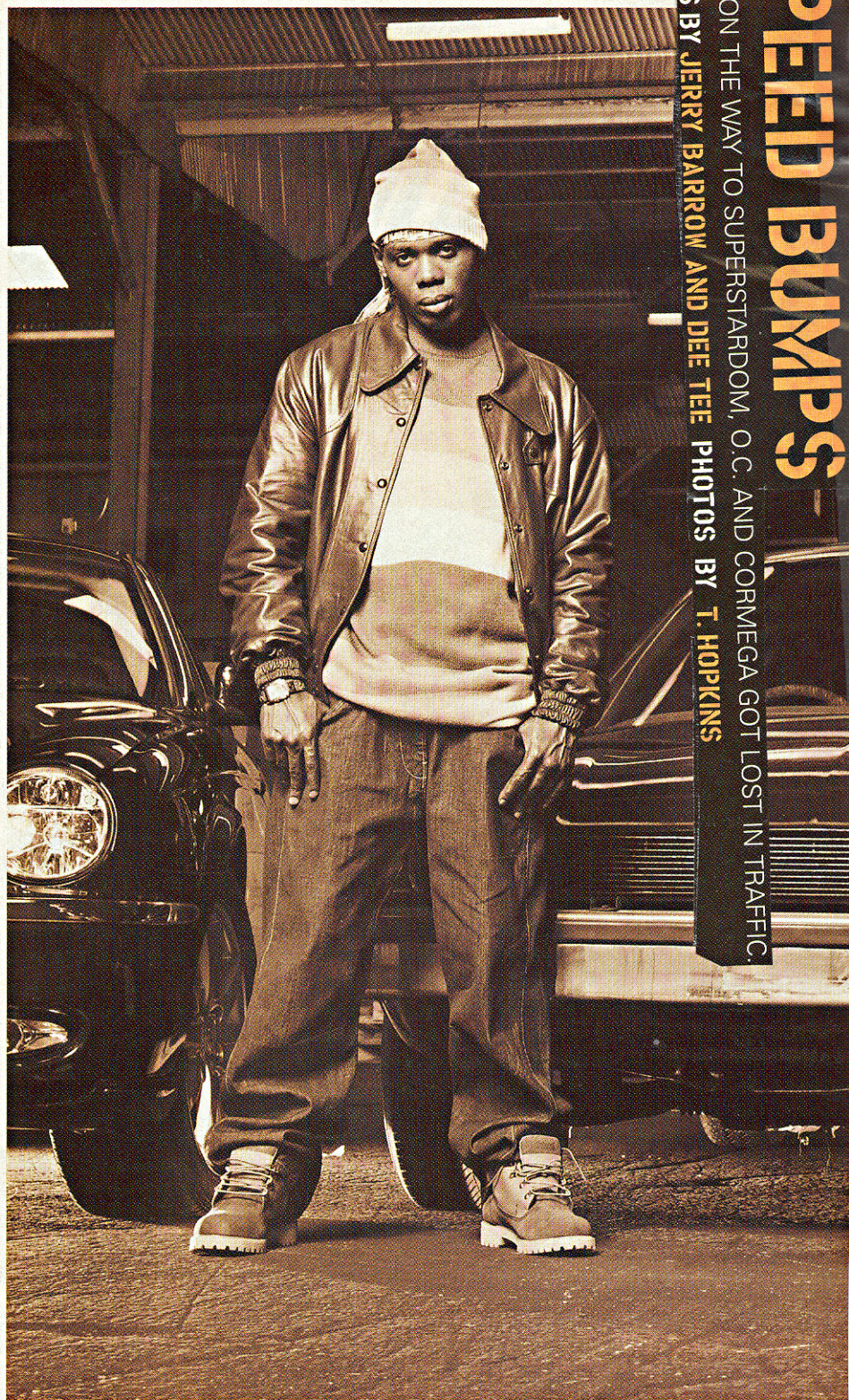
"I was born into this thug shit," begins a frustrated, yet earnest, Cormega. Five years after drawing his first breath at Brooklyn's St. John's hospital, Corey McKay saw his mother, Dorothy, brutally shot and killed with his own eyes. But it didn't phase him then. "When you're a kid they don't teach you how to approach death," he says pensively. "When my mom died I didn't take it seriously. I was thinking it was like a cartoon and she'll be back."

But she never did come back. His family moved him from Brooklyn to Co-op City in the Bronx to shield him from the violence. He became a Boy Scout, got skipped in school and took art classes—typical kid stuff. But when he moved to Far Rockaway, he started visiting his cousins in Queensbridge. He learned quickly that their culture was different from his guarded existence in Co-op City. "I saw a crack bottle on the floor and didn't know what it was. I didn't know about getting jumped. I thought it was all fair ones."

After moving to QB, the honor student got a fast lesson in chemistry and distribution while dabbling in rhymes under the name MC Core, after 'hood legend MC Shan. He later became Cormega, "the center of greatness." But before he could bless the world with his skills he got sent to Midstate Penitentiary for three-and-a-half years in 1992. Heads waited patiently for his return, but as he said, he was born into this thug shit, and things are never that simple.

While locked down, Cormega was surprised with a shout out from his boy, Nas, in his prison letter, "One Love." The two had grown up on the same block in Queensbridge. Nas was in the 40-16 building, Mega in 40-15. Nas was a "cool nigga" by Mega's own admission. They ran in the same circles with Ill Will and Cormega's cousin, Oogie. But things weren't quite right between them when Cormega was released. "Nas was showing me love when I first came home, but when he saw how niggas felt about me on the streets and that he could make money off of me things started to change. It went from 'I'ma help you get this deal' to 'Yo son, I want you to sign these papers and shit. I ain't even gonna be in your pocket that much.'"

Things got worse when Nas's then-manager, Steve Stout, flexed his muscle. "Steve Stout came to me and said he wanted \$50,000 and 3 points to be Executive Producer of my album," says Cormega. "You can't have an industry nigga tell a street nigga who just came home from



jail that shit. That sounds like extortion!"

Mega didn't go for either offer, but he and Nas joined forces with Foxy Brown, AZ and Dr. Dre to create The Firm. The super group was to be an unprecedented fusion of East Coast rhymes with West Coast beats. The crew was so tight Mega recalls writing rhymes for his lyrically proficient partner during sessions. "I wrote 'Life's a bitch/ God forbid the bitch divorce me/ I'll be flooded

with ice, so hell fire can't scorch me.' That's one of Nas's most prolific lines. I did that for love. I ain't ask for no money for that. I know someone who got that line tattooed on his arm thinking Nas wrote it. If he knew the truth he'd probably cut his arm off."

But it was what he considers betrayal, not sales, that ultimately caused Cormega to leave the group. "They left me out of a cover shoot for YSB magazine, and when I

**SPEED BUMPS**  
ONCE ON THE WAY TO SUPERSTARDOM, O.C. AND CORMEGA GOT LOST IN TRAFFIC.  
WORDS BY JERRY BARROW AND DEE TEE PHOTOS BY T. HOPKINS



Ayatollah and Alchemist. Speaking upon everything from "clips that go through bricks and whips customized" to his deceased mother ("Throughout my adolescence I was missing you, wishing you would appear in the physical..."), Cormega is set to prove that he is as great as his legend. Chris Lighty even gives up the goods on the new project. "The stuff I'm hearing now is the best I've heard from Cormega."

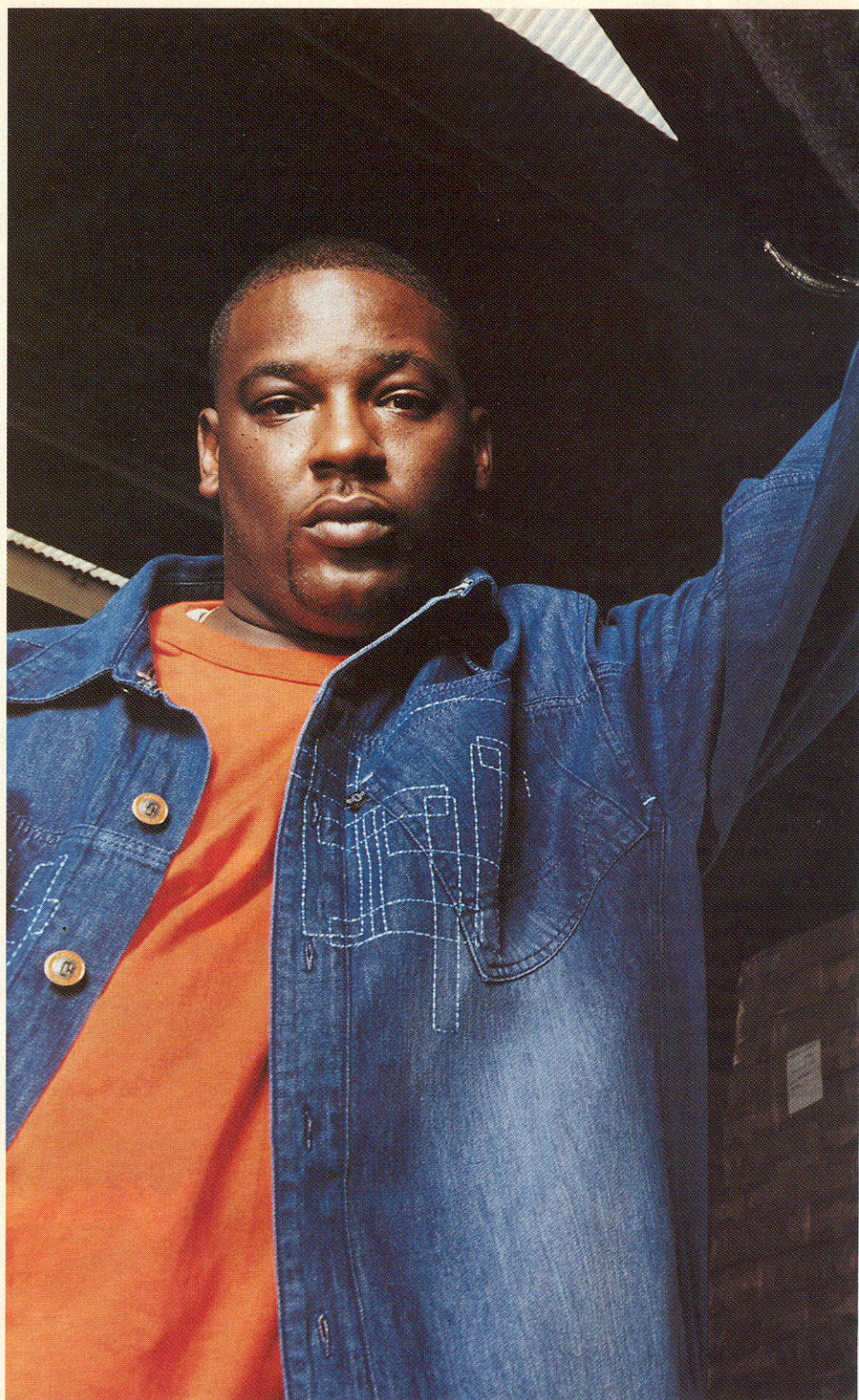
"Other artists had they chance," Cormega concludes. "I've never had an album out. I'm supposed to be faded right now. But the public still wants me. If they made a movie about my life, rappers would get mad and say they exaggerated the story. But it's real."

## O.C.

O.C.'s story is not about the spectacular rise and fall of a rap star. There is no VH1 *Behind The Music* coming. Instead, he may be on the verge of something else: rap history books. Yet, it doesn't seem to matter to him. There's something very simple but soothing about O.C.'s demeanor. He has the body language of a beach bum—laid back and chill. The kind of guy who's quick to say, "Nah, g'head, g'head" when he cuts you off in conversation. He's a real cat, but not some super thug who puts his gun on the table when he's eating. He'll let you know "that's fucked up" if something bad happened to you since the last time you two kicked it. And he listens so intently you get the feeling he's listening to you speak, not only to connect the story—but to see where your head's at as well.

Born the youngest of five siblings in Bushwick, Brooklyn, Omar Credle came onto the rap scene in the early '90s. "I don't think I was angry," he says, musing over his career while watching baby-mamas hustle their shorties along the streets of New York's Lower East Side. "I was just different. I just made a statement. Everybody who was coming out was talking about how they had bad lives or they lived in the ghetto. What's the ghetto? The ghetto is what you make it."

**"WHO WOULDN'T LOVE TO  
SELL 500,000 ALBUMS?!  
YOU THINK I WOULDN'T?  
BUT IF I DO THAT, THEN  
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SELLING OUT." -OC**



The rap game itself was a different animal then. And when the go-against-the-knucklehead-and-wannabe-gangsta-grain anthem "Time's Up" came out in the summer of '94, O.C. immediately gained the attention of heads who knew a thing or two about what a hot MC should sound like. Radio didn't support rap music and record sales weren't a concern to consumers. Heads found alternative ways of hearing

the music in the face of commercial radio's "No Rap Workdays." The streets hadn't yet been plastered with promo stickers and posters. So, there was more opportunity for non-commercial songs to really soar. But even in this environment, O.C.'s first album, *Word...Life*, which got its share of street props, didn't go gold. The promise of a Slick Rick-enhanced hook combined with the forceful, yet very lyrical verses of "Times





asked Nas why, he tried to make it seem like I wasn't there and there was no way they could stop the shoot. I said 'Nas, you have the #1 album out right now. You don't think you can get another photo shoot?!' Cormega was convinced that this was retaliation from Steve Stout for not signing with him. This, coupled with his verse disappearing from a track called "La Familia," prompted Cormega to bounce. Nature, who was

signed to a production deal with The Trackmasters, who were managed by Stout, was ushered in.

Subsequent friction between Cormega and Nature spawned the underground dis "Never Personal" (renamed "Fuck Nas" by the streets) which documented a violent, yet brief, confrontation between the two MCs where Mega pulled a Roy Jones. But according to Cormega, it had little to do

with the roster changes at The Firm. "Nature dissed me on a Clue tape," Cormega begins. "Clue knew it was gonna be some shit, 'cause that tape got Mike Tyson on the cover!" In retrospect, Mega manages to muster some sympathy for the young MC. "I felt sorry for Nature. He deserved more love from Nas 'cause he got fucked up for that nigga. He was a sacrificial lamb for him."

Once self-ostracized from The Firm, Cormega signed with Chris Lighty's Violator label, which was then distributed by Def Jam. One of the most celebrated MCs in Queensbridge was finally getting his shot. Or so he thought. "Chris is the reason my album never came out. When I dropped 'Testament' he coulda pushed the button then, but he only thought the single was 'aight'. He had my shit on the shelf intentionally."

Mega became more suspicious of Lighty's reluctance to release his project after returning from Def Jam's *Survival of the Fittest Tour* in 1999. "I thought Chris didn't feel me as an artist, but I'm sitting in the office listening to people from Def Jam tell him that I killed the tour even though I didn't have a record out. So I left. I'm still cool with people at Def Jam. But it was that nigga, Chris. He just didn't like me."

"We had to do what was good for the logo," Chris Lighty counters. "If Def Jam thought the album was so hot, they would have made me put it out. I wouldn't have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars just to hold him back."

When Cormega left Def Jam in 1999, the execs wanted \$250,000 for the masters to his *Testament* album, which was generous considering they had spent twice that amount to make it. (The price has since ballooned to \$350,000.) "But you know what that says?" Cormega challenges. "They knew they fucked up. I'm hot right now. Even Nas's lawyer came at me with a bullshit production deal after I ripped *QB's Finest*."

Instead, he opted for his own label, Legal Hustle, distributed through LandSpeed. *The Realness*, his long awaited LP, couples his thug syllabus with production from Havoc,

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