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UNFEAR

WORDS GABRIEL ALVAREZ IMAGES CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE

He blew up in 1992. Caught a brick in 1996. And now in the year 2G he's back at the top of the rap game—making movies and record label power moves.

You know his muthafuckin' name: **Snoop Dogg.**

IT'S BEEN SAID: All doggs go to heaven. And while Long Beach's finest, Snoop Dogg, is in no hurry to get there, he's still managed to find a little slice of nirvana in, of all places, Burnaby, a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia. (You know, Canada.) On a Monday, no less.

EABLE



On the set of *Bones*, a New Line Cinema horror flick custom-made for the rap star, Snoop is running on nothing but good vibes even amongst a deteriorating tenement, Pepto Bismol-colored passageways to hell and a hella evil labyrinth called Necropolis.

So what exactly has Tha Doggfather locked in gangsta bliss inside an old cheese-and-yogurt factory now running as a movie studio? It ain't hard to tell, as soon as Spike Lee's main man, director Ernest Dickerson, yells, "Action!" and a happy-as-shit Snoop snuggles up to his lovely co-star, none other than you-better-believe-she's-still-butter Pam Grier, the ultimate '70s Blaxploitation goddess.

Backed by hundreds of burning red candles, the lean leading man and his shapely companion embrace, standing upon a giant wooden turntable which two crouching crew members slowly turn clockwise.

As the makin'-babies melody of the Isley Brothers' "Voyage To Atlantis" kicks in, the cooing couple transform into Jimmy Bones, legendary undead don of the 'hood, and his soulmate Pearl. After some choice sweet-nothings, they tenderly kiss. And for a moment, Snoop, who's looking like a dapper, young, Black Vincent Price draped in some super-styl-

Alphonse Capone. After all, he lived for three years with the threat of life in prison without parole hanging over his head during a much-publicized murder case seven years ago.

And let's not also forget that it wasn't long ago that Snoop Dogg's career had lost some of its bite. Celebrated for laying his mack hand down on 1992-'93 classics "Deep Cover," Dr. Dre's *The Chronic* and his own *Doggystyle*, critics just as quickly shitted on his disappointing-but-still-went-platinum *Tha Doggfather* (1996). Many fans and pundits were further alienated when he fled Death Row and landed in Master P's then-unstoppable No Limit Tank. His first NL release, *Da Game Is To Be Sold & Not To Be Told* (1998), was bogged down by filler (21 cuts total), but Snoop's southernplayalistic demeanor fit like a glove on several Beats By the Pound productions as well as the should've-been-a-big-hit "Still a G Thang." Nevertheless, peeps begged him to reunite with Dre.

And that would happen on three songs from his next, tighter effort, *No Limit Top Dogg* (1999), but not before the slim, 28-year-old, tall-as-fuck, silky-smooth hustler cut his teeth doing cameos in theatrical films like *Caught Up*, *Ride* and *Half Baked* as well as acting in direct-to-video joints like *Da Game of Life* and *Hot Boys*. He saved his craziest performance for Part 2 of his *Smokefest* documentaries (raw, shot-on-video, overseas tour diaries) portraying Big Jeffrey, a dentally-challenged and cantankerous old-school mack.

The Capital-S passed all pimp tests, of course, on his across-the-globe smash "B Please" (1999), a blast that not only reeled back in a majority of his old fans, but blew Xzibit the fuck up too. His appearances on "Still D.R.E." and *Dr. Dre 2001* (1999) solidified his new standing, which was moving from artist to sharp businessman.

As CEO of Dogg House Records, Snoop had the last laugh when his inaugural group, Tha Eastsidaz, was passed up by several labels and eventually ended up on TVT, home to alternative groups like (formerly) Nine Inch Nails. The album quickly went gold. Ha ha.

He hopes to have similar success with Dogg House Films, a home-video company making movies of all ratings for, "the kids, the adults, the gangbangers." Its next two releases are *Tha Eastsidaz* movie and *Doggystyle*, a mighty fine, triple-X treat showcasing the skills of the so-damn-sexy *Obsession*, the striking *India* and other smut luminaries.

If that wasn't enough, it so happens that Snoop's fifth album, *The Last Meal*, which is due out July 4, also ends his contractual obligations with Priority Records. (Priority distributed Snoop Dogg records released by both Death Row and No Limit.)

It's on this tremendous upswing that we get the chance to get upside Snoop's head at his state-of-the-art rental apartment in downtown Vancouver. As long-time homies Nate Dogg and Kurupt battle it out on the Playstation in the living room, this genuine G scarfs down his Subway dinner and hooks up some supersounds of the '70s on the stereo.

"I feel blessed," he says in his distinct drawl as he leans forward on the sofa and channel surfs absent-mindedly. "It took a lot of hard work to get back to where I'm at. 'Cause a lot of people canceled me out, you know what I'm sayin'? Because I wasn't doin' what they expected me to do. But that's what this game is about. It's about change, growth and development. And I was changin', growin' and developin'."

"Before it was always somebody else dictatin' my career. Now it's me dictatin' my moves," he continues. "I thank Death Row, Master P for everything they did for me. For everything I

ish leather outfit, is lost in another world. He doesn't hear the murmurs of the 40-or-so curious on-lookers. He doesn't even hear the



director who has already ordered, "Cut!"

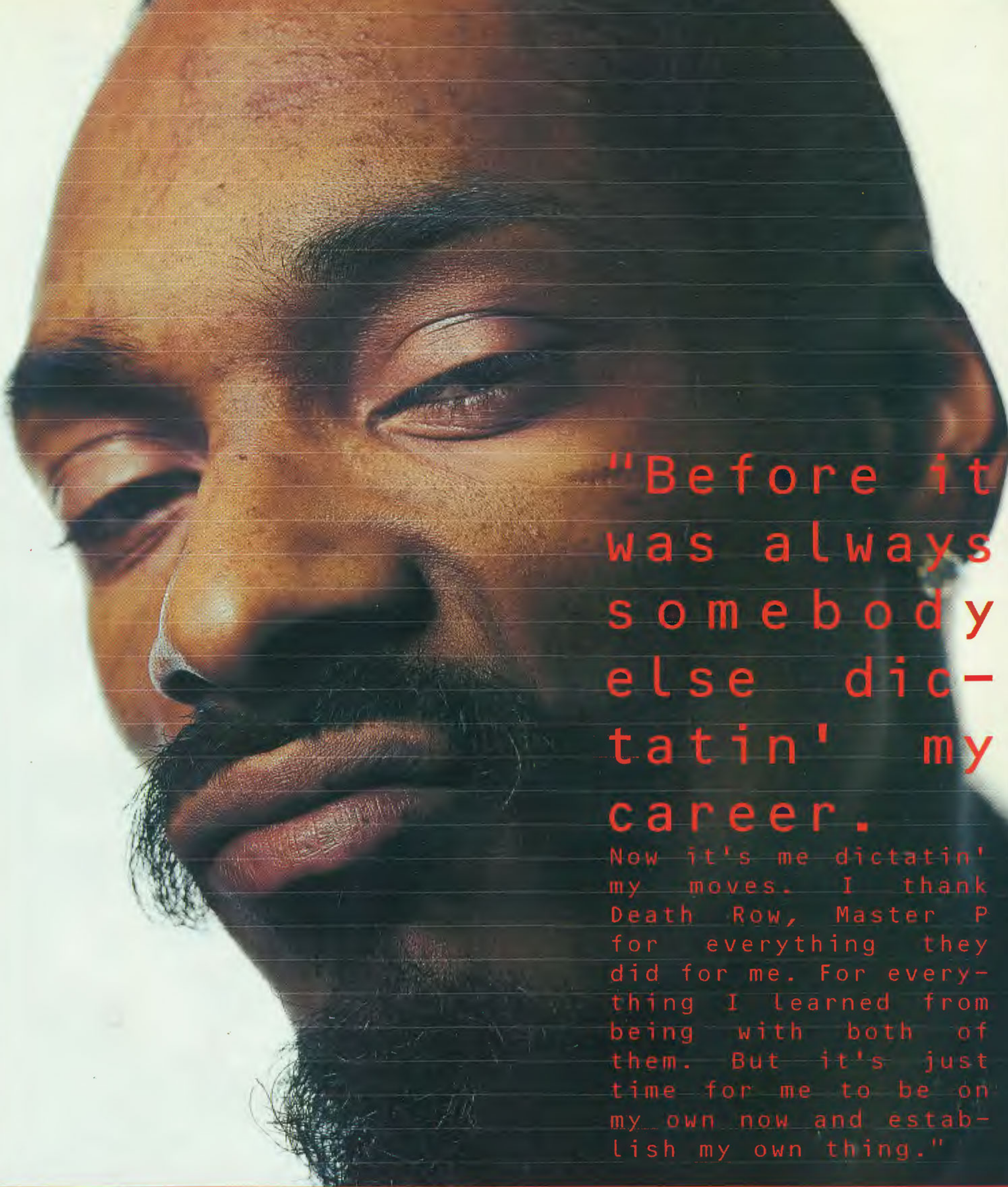
"He forgot where he was," jokes the eternally beautiful Grier, as she breaks the spell.

"I sure did," Snoop admits sheepishly. Cast and crew hoot and holler.

A small chance to forget and experience freedom in the true sense of the word means a lot to the coldest gangbanger since

learned from being with both of them. But it's just time for me to be on my own now and establish my own thing."

If Snoop sees a bigger picture, it's because he's thinking big. Speaking with more common sense than a bitter tone, he points out, "I sell all these records and do all of this shit without no real label doin' no real work. It's a matter of my music doin' the work. I've never been with a Columbia, a Sony, a Def Jam, somebody big like an Arista that can blow me up. That can put me out there and make me bigger than life. I've always been with these lil' independent companies that really don't treat me like I'm supposed to be treated. And now it's



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time for me to be on a label that can really get me out there around the whole world. And so when I do finish with this record, *The Last Meal*, I will be out there tryin' to find the best deal possible for Snoop Dogg's solo career and for my artists."

For the record, the Dogg House kennel currently includes: Tha Eastsidaz, Doggy's Angels (hard-core female group coming out next), Kokane (formerly on Ruthless), Butch Cassidy, Dogg House Heavyweights (CPO and RBX), and on the R&B tip, Toi (a female singer featured on the Doggy's Angels records).

With members of Tha Dogg Pound and 213 just a few feet away in the next room sipping on some after-dinner Courvoisier, the question comes to mind: Are reunion albums in the works for his former groups?

"We can definitely speak on 213 and say, 'Yeah, that's a definite.' 213 is my heart and soul. But Tha Dogg Pound shit I can't say that that's gonna happen," tells Snoop firmly. "Because people change and situations are still fucked up for them certain individuals. And they lovin' what they doin' and how they doin' it. I'm lovin' what I'm doin' and how I'm doin' mine. I'm not tryin' to go deal wit' people who don't want to be down wit' me. That got people in they circle that hate on me or are mad at me 'cause I'm successful."

With DPG Kuruft present, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Snoop is referring to his cousin Daz, who has stood by Death Row and is the label's premier talent. A recent Death Row ad featured Snoop Dogg's name crossed out from the label's roster. But the D-O-double-G makes it plain and clear that this is all on a professional level and shouldn't be taken personally.

"I'm not in this to make no enemies or make people mad. I'm just tryin' to make good music and do what I do best," he says. "The people that's wit' me choose to be wit' me. The people that love bein' up under my jurisdiction and my direction, I love leadin' 'em and showin' 'em the right way by example. So those that don't wanna be wit' me, I don't have no hard feelings towards them. Live your life and do your thing. Follow what you believe in. But over here, what we doin', we pushin' the right thing. All of my artists is gettin' all of their publishin'. It's not a situation where you locked into a seven-album deal. You can leave when you wanna leave. You know what I'm sayin'? So it's beautiful. It's a situation where I'm just givin' you an opportunity by openin'

In the meantime, fans can get yet another taste of 21st Century N.W.A on *The Last Meal*. Surprisingly, the cut is not produced by Dre (who at the time of this interview still had not recorded songs for his dogg's album) but by Timbaland. It features Ice Cube, MC Ren, Lady of Rage and Nate Dogg.

Other surprise guests behind the boards include Kid Capri as well as Swizz Beatz on a song tentatively titled "We Can Get Crazy" ("That shit is wicked," comments Snoop. "It's a club banger. Me and Swizz Beatz stayed in the studio 'til 'bout six in the mornin' puttin' that shit down."). Ruff Ryder First Lady and former Aftermath signee Eve also checks in. Those surprised by the appearance of these East Coast heads shouldn't be, contends Snoop.

"We always been friends," he says. "The game is built on this: You respect people's shit, they respect your shit. I don't have no ego. The game is built on challengin' [yourself] and bein' able to step outside your realm and work with other producers and change the game and make hit



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the door. The rest is on you."

Practicing what he preaches, Big Snoop has grabbed his opportunity to shine once again and undertaken a tremendous schedule, with the historic N.W.A reunion album still up ahead and his next movie project, *Snoopafly*, ready to roll as soon as *Bones* completes filming in mid-May.

records."

And it goes without saying that Dr. Dre will keep his scheduled appointment to add his hit-making magic to *The Last Meal*. Snoop can't wait for the good doctor to mix "No Back Trackin'," a mesmerizing track produced by Meech Wells that features the one-of-a-kind vocals of George Clinton and the Brides of Funkenstein. "On [that song,] I basically tell the record label, Priority, it's the last muthafuckin' time they gonna eat off me," he says.

"And I forecast my career from 1992 to 2000. How when I came out everybody loved me. And how in '96 muthafuckas said I fell off. And how in 2000 I'm back on top."

With a six a.m. wake-up call, it's time to hit

MONDAY. BACK WHERE WE STARTED. And "No Back Trackin'" is bumping from Snoop's quite tidy trailer. It's obvious the song means a lot to our rap amigo as we watch him nod his head and recite his lines. Framed family portraits, including a real cool shot of his three kids, stare back at visitors.

That he keeps his kin on his mind and close to his heart is expected. Snoop Dogg is down-to-earth and thrives on not acting like a superstar. In most interviews, he often makes a point of sharing the spotlight with others. Today's no different, as he gives props to his acting coach Elena DeSantos ("She really trained me and got my head and shit correct."); producer Meech Wells ("That's the late, great Mary Wells' son. Dr. Dre said he's one of the next up-and-comin' producers. I love his shit. We got a helluva chemistry."); director Ernest Dickerson ("Ernest is a real director. He thoroughly walked me through this from the beginning when it was just on paper."); and New Line Cinema ("I'm happy that they gave me the opportunity to do a real movie with real actors and a real director and a real film company to support it. A lot of people go to school for this shit, have to kiss ass and do all kind of shit to get into movies. So I'm thankful.").

But Snoop saves his best praise for Pam Grier. "She was one of the first people to set trends and wear afros and do the African-American thing on the movie screen that was never seen," he explains. "But most of all, she's a beautiful person to be around. She's education, she's wisdom.

I'm thankful that my first big movie is with a big star like her. I know I'm with some quality shit. Legendary quality. She's a superb actress, too. Deserves an Oscar. And if somebody from this muthafuckin' movie win one they need to give it to her. That's real, 'cause she deserve it."

After watching Snoop get close to Ms. Grier all day, one has to ask him if they actually pay him to do this? While others chuckle, he replies in a straight-faced, gangsta-lean fashion, "They pay me well, too."

But is Snoop earning his keep? Just ask the director Ernest Dickerson, who helmed *Juice* and *Surviving the Game*, and worked with Tupac and Ice-T, respectively. He had this to say in behalf of his current rap leading man. "Snoop is a total gentleman, and he's totally committed," says Dickerson. "I think some guys who have music as their first career, they can kinda take [acting] or leave it. But Snoop figures that he's gotten to a point in music where he needs a new challenge. And there's challenge in acting. I'd like to think that we're showing people a side of Snoop that they've never seen before."

During another break in the action, the opportunity arises to talk to Pam Grier, who is both refreshingly friendly and articulate. After joking that she first heard of Snoop Dogg when she was six, Ms. Grier, a musician in her own right, says that she has played the drums and keyboards along to the music of Snoop, Dr. Dre and tha Dogg Pound. Whoa!

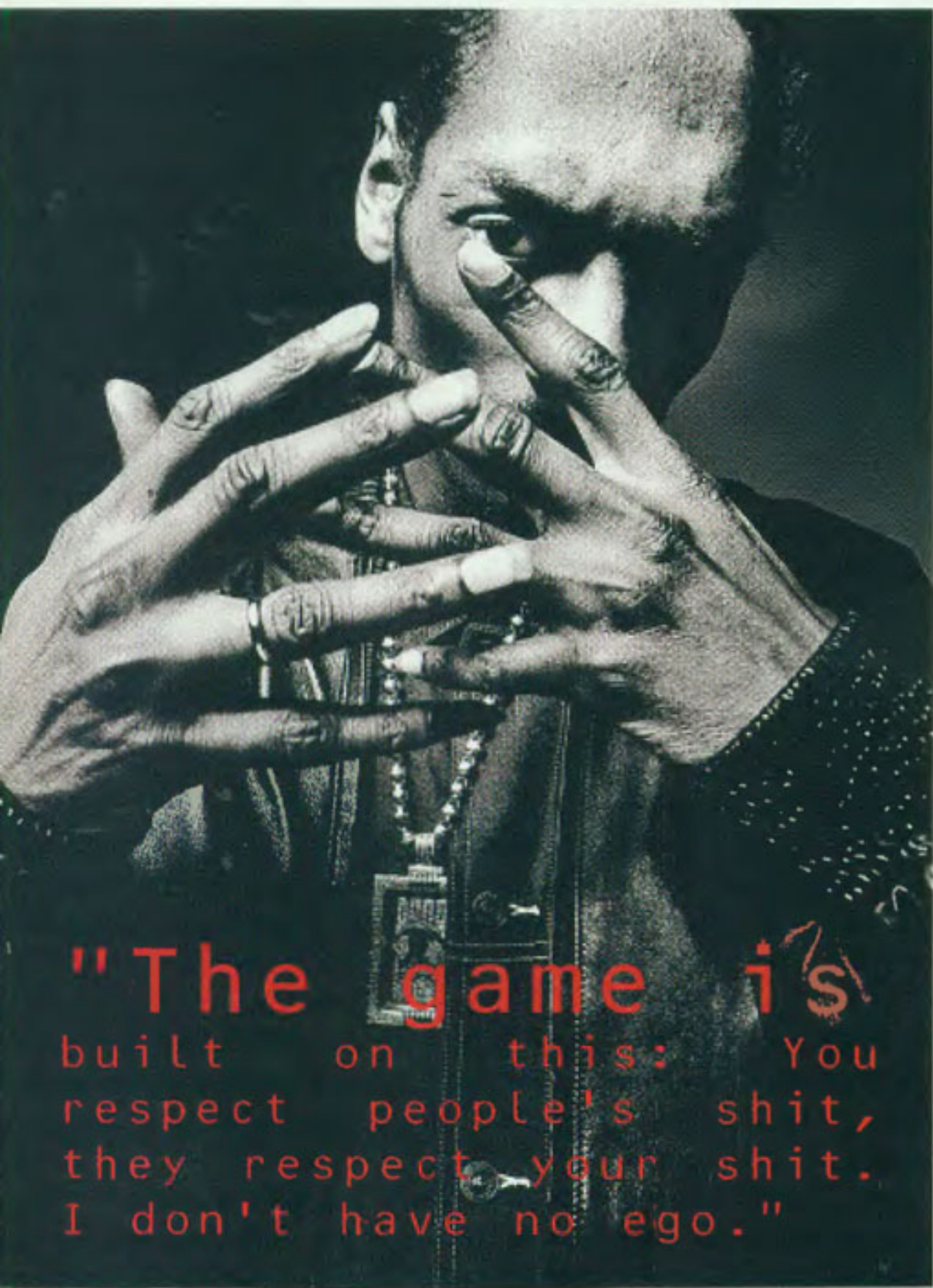
"I was very familiar with the Black Panthers growing up, which was about 'Don't wait to be given to, go out and get it yourself,'" states the accomplished and definitely hip actress known as the first Foxy Brown and cousin to Los Angeles Ram great Rosey Grier. "That's what self-empowerment and the hip-hop world is about. The young people [of today] are basically the products of those freedoms of the '50s and '60s. And they shouldn't take it for granted. People were bitten by police dogs and hosed down by fire hoses just because they wanted to get a lunch or use a restaurant. Those freedoms won opened the doors for all of us to be here. When [hip-hop artists] go back and they listen to my music from the '70s, it's what they heard when they were in the womb, when they were babies," she continues. "It was original music and we represented a music and a time of freedom. Where whites could go see James Brown and explore Ohio Players and now come see Snoop and not be called a nigger-lover. It's about love and expression. That was what the '70s was about. The world has been waitin' for freedom. Not just us. The entire world."

Including Snoop Dogg. Waiting to be free to control his music and thus his destiny. And maybe even to break free from the negative image which still haunts him in the mainstream. People still remember Snoop Dogg the drug-peddling gangbanger, Snoop Dogg the gangsta rapper with that murder case, Snoop Dogg the Death Row inmate down with Suge Knight. They forget that he served his time in jail for dealing, that he was cleared of the murder charges and that he realized he was-

n't well-served by his unfortunate business ties and severed them.

Well, for now, Snoop will take things one person at a time, as one of his bodyguards, Ed Hunter, illustrates with this tale: "We were workin' on his movie and this older lady [said] she wanted to meet him. She had heard her grandchildren talkin' about him. So she walks over to him and he says, 'How you doin'?' and gives her a hug. Blows her totally off her feet. When she left the set, she was sayin', 'That's my baby Snoopy.' And this was an older white lady."

Hey, if gringa grannies who be lovin' Celine Dion can show Snoop love, then one day so will the whole world. Heaven forbid. ♣



"The game is built on this: You respect people's shit, they respect your shit. I don't have no ego."

the hay. Our lanky lyricist is through with the press for tonite, but not before reciting the chorus to "No Back Trackin'" one more time for everybody to hear: "Don't listen when they say I pause and hesitate/I might stumble, but I refuse to fall."

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"The year 2000/And nigga I'm still housin'/Why them niggas goin' through your old shit browsin'/?Don't them niggas know that you the reason why we bouncin'/?Eastsidaz debuted a 100,000/Nigga, we clownin'/I really can't be trippin' off these niggaz though/I'm tryin' to make some moves..."