

# Banking On 50 CENT

**Curtis Jackson** escaped a violent drug-dealing past to become a rap millionaire. Now he wants to become a movie star

**C**urtis “50 Cent” Jackson thinks he’s misunderstood. An ex-crack dealer, he’s survived a murder attempt that left him with nine bullet holes in his body and glorified his life of crime in his multiplatinum 2003 debut album, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’*. Now he stars as a pusher turned rapper in a loosely biographical film of the same name—a movie that’s kicked up controversy over billboards of Jackson brandishing a gun. Still, Jackson says his first movie, directed by Oscar nominee Jim Sheridan, will “help people understand the decisions I’ve made.” How did he go from street thug to budding mogul? Read on.



**“I don’t feel that ambition is a learned behavior,” says Jackson. “And I have always been that way—only with bad direction early on.”**



“ My only question was, Could he act? After 10 minutes I knew it wouldn't be a problem”

—Director Jim Sheridan on Jackson (with costar Howard)

Winter. “I expected him to be the guy in his songs—he wasn't that at all.” He also cried on cue and stripped down for a fight scene in a jailhouse shower with castmate Terrence Howard. “Curtis had the most to lose,” says Howard, who praises his castmate's transition from rap to acting. “I view him as an artist that is changing from acrylics to working with oils.”

**HEADED FOR TROUBLE** In poverty-stricken South Jamaica, Queens, Jackson's early years were marked by violence. His single mother, Sabrina Jackson, worked the streets as a crack dealer until her drug-related murder in 1984, and he has never known his father. Taken in by his grandparents, Jackson himself started dealing at 12. “I started hustling [drugs],” he says. “At first I could only do it between 3 and 6, when my grandparents thought I was in an after-school program.” By 16, Jackson, now 30, was a high school dropout who'd spent several stints in jail. But after the birth of his son Marquise, now 9, in '96, he decided to focus on rapping. “My priorities changed,” he says. “My son is the reason I stopped doing the things my mother was doing.”

**TAKING ON RAP—AND NINE BULLETS** Selling tapes on New York's streets, Jackson was beginning to make a

name for himself in hip-hop when his dream of stardom almost ended after a 2000 shooting that nearly killed him. “I knew if he couldn't have his music, there was no use to him living,” says grandmother Beulah Jackson, who witnessed the shooting outside her house. Now Jackson, who parlayed such experiences into gold records, endorsements and plenty of bling (see below), travels with six security men. “My son thinks I'm a superhero. He says, ‘They can't kill my daddy.’ You kidding me?”

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN** With a history like that, it's no wonder cast and crew of *Get Rich* were surprised their star was anything but scary. “He's soft-spoken,” says costar Viola Davis, who plays his grandmother. “Not egotistical.” Indeed, Jackson, who doesn't smoke or drink anything stronger than his signature vitamin water, “is disarmingly funny,” says screenwriter Terence

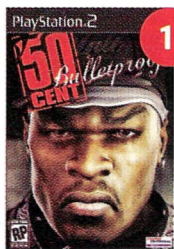
**PAGING MRS. CENT** While his *Get Rich* alter-ego has a love interest in costar Joy Bryant, the rapper is happy single. “I got so much going on,” says Jackson, whose relationship with Vivica A. Fox ended in 2003. “[But] a woman is always a priority, whether a man admits it or not.” Commitment may be tougher than mastering acting: “I have trust issues.”

**LIVING LARGE** In the meantime Jackson hangs with Marquise and his rap crew G-Unit at his Connecticut mansion. The newest member: a cute Jack Russell terrier named Soldier. Further proof that 50's gone soft? Not so fast. If someone breaks in, “all I need him to do is bark,” says the rapper. “I'll handle the problem.”

By Chris Strauss. Oliver Jones and Michael Fleeman in Los Angeles, Tiffany McGee and Kelly Carter in New York City

**AMBITION**  
+  
**50CENT**  
= \$60 MILLION

“I feel like I could make a billion dollars easy,” says Jackson, whose empire includes (1) a video game, *50 Cent: Bulletproof*; (2) a flavor of Glacéau Vitamin Water; and (3) a multiyear sneaker deal with Reebok. His 50,000-sq.-ft. Farmington, Conn., mansion (4), once owned by Mike Tyson, features 18 bedrooms, a movie theater and a nightclub.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHAEL GIBSON/PARAMOUNT; JUSTIN SUTCLIFFE/SIPA; REEBOK; WENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES; GLACÉAU