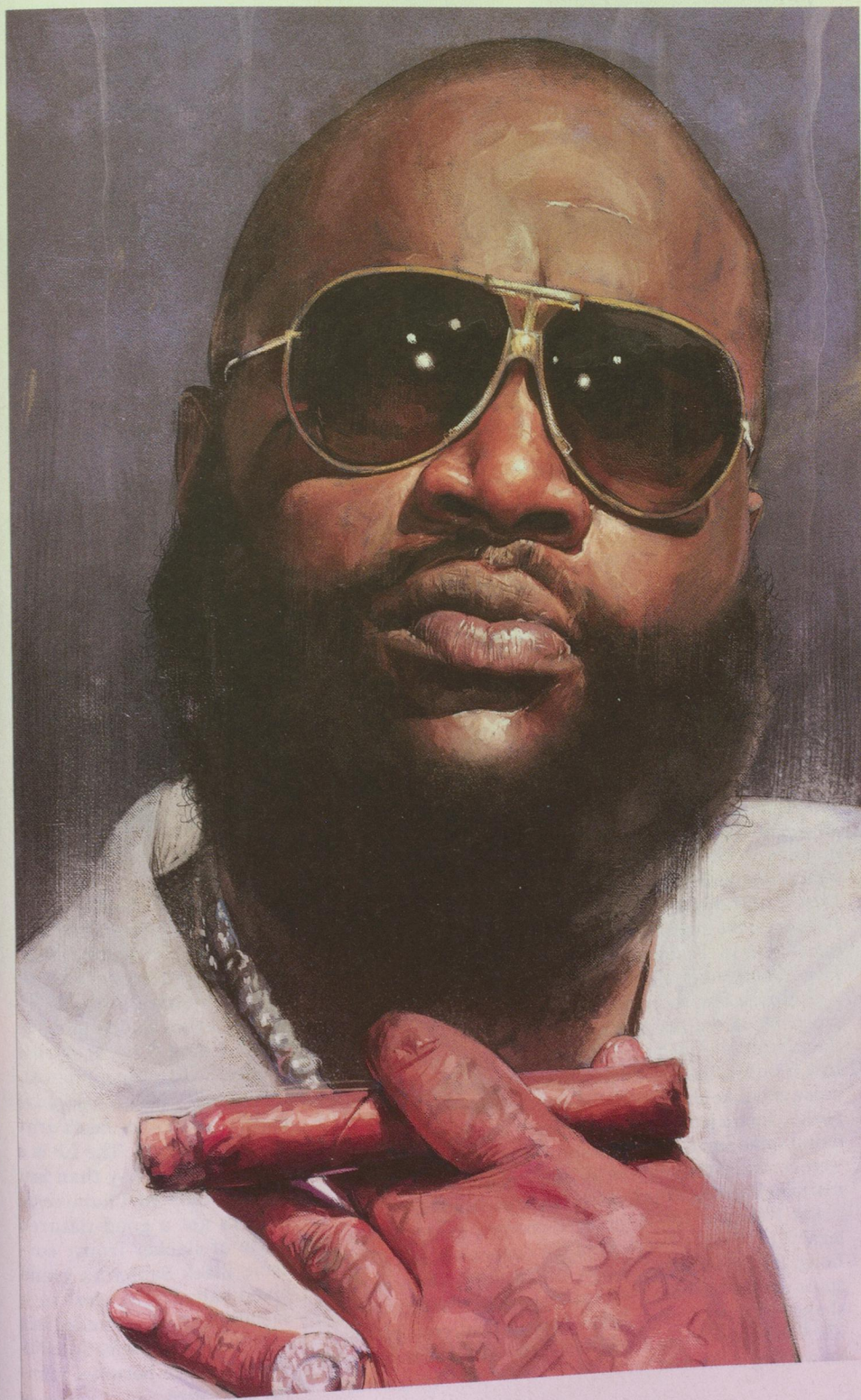


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## Rick Ross: Larger Than Life



How the Miami rapper sells high-life fantasies like no one else in hip-hop today



### Rick Ross

*God Forgives, I Don't*

Maybach/Def Jam

★★★★

BY JONAH WEINER

It's perfect that the first word Rick Ross raps on *God Forgives, I Don't* is "hallucination" — after all, he's in the fantasy business. Over his career, Ross has gone from generic dope-boy with a stolen name (the actual Ross, a California cocaine drug lord, sued for copyright infringement) to unmasked former corrections officer to inspired charlatan, who pretends to be a high-living king-pin — sticking to his script with hammy gusto, never breaking character. In interviews, Ross laid out a clear MO for his fifth album: He wanted to craft the equivalent of a Scorsese or Tarantino film.

There are times when *God Forgives* is as engrossing and surprising as rap can be. Over beats that alternate between sparkling, decadent string arrangements and assaultive, synthesized blare, Ross pretzels hip-hop's familiar rags-to-riches arc into a Möbius strip, slaloming around an autobiographical timeline that may or may not be his own. One moment he's enjoying "20-stack seats at the Heat game"; the next he's counting small-timer "brown-bag money." Here he's in a Maybach; a few bars down he's in a rental car. An Audemars Piguet on "Amsterdam"