

# Actor Jackson covets role in Star Wars saga

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Special to Sentinel-Voice

Actor Samuel L. Jackson has fulfilled a life-long dream in his portrayal of Mace Windu, a member of the Jedi Council, in George Lucas' new "Star Wars" saga "Episode I: The Phantom Menace."

Although he had a very small part in the film and spent only three days on the set, he was part of the big press junket that took place in New York City.

Wearing his signature Kangol hat turned backwards, a black short-sleeved shirt, loose-fitting cream colored pants, and rose colored rectangular glasses, Jackson strolled coolly into the room at the Regency Hotel.

When asked about "The Phantom Menace" written in white on his black Kangol, he laughed and said, "I know people."

When it was suggested that Lucas had it made, Jackson said, "I had them made especially for George. I have the Kangol contact, not him. I'm trying to hook him up, though."

Underneath Jackson's calm countenance lies a very excited man. Of the many millions of "Star Wars" fans, only a select few can boast that he or she has appeared in one of Lucas' landmark films. Seeing "Star Wars" for the first time at the age of 22-years-old, Jackson said he knew then he wanted to be involved in that series.

Word of his interest eventually got back to Lucas,

and they finally met.

"I was shooting 'Sphere' at the time, over two years ago, so I was close by in Villejo. I was telling him how big a fan I was of the series, and how much I admired the things that he'd done. And, he said, 'Well, I really don't know what the story's about, and I don't know exactly what you'd do.' because he hadn't started to write it. And, we talked about it for a second. We actually talked a bit about the brother who played the Queen's guard," Jackson said.

Although Lucas couldn't guarantee him a big role, Jackson was not discouraged. He said he would play any character.

"I said, 'I don't care. You don't understand. I'll do whatever. I'll be a Stormtrooper.' Then we just started talking about a lot of other things, and why he hadn't done a film in 20 years. We just ended up liking each other as people. And, I guess, through that he ended up giving me this particular role."

The role of Mace Windu, Jackson proudly professed, was the "first character name [Lucas] ever wrote" when he started writing the "Star Wars" prequel. Jackson also took great pleasure in announcing that his action figure was the first to be sold out.

Considering he was the only character in "Jurassic Park" not to get an action figure, he made the statement with a wicked grin and air of



SAMUEL L. JACKSON

retribution.

"My daughter was the first one to tell me my action figure was sold out, but it's no big deal to her. My 17-year-old is one of those mall people. The mall and the car keys. That's it."

More than a year ago, Jackson made headlines when he took aim at the Academy Awards for being racist. When asked if at this point in his career appearing in a "Star Wars" film had more weight than an Oscar, he appeared to be a bit perturbed.

"That was then. This is now," he said. "I had problems with it a long time ago. I don't have any problems with the Oscar nominations or what people do with that. An Oscar would

be nice to have because it would mean I could make more money. I could ask for more money. But, it's not gonna validate my career at this point. A lot of people enjoy what I do, and they've seen what I've done," he said.

Jackson said in a fair world, he would have received Oscars for "Pulp Fiction," "A Time to Kill" and "Jungle Fever."

Regardless of the Academy's lack of acknowledgment, Jackson relishes in the fact he has become a cult figure. He said people are constantly faxing him items from a web site, which asks surfers to list "The top ten things you want to

hear Samuel Jackson say as Mace Windu."

He said his favorite was "Feel the Force, mother—" and broke out into a hearty laugh. To the naysayers who have said the film does not live up to the hype, Jackson says you can't critique a man's vision.

"There's no such thing as, 'Well, that wasn't right' or 'That was wrong' because it's his world. He can do what he wants. And, the film only has to be what it is. It's the first installment. It's more or less a gift from him to even go back and do that," he said.

In addition to his current role in the "Phantom Menace," Jackson has two

films coming out this summer, "The Red Violin" and "Deep Blue Sea." And he just finished shooting another film, "Rule of Engagement." He is scheduled to begin work on John Singleton's remake of the 1970s classic, "Shaft."

Having worked with some of the top filmmakers in the industry, Jackson said he would like to do some projects with some Hong Kong directors.

"I'm looking forward to possibly working with Stanley Tong, Troy Hart, Ronnie Yu and maybe John Woo, if he ever looks down from his perch and sees me," he said.

## Oprah to teach graduate business course

CHICAGO (AP) — Actress. Talk show host. Bookseller. Empire builder. And now, professor.

Oprah Winfrey and longtime beau Stedman Graham will teach a course titled "Dynamics of Leadership" this fall at Northwestern University's J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management.

"It has always been a dream of mine to teach," Winfrey, who didn't finish her bachelor's degree until 1987, said last week. "We share the same beliefs in the importance of



OPRAH WINFREY

dynamic leadership in this country." Graham, who has taught sports marketing at the school for two years, and Winfrey will instruct about 100 second-year business students for three hours once a week.

"The feedback we're already getting from MBA students has been phenomenal because she is truly admired, especially by the women and minority students who see her as someone who has made it," said Rich Honack, assistant dean at the business school.



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