

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: SAMUEL L. JACKSON

A candid conversation with the highest-grossing actor about the burden of being cool, his near-lethal golf swing and that feud between Quentin Tarantino and Spike Lee

Samuel L. Jackson is one of Hollywood's greatest special effects. Depending on the movie and the role, the actor, who has appeared in more than 100 films since his first in 1972, brilliantly calibrates the required intensity of flash and firepower. As the hit man in *Pulp Fiction*, he roars his Quentin Tarantino-written rants with electrifying, Old Testament-worthy fury laced with deadpan street talk. In *Coach Carter* he's quiet and righteous, a dignified, unshakably good man, never better than when laying down the law to a hardcase basketball team. As the brainy bad guy in *Jackie Brown*, he's so caught up rapping about the killing power of AK-47s that he's oblivious his girlfriend is hot for fellow con man Robert De Niro.

Whether he's flashing his charismatic mojo in blockbusters (*Jurassic Park*, the *Star Wars* prequels, two *Iron Man* flicks, *Captain America*, *The Avengers*), tamping things down in arty indies (*Eve's Bayou*, *The Red Violin*, *Black Snake Moan*) or rousing cheers from the rafters with profanity-laced tirades in popcorn-munchers (*Deep Blue Sea*, *Snakes on a Plane*), no 3-D IMAX CGI light-and-magic show can upstage him. And with an estimated \$7.4 billion-plus at the box office—making him the highest-grossing actor in history, according to Guinness World Records—Jackson has an uncanny knack for landing in more hits than misses.

His road to the top wasn't short or easy. Jackson was born Samuel Leroy Jackson in Washington, D.C. Abandoned as an infant by his alcoholic father, he was raised by his mother, grandfather and grandmother in racially segregated Chattanooga, Tennessee. A strong student, musician and athlete, he attended Morehouse College, where he took a public-speaking class to tame a terrible stutter and reconnected with his childhood love of acting. He and fellow students took hostage an entire board of trustees meeting in a 1969 campus protest, which led to his being ejected from Morehouse but also introduced him to his future wife, LaTanya Richardson, a fellow actor. He moved to Harlem in 1976. While in New York, Jackson began to get work in off-Broadway productions, as a stand-in for Bill Cosby during rehearsals for *The Cosby Show* and in films for then-budding writer-director Spike Lee, including *Do the Right Thing*, *School Daze* and *Mo' Better Blues*.

But there were problems. Jackson's spiraling addictions to drugs and alcohol cost him jobs and eventually led to a life-changing 1990 intervention by his family. He worked constantly through the 1980s and early 1990s on TV series such as *Law & Order* and in small film roles including *Gang Member No. 2* in *Ragtime* and *Dream Blind Man* in *The Exorcist III*. He won acting awards from the Cannes Film Festival

and the New York Film Critics Circle for his heartbreaking turn as an addict in *Jungle Fever*, but playing Bible-quoting killer Jules Winnfield in the instant cult classic *Pulp Fiction* in 1994 gave him his first signature role. Now, at the age of 64, he finds himself as busy as ever, with six movies already completed in 2013.

PLAYBOY sent Contributing Editor **Stephen Rebello**, who recently interviewed Matt Damon for the magazine, to talk with Jackson at the London hotel in West Hollywood. Says Rebello: "I first interviewed Samuel L. Jackson seven years ago for a 20 Questions feature, and he'd done the Playboy Interview in 1999. Apparently he thought he'd blown our earlier interview, because he told me he'd been wondering why he hadn't been asked back until now. The thing is, if you want to hang with a smart, well-read, supremely confident guy with a truckload of gusto, passion and a seen-and-done-it-all vibe, then this is your go-to guy. In the space of several hours, he ran the gamut—candid, funny, insightful, explosive, friendly, defensive and politically incorrect—and was deadly accurate. Over soft drinks, he more than lived up to his reputation. Better still, he surpassed it."

PLAYBOY: You and Spike Lee have reunited for your new movie, *Oldboy*, Lee's take on the South Korean-made 2003



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"These 20-somethings can't turn around and tell me the word nigger is fucked-up in *Django* yet still listen to Jay Z or whoever else say 'nigger, nigger, nigger' throughout the music they listen to."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAVIN BOND

"I was a militant revolutionary dude. I went to Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral. I joined a march for equal rights in Memphis. In 1969 I got kicked out of college because a bunch of us had issues with the way the school was run."

vengeance hit. It's been more than 20 years since you worked together on *School Daze*, *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever*—movies that helped put you on the map. Why such a long gap?

JACKSON: Spike's wife, Tonya, and my wife, LaTanya, have been good friends for a long time. My wife just acted in a TV film Tonya produced and wrote called *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. So our wives would interact often, and we would all end up going to dinner together. Our relationship healed [from a public falling-out] over those dinners and conversations. He told me at dinner he was going to remake *Oldboy*, and I was like, "Can I be in it?"

PLAYBOY: Why did you want to be in that one in particular?

JACKSON: I watch the original *Oldboy* eight, nine times a year. Every time I meet someone who hasn't seen it, I order it and give it to them. Spike told me that, aside from the leading role, I could have any part. I always wanted to be the crazy guy who runs the place where the main guy gets locked up and isolated.

PLAYBOY: Did you two get back into the groove quickly, or did it take some time?

JACKSON: Working with Spike was just like we'd never stopped. He's very efficient, knows what he wants and doesn't get in my way artistically—whatever I come with, I come with, and it's cool.

PLAYBOY: How did you and Josh Brolin, who plays the leading role, get along?

JACKSON: We all do our homework, so beforehand I asked T.L. [Tommy Lee Jones] about Josh because he tolerates no bullshit whatsoever, and he said, "Ah, great kid." If T.L.'s down with you, you're good with me. People who come to a movie set angry, bitter and giving people a hard time? It's like, fuck, this is supposed to be a great place, a playground. Josh is good, and he understands the fun aspect of the job. When they say "Action," you get serious. "Cut," boom. There are a few actors who are like that who are really great, like Julianne Moore. When we were doing *Freedomland*, Julianne was standing there saying, "Sam, do you watch *American Idol*? Oh, it's so great." They call "Action!" and she's crying her eyes out; they call "Cut!" and she comes right back over: "As I was saying, this *American Idol* thing...." She's amazing.

PLAYBOY: Spike Lee said some pretty harsh things last year when you played the controversial role of a conniving house slave in *Django Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino's racially charged spaghetti Western. Lee complained about Tarantino's 100-plus uses of the N word in the script, called the movie "disrespectful to my ancestors" and tweeted, "American slavery was not a Sergio Leone spaghetti Western. It was a holocaust. My ancestors are slaves. Stolen from Africa. I will honor them."

64 Tarantino called Lee's charges "ridicu-

lous." Did you hash out any of this while making *Oldboy*?

JACKSON: We didn't have that conversation. One thing I've learned is that when I'm hired to do the job, that's what I do. I did a film [*Soul Men*] with Bernie Mac that was directed by Spike's cousin that I didn't have such a great time doing. We didn't talk about that either, other than my saying, "How's he doing?" and Spike answering, "Oh, he's fine. You guys didn't get along so well, did you?" "No, we didn't." Boom—that was the end of it. One thing had nothing to do with the other. Part of the thing that fucks with all those people who criticize Quentin for being a "wigger"—even, I guess, Spike—is that they don't take into account that Quentin's mom used to go to work and leave him with this black guy downstairs who would take him to these blaxploitation movies. That's his formative cinema life. He loves those movies. It's part of him.

PLAYBOY: Isn't Lee basically saying that only black artists should tackle black characters and subject matter?

JACKSON: There is this whole thing of "Nobody can tell our story but us," but

[I wouldn't] dress up as a woman and kiss another guy. I don't think people want to see me do that. But you know what? If it's done right and the story is good, I might.

that's apparently not true, because the Jackie Robinson movie finally got made as 42. Spike didn't make it, but people still went to see it. When Boaz Yakin did *Fresh* in 1994, all of a sudden it was like, "Who is this Jewish motherfucker telling our stories?" He's the Jewish motherfucker who wrote the story, that's who. If you got a story like that in you, tell it. We'll see when [director] Steve McQueen's movie *12 Years a Slave* comes out, if it'll be like, "What's this British motherfucker know about us?" Somebody's always going to say something.

PLAYBOY: Do you think Lee has substantive issues with Tarantino and his movies?

JACKSON: Spike saying "I'm not going to see *Django* because it's an insult to my ancestors"? It's fine if you think that, but then you have nothing else to say about the movie, period, because you don't know if Quentin insulted your ancestors or not. On the other hand, Louis Farrakhan, who these blackest of black people say speaks the truth and expresses the vitriol of the angry black man, can look at the movie and go, "Goddamn, that's a great fucking movie. Quentin Tarantino

told the truth." Dick Gregory's seen the movie 12 fucking times. I respect what they have to say more than anybody else, because they've been through it. They walked the walk with Dr. King. Some of the bullshit criticisms about *Django* come from people who don't understand the genre and who didn't live through that era. They think they need to wave a flag of blackness that they don't necessarily have the credentials to wave.

PLAYBOY: Do you have other specific people in mind when you say "these blackest of black people"?

JACKSON: W. Kamau Bell's FX show [*Totally Biased With W. Kamau Bell*] had this whole segment where he was criticizing *Django*. He's a young black man with nappy hair and very dark skin, but he also has a very white wife and an interracial child. You can't tell me you know what people in the South did if you never spent time down there. He can say there had to be words Quentin could use other than *nigger*. Well, what are they? These 20-somethings can't turn around and tell me the word *nigger* is fucked-up in *Django* yet still listen to Jay Z or whoever else say "nigger, nigger, nigger" throughout the music they listen to. "Oh, that's okay because that's dope, that's down, we all right with that." Bullshit. You can't have it one way and not the other. It's art—you can't not censor one thing and try to censor the other. Saying Tarantino said "nigger" too many times is like complaining they said "kike" too many times in a movie about Nazis.

PLAYBOY: As painful and uncomfortable as *Django* can be to watch, did Tarantino's decision to cut out some of the brutality cost you any big scenes?

JACKSON: Tarantino asked me to play the most hated Negro character in cinema history, but if people think they hate my character, they will really despise him if one day they get to see me torture Django. There are scenes on the cutting-room floor or in Quentin's house or wherever that one of these days, hopefully, he'll let people see. He literally could have *Kill Billed* that movie, because there is enough stuff for two two-and-a-half-hour movies. A *Django* Western and *Django* Southern would have been equally entertaining and great. I kept hoping he would do that. People said, "Well, slavery wasn't a picnic," and I want to say, "No, motherfucker, slavery wasn't a picnic," but nobody was singing songs while picking cotton in the field in that movie either. People got whipped. Dogs got sicced on people. These 20-year-olds are always talking about "Where's my 40 acres and a mule? Where are my reparations?" Well, you wanna act like the government owes us reparations, we gotta *show* what they owe us for. Here it is, right here onscreen. These stories must be told. Yet they still want to turn around and go, "Fuck Quentin Tarantino, he

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don't know shit about it," but if Spike, the Hughes brothers or Carl Franklin had done it, it would have been right? Look, Quentin has this master storytelling ability, and a lot of criticism from a lot of people is straight bullshit jealousy because they can't do it themselves.

PLAYBOY: How do you explain the bond between you and Tarantino?

JACKSON: I get the vision of the whole movie when I read his stuff. It's like you go into his head. I work with a lot of mechanics—you know, the film-school guys. Quentin isn't like that. He knows what his movies look like before he shoots them and knows how to tell a story with camera movement. I love the same movies he does. We both look at a lot of movies. We've read a lot. I also think part of it is the only-childness of both Quentin and me.

PLAYBOY: What's the one thing you wouldn't do onscreen, even for Tarantino?

JACKSON: Probably dress up as a woman and kiss another guy. I don't think people want to see me do that. He hasn't asked me, but you know what? If it's done right and the story is good, I might.

PLAYBOY: Which of your movies would you choose as your signature, your legacy?

JACKSON: If there were one movie I wanted people to look at, it would be *A Time to Kill*.

PLAYBOY: That's the 1996 Joel Schumacher-directed movie with Sandra Bullock and Matthew McConaughey, based on a John Grisham novel, in which you play a man on trial for murdering the men who raped his 10-year-old daughter. Why that one?

JACKSON: It's an American story and a very Southern story. I'd like people to look at that one and say, "Oh my God."

PLAYBOY: Moviegoers know you best today as a smart, larger-than-life, potentially explosive, sometimes funny and usually likable badass. Did you show any childhood signs of some of the personality traits that have made you famous as an actor, let alone a star?

JACKSON: I play a lot of characters that aren't that way at all, but those aren't the ones people remember. If audiences see those qualities in my work, it's about comfortableness, confidence, success in what I've done. But oh hell no, I was not the cool guy growing up. I was bookish. I had a stutter. I wasn't in the streets with all the other kids. I didn't dress cool or do cool shit. I played the trumpet, flute and French horn in the marching band and had great style on the field when we performed, but that wasn't the cool thing to do. I was popular because I was funny. I definitely didn't have the hot chicks. The atmosphere in the house was one of love, with a lot of joy, but I also had discipline—and a curfew.

PLAYBOY: Did you and your family butt heads over their rules and discipline?

JACKSON: Looking back, I love the South so much, even though there was a time

when I didn't feel so proud of being from there. The sense of community there is unheard of in this day and age. The idea that it takes a village to raise a child—it works, because wherever I was in town, somebody always knew. My teachers had taught my mom and her brothers and sisters. The teachers knew the expectations my family had of me. If I was fucking up in school, somebody was like, "Stay away from those people. Sit down, read." Outside school, if other kids were getting ready to do some shit that was going to get everybody in trouble or might get me in trouble, I went home. The one thing my family insisted on was, don't embarrass us. Don't make us come to jail, because though we will come to see you, we're going to leave you there. It just wasn't an option for me. I was more afraid of the people I lived with than the people I ran with.

PLAYBOY: Living in a segregated environment, what were some other useful survival tools your family gave you?

JACKSON: There were certain things you necessarily had to be told as a child—things that would keep you alive and out

I was always noticing girls. As a kid, I spent summers on a farm with cows, chickens. I saw things fucking from the time I was three, four years old.

of harm's way. My family would point out this or that person as a Klansman or a grand wizard and tell me who specifically those men had killed and gotten away with it just because they'd said that black person was doing this or that. You could not look suspicious, because when people can accuse you of anything, there's nothing you can say. They'd tell me not to get in a car with this or that policeman, saying, "I don't care what happens, you run and run till you get here, and then we'll deal with it here."

PLAYBOY: When did girls come into the picture for you?

JACKSON: I was always noticing girls. As a kid, I spent summers on my grandfather's sister's farm down in Georgia, with her cows, chickens and all her kids and me running up and down dirt roads, feeling all that freedom. I saw things fucking from the time I was three, four years old.

PLAYBOY: When was the first time you did what comes naturally in the barnyard?

JACKSON: In Georgia there was a family of girls who lived through the woods from us, and we all used to meet at this

creek and swim naked. I was about 10 or 11. I think two of the girls were about 14, 15, so that's when it happened. Girls were interesting to me, period. They could be fat, skinny, tall, short, ugly, beautiful—as long as they were willing to do that thing.

PLAYBOY: How did acting enter the picture?

JACKSON: When I was a small child, my aunt Edna, a fourth-grade teacher and performing arts major, taught dance at home, so I took tap with her and other crazy classes. When she did plays and pageants, she never had boys available, so she was always putting me in shit. I did a lot of acting against my will for a long time. I acted my way right through junior high and high school.

PLAYBOY: Did moviegoing influence your eventual decision to become an actor?

JACKSON: Before we even had a television, I listened to a lot of radio drama as a kid, hearing how people's voices can tell stories. Every Saturday I spent all day in one of Chattanooga's two black theaters, the Liberty and the Grand, seeing Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Lash LaRue, Westerns, *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, *Francis the Talking Mule*. Books had more to offer than movies. My mom's rule was that for every five comic books I read, I had to read a classic. I read Shakespeare and *Beowulf* while other kids were learning how to diagram sentences and learning to conjugate so they could fill out job applications. My fantasies weren't inspired by John Wayne but by Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*. When I was in the room by myself reading, I would stand in front of the mirror pretending to be all those people in the books. I was acting for myself before I ever did it for anybody else.

PLAYBOY: What about sports?

JACKSON: I had all kinds of shit going on. It was crazy. I had track scholarships but didn't use them. By my senior year in high school I was a candidate for Annapolis, and I had also applied to UCLA, Cal Berkeley, the University of Hawaii. As much as I love the South, the one given was that I was not going to live in Chattanooga. I had read too many books about the world, and I wanted to see it. I had actually signed myself out on a merchant ship, but my mother found out and she was like, "Oh hell no, that's not happening." My mom had it in her mind that I was going to Morehouse College in Atlanta, and that's where I went.

PLAYBOY: What was your major?

JACKSON: I wanted to be a marine biologist. That was the influence of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Even today, when they keep talking about doing a new *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, I would kill to play Captain Nemo. I loved Edgar Rice Burroughs as a kid too, and I was going to do a new Tarzan movie with Alexander Skarsgård, but it got canceled.

PLAYBOY: Did you act at Morehouse?

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JACKSON: I took a public-speaking class to help with my stuttering, and all of a sudden I found myself being part of a theater group. It was like, *click*—this is where I should've been all along. Not to mention that when I showed up, six of the nine guys were gay, so I saw all these girls, they saw me and it was like, *bing!* So shit kind of changed for me in that way.

PLAYBOY: What was college about for you? Your studies? Partying? Acting? Women?

JACKSON: I was a militant revolutionary dude. I went to Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral in Atlanta after his assassination, and I joined a march for equal rights down in Memphis. In 1969 I got kicked out of college because a bunch of us had issues with the curriculum and the way the school was run. We asked to meet with the board of trustees. They said they didn't have time for us. They had chains on the walkway. We took the chains off, went to the hardware store, bought a padlock, went inside the building, chained the doors and it was like, "Got time for us now?" The first time I actually saw and recognized LaTanya, my wife-to-be, she was in the building where we had those people locked up. She was at Spelman College and was part of the movement too. In college, a lot of people knew me as that militant dude; other people knew me as an actor or as that guy who hung out on the corner and drank wine and got high all the time. I had a whole other set of people, women, around me in different circles.

PLAYBOY: Did those circles intersect?

JACKSON: Like every sport has its own set of groupies, those circles have their own groupies. There were the militant chicks, the theater girls, the girls who were druggies and the party girls. I had different sets of people I could randomly select from.

PLAYBOY: Because of your involvement in the protest at school you were convicted for unlawful confinement. What did your family think of your evolving politics and budding involvement with the black power movement?

JACKSON: They actually *got* my militancy. They just didn't want me to get killed running around, chanting with my fists in the air. But I was in Atlanta doing that anyway. One time, I had come home from school to Tennessee. From the time I was an infant, my grandmother had been buying all these bullshit life insurance and burial policies, and every week this insurance guy, Mr. Venable, came to collect his nickel premiums. I had my hair braided and was sitting on the porch, and he walked up and said, "Hi, Sam, is Pearl here?" I said, "Motherfucker, why you calling my grandmother, a woman three times your age, Pearl?" I was cursing and yelling, babbling at him, and before I knew it, my grandmother was out the door and had me by the hair, going, "What the hell is wrong with you?" It was the first

time in his life Mr. Venable thought he might have been wrong, and he felt bad, saying, "I don't call anybody else older than me by their first name." But my grandmother kicked my ass after he left. She still thought that he was going to call somebody and have me hanged.

PLAYBOY: Do you find yourself dealing with many Mr. Venables today?

JACKSON: The other day I'm watching this white guy talking to black people on TV, and all of a sudden he's saying stuff like "Pump your brakes" and "I got you," these new politically cool terms that kind of came out of hip-hop and blackness. I'm thinking, We do still speak English, right? Though sometimes I wonder. So yeah, it still happens. But the whole language and culture are different now. I'll be reading scripts and the screenwriter mistakes "your" for "you're." On Twitter someone will write, "Your an idiot," and I'll go, "No, *you're* an idiot," and all my Twitterphiles will go, "Hey, Sam Jackson, he's the grammar police." I'll take that. Somebody needs to be. I mean, we have newscasters who don't even know how to conjugate verbs, something Walter

We have newscasters who don't even know how to conjugate verbs. How the fuck did we become a society where mediocrity is acceptable?

Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow never had problems with. How the fuck did we become a society where mediocrity is acceptable?

PLAYBOY: Or a society that views graduating from college or grad school as elitist, or one in which President Obama or other highly educated Americans consciously drop *g's* off the ends of words to sound like Joe Average?

JACKSON: First of all, we know it ain't because of his blackness, so I say stop trying to "relate." Be a leader. Be fucking presidential. Look, I grew up in a society where I could say "It ain't" or "What it be" to my friends. But when I'm out presenting myself to the world as me, who graduated from college, who had family who cared about me, who has a well-read background, I fucking conjugate.

PLAYBOY: With your and your wife's militant revolutionary background, how political are you today, especially having told *Ebony* magazine in 2012 that you wanted President Obama to "get scary"?

JACKSON: He got a little heated about the kids getting killed in Newtown and about the gun law. He's still a safe dude.

But with those Republicans, we're now in a situation where even if he said, "I want to give you motherfuckers a raise," they'd go, "Fuck you! We don't want a raise!" I don't know how we fix this bullshit. How do we fix the fact that politicians aren't trying to serve the people, they're just trying to serve their party and their closed ideals? How do we find a way to say, "You motherfuckers are fired because you're not doing shit about taking care of the country"? If Hillary Clinton decides to run, she's going to kick their fucking asses, and those motherfuckers would rather see the country go down in flames than let the times change. But as I tell my daughter, there was a time we would be in the streets about this shit.

PLAYBOY: You mean instead of signing petitions on Facebook and Twitter?

JACKSON: You need to have your physical body out there in the streets and let these people—and the rest of the world—know. When our antiwar movement led the world, it was because people could see us in the streets, see our faces, hear the protest music. You can't do that shit blogging in a room. I can't see you on your keyboard. I can't see you sitting there in the dark. Things happen when people get out in the street.

PLAYBOY: Your daughter, Zoe, is 31. Is she politically active?

JACKSON: She understands our backgrounds as revolutionaries and about being in the street because I put her out there. She's done some protesting, even though I laughed at her when she went down to Occupy Wall Street because she and Anne Hathaway are good friends. I went, "Wait, you went to Occupy Wall Street—with *Annie Hathaway*?" But see, we also understand the complacency and how we've changed Zoe's life to a point where she sees things differently because she's gone to racially diverse schools like Manhattan Country and Oakwood in Los Angeles and Vassar. Her mother and I would say shit and Zoe would go, "You guys are so racist." When we talked about racism, she said, "That's just some old shit," until she had her own experiences that made her understand.

PLAYBOY: So back in the day, there you were, a militant revolutionary, a budding actor, kicked out of college—and a good grammarian. How did you get hooked up in the off-Broadway New York theater scene, where you really got your start?

JACKSON: First, after I got kicked out of school, I came to Los Angeles for a year and worked as a county social worker, an eligibility worker, for the city.

PLAYBOY: Were you hungry for a Hollywood career?

JACKSON: I never wanted to come to California and be an actor or movie star unless I was being sought out. I had so many friends who were good actors who came out to Los (continued on page 139)

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Angeles and I never saw them on-screen, never saw them doing anything. Some I never saw until I got to L.A. myself and saw them at a party or something.

PLAYBOY: In the 1970s and 1980s, when you and your wife were touring the country or working in theater in New York, you encountered your father, who had been gone from your life since you were an infant.

JACKSON: Once, when we were performing in Topeka, Kansas, my wife, my three-month-old daughter and I went to see my other grandmother, and it just so happened my father was living in her house again. I was in my 30s, and there was this woman and this older lady, and then this teenage girl comes downstairs with a little baby in her arms as young as my daughter. He's like, "Hey, I want you to meet your sister." I think he's talking about the girl, but he's talking about the fucking baby. I'm like, "You're a grown-ass, old-ass man doing this shit?" Then the older lady's like, "So when's the last time you saw your dad?" And it was like, "I haven't seen this motherfucker since I was three months old." We go outside and he gets angry, going, "Why'd you have to tell her that?" I said, "Do you want me to tell her we hang out, that you've been taking care of me all these years? You're not my father; you're just a guy who happened to be my mom's sperm donor. I'm here to see your mother, not you."

PLAYBOY: Did you ever see him again?

JACKSON: He passed not long after that. He was an alcoholic with cirrhosis and all that other shit. They had called me from the hospital: "Mr. Jackson, your father's really ill now. If we have to take drastic measures, do you want us to keep him alive?" I said, "Are you calling to ask if I want you to put him on life support, or are you calling to see if I'm going to be responsible for his medical bill?" They're like, "Well..." I said, "He's got a sister in Kansas City—you should call her." *Click.* [laughs] It's done.

PLAYBOY: By the 1980s, to your substances of choice, booze and pot, you had added heroin and cocaine. The roles you originated at Yale Repertory Theatre in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and *Two Trains Running* were cast with other actors when those landmark plays transferred to Broadway in 1987 and 1990, respectively. How did your addictions mess with your career and personal life?

JACKSON: I was always doing a play. I paid my bills. I didn't steal shit to sell out of my brownstone. I didn't steal my daughter's toys. I didn't steal my wife's money out of her purse. I could go to the ATM and get money for cocaine. I just kept spending money and finding people to get high with.

PLAYBOY: When was enough finally enough?

JACKSON: In 1990 my wife said, "Look, you're going to rehab," and the very next day I was in rehab. I didn't go kicking and screaming. I was tired, burned-out and at that low point of like, What the fuck is going on with me?

PLAYBOY: Did seeing some of your co-stars and acting peers become more successful affect your drug use?

JACKSON: They ask you in rehab to take an assessment of how you got to the point you're at, and I said, "I guess I could have gone to that audition without my eyes red, without smelling like the beer I had or the weed I'd smoked." I never blamed anybody else for not being successful or not getting to the places I saw everybody else I worked with, like Wesley Snipes, get to. I had no problem doing roles like Black Guy in *Sea of Love* or Hold-Up Man in *Coming to America* or going to Boston once a year to get killed on *Spenser: For Hire* or *A Man Called Hawk*. LaTanya asked, "Why are you doing these piddly-ass jobs?" I told her, "Well, this or that guy I worked with is probably going to be something somewhere down the line." I always left an impression in an audition. I was memorable. In rehab I saw that I owed it to myself to see things another way and try it the other way. I opened my mind to what was being said.

PLAYBOY: So rehab took?

JACKSON: Like the petals were closed and, all of a sudden, the sun hit the flower and opened it up. People looked at it and it smelled great, it looked great to them. I'm like, Oh Jesus, this is not bad at all. I wondered whether I was going to be as much fun as I used to be, wondered whether people were going to think I was as good an actor. But the clarity and professional satisfaction that came with sobriety—couldn't beat it.

PLAYBOY: In 1991 critics raved about your performance as a crackhead in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*, which won you a Cannes Film Festival award. In what stage of your recovery did you make the movie?

JACKSON: I got out of rehab, and about a week or something later, I was shooting the movie. I had a modicum of fame because I'd done other Spike Lee movies, so when I'd go buy coke or something, the guys sitting around would go, "Hey, man, *Do the Right Thing!* Yeah, sit down!" and I sat right down and got high with them. All of a sudden with *Jungle Fever* I'm traveling in a different circle, which brought the next challenge because that circle has some darkness too—drink, drugs, only now they're offering them to you free. Now you have the chance to really get fucked-up. You know how it is. Make a wrong turn at a party and there's a bunch of people sitting around a table with more cocaine in front of them than you saw the entire time when you were using. I said to myself, Do you want to be fucked-up and think you're having a good time, or do you want to be satisfied artistically and spiritually in another way? I chose the other way.

PLAYBOY: You were lucky. What are the odds of an actor, even a talented one, getting clean after rehab, coming out and immediately landing a movie role as—?

JACKSON: As a crackhead junkie, right. I grew up in the Methodist church, and I pray every day. I believe there's a higher power, a supreme being. God puts you in the places you need to be. So I helped myself, and God helped me to get to that next place.

PLAYBOY: How tough is it for you today to maintain sobriety?

JACKSON: What's it been now, 22 years or something? There's all kinds of shit in my house that I've never tasted in my life, like Cristal—stuff I couldn't afford back when I was drinking. All I'd have to do is walk in the closet, open a beer, and no one would know, but I know that I probably wouldn't stop at one beer. So I drink nonalcoholic beer. I'm not looking for the kick.

PLAYBOY: You were in five movies last year. You've made six so far this year. Is work the replacement addiction?

JACKSON: Golf is. It's the perfect game for only children because the ball sits there, you have a club in your hand, and if you hit it great or hit it bad, you get all the credit or blame. Nobody around you is playing defense. When I play golf with other people, I'm not out there to beat them. I'm out there to beat the course. There's no point paying attention to what other golfers are doing, so I just play as well as I can. That's the only-kid mentality. Golf's perfect for us.

PLAYBOY: Just this past April, your golf swing during a celebrity tournament in Scotland made world headlines.

JACKSON: Yeah, I almost killed two ladies when I shanked the ball on the 18th hole. I hit one of them. It was a bad day. I knew I wasn't going to make the cut, and I was wet, tired, cold and miserable on one of those Scottish, raining-sideways, 48-degree days. I just wasn't paying attention. But I could have been shooting a 63 and that still would have been the one shot they put on the Jumbotron, which they did. My cell phone blew up. People all over the world were fucking with me about that shot.

PLAYBOY: You've helped make Kangol hats iconic, and you design a line for the company. Are you comfortable with the reality that when actors get as major as you are, companies send them lots of swag—things they could have really used when they were broke?

JACKSON: I still need the swag. The majority of the shit I get, I use. I don't overdo it. I don't gouge people. I get free golf clubs sometimes from Titleist or TaylorMade. But I use the golf balls, the clubs, the shoes. I have a sneaker fetish. I admit it.

PLAYBOY: How bad a fetish?

JACKSON: I have hundreds of pairs of sneakers at home. I put the color and style on the boxes so I know what's in there. It looks like a Foot Locker in my closet. It makes my wife crazy. She's got a ton of shit, but she still thinks I have too much. That's her opinion.

PLAYBOY: In a 2012 *New York Times* profile of you, your wife was asked the secret of your 40-year relationship. She answered, "Amnesia." Did that make for interesting discussions at home?

JACKSON: She regrets saying that. We've been together for 40 fucking years. I know what she means when she says something. You have to forget certain shit happened to stay together. You have to act like it didn't happen. Everybody's got excuses for not being together. It's way easier to walk away from somebody than it is to stay with them and deal with the shit.

PLAYBOY: Fame is a powerful aphrodisiac. How do you and your wife deal with

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women coming on to you on movie sets or as you travel around?

JACKSON: I'm not that superfine hot guy who makes those lists of "handsomest men in the world" or "most eligible men." When I was a young actor in the theater, I could put out that certain vibe that says, "Hey, I'm available—who wants this?" There's also a way to turn that off. I don't have it switched on because I don't want to be bothered with the shit that comes with it.

PLAYBOY: Since you're not shy about asking to be in movies, will you talk to [writer-director] J.J. Abrams and George Lucas about bringing back your character Mace Windu in *Star Wars: Episode VII*?

JACKSON: They should figure out a way to bring my ass back from wherever I went when I fell out that window, because you know a Jedi can fall from incredible heights and not die. I'd just come back with a fake hand like Darth Vader and my purple lightsaber.

PLAYBOY: How are your other upcoming movies shaping up—the *RoboCop* remake, the next *Captain America* flick?

JACKSON: In *RoboCop* I play a Rush Limbaugh-type newscaster dude who's in favor of automated policing. I don't know how it is because we did reshoots. But the

director, José Padilha, is a great guy who made two brilliant films in Brazil about cops going into the favela, so it's right up his alley. I'm in a lot of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. It's a good script. Chris Evans and Scarlett Johansson are back, and Anthony Mackie plays a new character they're adding. I worked with Robert Redford on it too, and that was great. As soon as I met him, we started talking about golf.

PLAYBOY: Redford has been directing movies since 1980, but it doesn't seem as though that's a goal for you.

JACKSON: I don't have that directing thing. I don't want to be out there setting up shots all day. I like to act. I read the script and sign the contract. I like hanging out in my trailer watching *Judge Judy* and eating sandwiches.

PLAYBOY: You've yet to do one of those all-star old-guy movies. You know, old guys go to outer space, old guys go to Vegas—

JACKSON: Old guys rob a bank. I don't play my age, but there's also only a certain amount of running, jumping and fighting I want to do now. The one old-guy story I want to do is a great book by Walter Mosley, *The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey*, about a 91-year-old guy with Alzheimer's who is told by a doctor that he can give him all his

cognitive functions back, but he'll die in a week. He does it because he has some shit he wants to get together.

PLAYBOY: You mention Alzheimer's—you've tweeted about it.

JACKSON: I mostly just write inane shit on Twitter, criticizing sporting events more than anything else. But my grandfather had Alzheimer's, my maternal and paternal grandmothers had it, my mom died from it last year, her sister's got it. Because it's around me like that, I'm kind of waiting on that day I walk in a room and don't know why I'm there. I'm going to do all I can to help people because of that, with a golf fund-raiser in London, and I'm also doing a benefit for male cancer. People wear pink ribbons all the time, as if women are the only people who get cancer. Men get it too, so we're going to try to raise awareness. I'm doing what I can.

PLAYBOY: What do you hope people will say about you when you're not around to care?

JACKSON: That I was a hard worker and I generally gave people their money's worth. That's all you want from a movie star. I mean, I'm not trying to change the world. I'm just trying to entertain people.



Dirty Duck by Bobby London

