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MOVIES 4:18 p.m. Wednesday, March 31, 2010

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'Titans' star picks roles with passion

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By Gina Piccalo
For the AJC

Sam Worthington seems a bit over-determined to trump the superstar stereotype. He rode his bike to a news conference at the lavish Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles and sauntered onto a dais wearing a faded Iron Maiden T-shirt and a smirk.

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Legendary Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures

Cast as Perseus in "Clash of the Titans," Sam Worthington changed director Louis Leterrier's whole concept of what the character was going to be.

The 33-year-old Australian then regaled the small clutch of reporters with his salty language and unvarnished attitude about Hollywood, occasionally filling the room with his staccato laugh. Here he talks about living out of his car before James Cameron cast him in "Avatar," his commitment to giving fans their money's worth, and how he fought to change Perseus before he took on the role in the upcoming "Clash of the Titans" remake.

Q: Is it true you lived in your car for a while before all this success?

A: I hit 30. I woke up looking in the mirror one day. Didn't like what I saw. So I sold the [expletive] mirror. Sold everything else. I call it Control-Alt-Delete. I had a great career — don't get me wrong — in Australia. I worked for 10 years. Solidly. I just didn't like the position I was in. So I sold everything to my friends at an auction at my house. It's like that Rudyard Kipling poem: "Risk it all on a pitch and toss and lose. Breathe no word of your loss. And you're a man!" I thought that was quite inspiring. I got in the car and drove and thought something's got to give. Something's got to crack. Little did I know that a man [James Cameron] would come along who could change my life. But I think also when you've got nothing to lose, you've got everything to gain. That was key ... So I put myself in the position where I had nothing. ... I still live the same way. I don't own anything. Still got a couple bags. A bag of books and a bag of clothes. That's all.

Q: After "Terminator" and "Avatar" are you itching to do some intimate little character drama?

A: No. I like to make movies that I would go and see. And I think that's a good barometer on how

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I chose my movies. "Avatar's" given me a lot of freedom. I'm not in this profession to be famous. That's a by-product of the size and scope of the movies I do. You want to be famous; you'll go broke. This job is too hard. And it requires a lot of skill and a lot of passion. So if I'm going to invest six months of my life in something it should be something worthwhile, and hopefully give the audience their 16 bucks worth. That's how I look at the job. ... You get to the point where you play with the big boys, and I want to do big movies.

Q: Has James Cameron shared with you any ideas of the next chapter of "Avatar?"

A: Yeah. He's mentioned many ideas. Even when we were filming he'd bring up ideas. I think with any undertaking and the manpower and time that it takes to make that kind of movie; Jim's got to find the challenge. He's got to push the bar again. He's a man that raises the bar. Dares everyone to jump over it, to have the courage to jump over it. But he's got to find the challenge for himself. ... Jim had an arc for three [films]. [But] we didn't even know we'd get to a second one until it got embraced. The fact that it got embraced so quickly, so amazingly, was mind-blowing for all of us.

Q: "Clash of the Titans" director Louis Leterrier said you changed his whole concept of what Perseus was going to be.

A: I had an idea he shouldn't be a god. Even though he embraces god's gifts in the story. I've got a 9-year-old nephew. That's a terrible message to give to him. That he can only succeed as a god? That's a terrible message for all of us. So I really hammered home hard how [Perseus] should step aside and do it as a man. Then my nephew can go, "If you look deep inside yourself, you can achieve anything."

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