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MINORITY REPORT

Samantha Morton Interview

Samantha Morton knows all, sees all, answers all. Recognized for her convincing portrayal of Sean Penn's mute lover in *Sweet and Lowdown*, Samantha is certainly a talented actress. Why else would Mr. Director himself, Steven Spielberg, ask her to play a pivotal role in his latest sci-fi flick? Ahem, rhetorical. Anyway, we had a chance to speak to the actress at length about *Minority Report*, her previous works, and who would win the 3rd race at Belmont this weekend. Seabiscuit all the way, baby!

Q: How did you wind up with this particular project?

Samantha Morton (SM): They came to me.

Q: That's always nice.

SM: Yeah.

Q: Did Steven say that he'd seen something that you'd done that gave him the impression you'd be good for this part?

SM: Yeah, but there's also a huge amount of work that goes into putting an actress in a role. You know, agents, casting directors. It's an ongoing process, really.

Q: Steven and Tom said that after your first day of shooting, they went behind the set and high-fived each other because you put on this really good performance...

SM: Really? Oh, that's nice.

Q: What was that first day like? Because I think that was the scene where he pulls you out of the goop...

SM: No, no the first scene I shot was just before we go into Leo Crow's room.

Q: Spielberg described you as kind of like a silent film actress. Was that because you didn't speak in *Sweet & Lowdown*?

SM: Oh, that's kind. Maybe it's because I'm quite animated. You know, if it's a silent role, you have to rely on other things.

Q: What intrigued you most about the character?

SM: I just tried to make her believable and not crazy. Not, you know, oftentimes actors get carried away when they're playing people with a gift, or they do kind of a quirky, loony kind of thing. Whereas I just wanted to make her as normal as I could.

Q: I read somewhere that you said you were the "emotional DNA" of the film...

SM: I said that? No, Steven said that. About the character. Agatha is the emotional DNA, because of what she brings out in people.

Q: This film really addresses a lot of scary things that could happen in the future. Is there anything that particularly scares you?

SM: It's not something I've really thought about. I mean, it has, of course, but I've been so busy talking to you guys I've not had a second to think about it.

Q: Do you have a favorite scene in the film?

SM: No, not a favorite scene. I just love the film. It's remarkable.

Q: Anything in particular bother you about working the water?

SM: No, I was really taken care of very well, you know. You kind of have anticipation prior to shooting it..."Will I be able to do this? Will I be able to do that?" But it's fine.



Q: Did you have any issue with the need to shave your head and eyebrows?

SM: Yeah, I had a huge issue in that I wanted to know it was going to grow back!

Q: This is the first really big budget film you've done...



SM: What is the budget?

Q: Like, 80, 90...100 million. How would you compare it to working on all the low-budget films you've done?

SM: My job is the same, whether they've got a hundred million or half a million. I go in and I play that character to the best of my ability. It's the same. The nice thing is craft services, I have to say.

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Q: How much did you know of the story before you got the part? Had you ever heard of the story, or read the story?

SM: Yes, yes.

Q: Was it a story that intrigued you?

SM: Hugely, but also, I think the script is far superior to the book, I really do. Because it's a strange little short story and I think that what they did with it was fantastic.

Q: What were the elements that you appreciated in the script?

SM: The development of the characters. It's funny, you know... especially with Agatha, he's given her, you know, more respect in the film. She's not as abused as she is in the book.

Q: Were you comfortable working with Tom? Was he OK with the choices you were making?

SM: You know, actors, in general, collaborate together. I found him incredibly easy to work with.

Q: The "icon" thing didn't get in the way at all, did it?

SM: No, but you're all there to do a job, you know. If you start thinking, "Oh, this is Tom Cruise," you can't do your job. You cannot think like that. You're just all there to do what you do. Do you know what I mean?

Q: Was there one obstacle you were concerned about?

SM: Not really. If I ever get feelings where I get nervous about something, I don't do the project. I have to feel comfortable and confident with the whole character, what the requirements for the roles are.

Q: In terms of the types of characters you've played, do you enjoy or find more challenging introspective roles like this, or something like *Under the Skin* in which it's more out there?

SM: To me, it's about having the choice to play a person that I think deserves to be onscreen. It's like, you read a book, or you read a script, and you think, people need to know that story. They need to feel that girl's pain, or see something. So, to me, that's kind of my buzz, really.



Q: How about when you step onto a set, how does that affect things? Because this world is pretty much there, this futuristic world. Does that affect your performance at all?

SM: Not at all. The environment... with some characters, of course it does, you have to be completely aware of your environment. But with Agatha, she isn't. You know, she's in the temple and she comes out and she's not seen the world since she was, like, six or seven years old. So, that was, you know, I just had to stay as focused and as concentrated as I could in order to achieve that.



Q: You said Agatha's abused in the film. You also had a very tough early life. Did you use a lot of that?


SM (intensely staring down interviewer): I'm not here to talk about my life.

Q: There are a lot of special effects in this film. When you're watching the finished product as an audience member, are you impressed?

SM: Oh, completely. I mean, on the day, you're there, and you're not thinking about what the cereal box is going to do, anything like that. So, it's like, "Wow, I can't believe... How did they do that?"

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Q: Did you just recently see the film for the first time?

SM: No, I've seen it a couple times, actually.

Q: Do you have a favorite Spielberg film?

SM: Oh, God. I don't know. I'll have to think about that one - I'll get back to you in about a week. There are so many...

Q: In general, do you have an appreciation for science fiction.

SM: I have done, but I appreciate everything, to try. I'm not, like a big sci-fi buff or, you know, completely knowledgeable about it, but I've read some Ursula LeGuin and Robert Heinlen and the likes of.



Q: What was it like working with Spielberg? Was he very inventive on the spot?

SM: He's a complete, kind of, tunnel of some kind of energy. He's got the ability to be so alive and to communicate very well what he needs and wants in a way that feeds you, that doesn't make you feel like somebody's demanding too much of you. He's able to make you feel very confident, and very special... to make you proud. You know, you do the scene and you wait to see what Steven thinks of it.

Q: The scene in which you reveal the future to Tom, about the child... Different people have different interpretations of that. Some see you talking about his child that was missing, and other people say you're talking about the child who is to be born, which we later know is coming. What was your take on it? What did Steven say to you?

SM: I'm not going to talk about that. I mean, obviously, I'm here to talk about the film as much as I can, but some of it's private, you know? Some of it, you want to keep to yourself the moments that you have on set.

Q: Let me ask you a different way...

SM: No, I know what you're asking! It's up to you. It's up to the audience (laughs).

Q: Does Spielberg allow you a lot of leeway in terms of the choices you make, what you bring to the character, or does he have a specific vision for what you're doing?

SM: He does have a specific vision, yeah. But, for me, fortunately, we were on the same track. Sometimes, you come on board a project, and you do something, and it's like, "Oh, dear, I thought you were going to do this or that."

Q: Was there anything you brought to the part that he hadn't thought of?

SM: I don't know, really. You'd have to ask him. As you said, they were pleased, so that was nice.

Q: What happened when you got that phone call saying that you got the part?

SM: I fell down the stairs! I was in Israel, and the phone...you know, my agent phoned and said, "Steven's going to phone you tonight." And I was living in Israel in this funny house, and I had to get to it because it used to ring for just five rings and then it would go to the answer phone (that's British for voicemail - Ed.), and I was, like, please, I can't have Steven talking to the answer phone. So I was running, and I fell. But it was alright - I banged my knee a bit, but I was alright.

Q: Is there any particular type of film you'd like to do in the future?



SM: I'd just like to keep working, really. It's a funny job. And it could all be over tomorrow. People could decide tomorrow that they don't want to put me on the screen any more. You know, you don't have that choice.

Q: What was it like working with Jim Sheridan?

SM: Wonderful. I'm so lucky, having the opportunity to work with Steven Spielberg, Woody Allen, Jim Sheridan...

Q: How did playing silent in *Sweet & Lowdown* affect the work that you do now?

SM: I think that it just helped people see a range in me that they hadn't seen. I mean, people had seen *Under the Skin* and they saw Michelle in *Jesus' Son* and kind of a messed up kind of character, hard-core in that way. And to play somebody that innocent, you know, "Oh, she can do that, too." People need to know that you're versatile, otherwise you don't get the opportunities.

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Q: Can you tell us about *Morvern Callar*?

SM: *Morvern Callar*'s an adaptation of a cult novel in the U.K., that Alan Warner wrote about an ordinary supermarket worker. She lives in a small, town, dead-end, you know it's kind of *Twin Peaks*-y, a bit surreal. She works in this normal job, then she goes home and, Christmas morning, her boyfriend committed suicide. And he's dead on the floor, and he left his Christmas presents... and what she tries to do, and the choices she makes about that. She basically decides to chop up the body and bury it in the woods and sell his manuscript as her own. I mean, very strange character, very funny. And it did really well at Cannes, the reviews were unbelievable, and we won some prizes...



Q: What drew you to that project?

SM: Oh, the role, and Lynn! To work with Lynn Ramsey, my God.

Q: Since taking a big film like *Minority Report*, do you ever worry about yourself losing that "indie edge?"

SM: No, that's not going to happen. I don't think I'm an indie actress, I think I'm an international actress in the sense that I will work on films that appeal to me. And therefore, hopefully, they appeal to a wide range of people. And, you know, some of the films I do that... they don't make much money, or they kind of are sold on a smaller scale, I think they could equally have as much attention if there was money behind them to make them bigger films. But I don't think this film, even though it's obviously a very expensive film, and it has Mr. Cruise in it and Mr. Spielberg directed it, I don't see it as just like a blockbuster. It's a brilliant film in its own right. It isn't just an action film. It appeals to so many people.

Q: Are there any directors you want to work with in the future?

SM: Yeah, just tons and tons. You just hope that they want to work with you!

Q: You didn't have any problems with the glowing electrodes attached to your head?

SM: You know, occupational hazards! But you come into work and your pen doesn't work, or your tape recorder's playing you wrong...we all get little things that maybe do our head in sometimes.

Q: Is this a film you would have seen if you weren't in it?

SM: Yes. Because I read reviews about other films, and I would have read the review. Apparently, the reviews have been very good; I haven't read them yet. But if I was in that scenario, as an audience member...the way I go see films is often by what my friends say or what the critics say. It's not about who's in it or the poster or anything like that.

Q: What's the last good movie you saw?

SM: Oh, I saw *Breathless* again the other day.

Q: The original?



SM: I didn't even know there was a remake. When did they do a remake?
Q: 1985 or '84...
SM: No!
Q: So where do you go from here? Do you have something lined up?
SM: No. So hopefully you guys'll write nice things about me so I can get a job.

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Q: Do you spend most of your time in London, or are you spending time in America?

SM: I love America. I really do. I'd love more opportunity to come work here.

Q: What do you like about it?

SM: The choice you have. You know, you go to the sidewalk, and you've got, you know, a black person, a white person, a Hasidic Jew, and it's all there, and it's so vibrant. I love Manhattan. It's my favorite city in the world. And also, the fact that it's... I get a real culture shock when I come here, more so than I do if I'm in Russia or anywhere like that. You know, just because we all speak English... I think America's very different.



Q: Can you talk about shooting the scene at the mall, and how it worked? Was it complicated?

SM: It wasn't that complicated for me. I think it was just really complicated for the people behind it.

Q: With the margin of error involved in the Precrime system the movie postulates versus the complete eradication of murder... Do you think that's a worthwhile tradeoff? Is that a system you'd be willing to live under?

SM: No, absolutely not. I think that we need to take care of people. I think that mental health is the first thing society needs to look towards, because crime happens for a reason. Crime's a massive, broad spectrum. People commit crimes for so many different reasons. I've not studied law, but certain things that are crimes, you're like, "What?" And certain things that aren't crimes, and then... pedophiles in the U.K. get, like, six months suspended sentence. Judges are letting them walk around and do what they want. It's absolutely sick. Is that justice? No, it's not. And yet somebody, they're being beaten up by their partner for 25 years and they go absolutely crazy in a moment and stab them and are completely remorseful and regretful and get 25 years in

prison. They need counseling. It's a horrific thing that they did, but... you know, it's just so unjust. And a lot of laws in our country are very old, you know, they've been there since 1927 or something like that, and society's changed so much. This needs to be looked into.

We don't look after people enough any more. Everything's about money. I mean, we (England - Ed.) have got the national health system, and even that's pretty poor at the moment, although it's a good thing to have, that everyone's entitled to the same free health care. Everybody. I find it horrific that pregnant women aren't entitled to health care here. Babies die because they don't get seen by doctors. What?

Q: What about the government being more invasive?

SM: I think it's happening more and more. For Americans, it's just hitting home, you know, after September the 11th. I'm not saying that to be rude, I just really think that, en masse, people have just woken up and said, "Oh, gosh, we didn't realize how vulnerable we were." Because, obviously, you're a very powerful nation, and with that comes a certain amount of arrogance. I'm not saying that you're an arrogant nation, but there's a comfort that comes with being powerful, and I think that now, certain things have happened with regard to protecting that.

But I do think it's invasive, anyway. Governments are... they have to be. You can't live in a completely anarchic society.



Q: To turn things 180 degrees, are there any bands you're into at the moment?

SM: I like lots of music. From Patti Smith to Busta Rhymes, you know what I mean?

At this point, Samantha closed out the interview by telling us the exact date of the apocalypse, as well as who is going to win the World Series in 2014...but don't worry, we won't ruin the surprise. Oh, and Frank Samuels of Strausberg, North Carolina? She knows everything, you might as well give yourself in now.

[Click here for more shots of Samantha Morton and Minority Report](#)

Do you know what we are going to be doing in the future (other than drinking ourselves into Chapter 11)? Tell us!

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