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CinemaCon: Dwayne Johnson is 'franchise Viagra,' says director

April 25, 2012 | 8:54 am

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Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson has reinvigorated so many flagging franchises in recent years that his friends in Hollywood have started to refer to him as "franchise Viagra."

"He's created a brand for himself that's unlike any star ever before, and he brings an energy to properties that need it," Jon Chu, director of Johnson's latest film, "G.I. Joe: Retaliation," said at the CinemaCon convention in Las Vegas this week. The Paramount Pictures movie hits theaters in June.

Indeed, the "G.I. Joe" series was in need of what Johnson calls a "creative shift" after 2009's "Rise of the Cobra" received scathing reviews from both fanboys and critics. While the film was a financial success, raking in over \$300 million worldwide, Johnson was cast in the sequel in an effort to help win moviegoers back after the original's poor reception.

The brawny actor has fulfilled the role of the white knight before: He replaced Brendan Fraser in the sequel to "Journey of the Center of the Earth" and helped reinvigorate both "The Mummy" and the "Fast & Furious" franchises.

Still, the 39-year-old actor joked he only considers himself "franchise Viagra" when he's drunk.

"The goal was never to find franchises, go in and take them over," said Johnson, who was in Las Vegas to accept CinemaCon's Action Star of the Decade award. "The first question is, 'Well, can I come in and help elevate a movie?' With this film, it was an opportunity I wanted to grab by the throat and make right. I wanted it to veer off from the first."

Johnson said he was eager for "Retaliation" to have a grittier, more grounded feel. Despite the increased emphasis on physical stunts, Chu says the movie will offer up a more emotional side of its characters -- especially Johnson's.

"I think people will see a whole new face of Dwayne when they get to see him perform some pretty dramatic stuff," the filmmaker said.

"OK, he doesn't shed tears. But he sheds punches."

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--Amy Kaufman

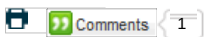
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Photo: Dwayne Johnson accepts the Action Star of the Decade award at CinemaCon. Credit: Chris Pizzello / Associated Press

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