

Ridley convince me I could play the part,” he says. “I knew the psychological engine of it would be fine, but what I needed to know was, would I look silly in a gold skirt? And the answer to that is yes and no,” he laughs.

At first he felt awkward in the costume, but the director had him shave his head and put on the heavy eyeliner, which tied it all together. Duly convinced – and comforted by the fact *Exodus* is based on a biblical story, rather than an historically accurate account – Edgerton “dove in”.

“Personal issues, whatever they are, they’re always going to be there,” he says. “Work helps you take a vacation for a moment, or at least part of the day. But f*ck, I had a great time. [Scott] is such a special man. The other intoxicating thing was getting to go toe-to-toe with Christian.”

The low point Edgerton alludes to, in August last year, came around the time his engagement to Bali-based fashion designer Alexis Blake was reportedly called off. Photos of the pair together began to emerge in late 2012. Over the years, Edgerton has shown a steely reluctance to speak to the press about his romantic life, including his relationship in the early 2000s with Olympian Cathy Freeman and subsequent links to actors Robin McLeavy and Isabel Lucas. However, in an interview earlier this year, he said of his relationship with Blake: “We’re done. You can underline ‘done’ if you like.”

What prompted this uncharacteristic, albeit brief, comment?

“Why did I say that?” he asks. “Because it’s true.”

There’s a slightly wounded edge to the way he chose to describe the end of the relationship. Was he sending some kind of message?

“Ah, maybe I was, maybe I wasn’t,” he says, before continuing, in a brighter tone: “No, we’re all good! We’re friends and it’s all fine. But the reasons and the minutiae of why that engagement didn’t turn into the thing it usually turns into next is for our private information and nobody else’s business.”

Fair enough. He also turned 40 this year. A milestone. What’s next then?

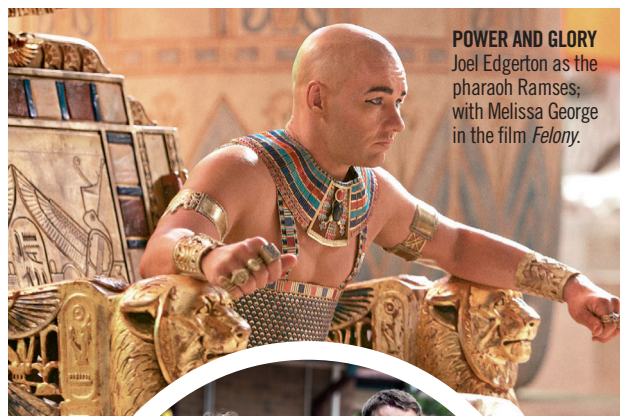
“Forty-one,” he replies, not missing a beat.

Does he want a family? Is he single? “Look, there are things I don’t really talk about,” he says genially. “I’ll say this: my brother [filmmaker/stuntman Nash] recently got married and has a little family situation going on and I’m very envious of that.”

Looking back on his own childhood, Edgerton says he had an “incredible life” growing up on acreage in Dural, NSW.

He recalls being an attention seeker as a child; playing sport and doing plays mainly to gain praise from his parents, particularly his dad, Michael. Edgerton once said that winning a director’s approval fulfilled a need in actors to be loved. Today he tells me he believes that need exists in most actors and pushes them towards a performance career. But, given his stable upbringing, where did his need come from?

“The idea of my dad thinking I was a great soccer player, I remember the feeling of that, and I still to this day feel good when I impress my parents,” he says. “It’s weird,



POWER AND GLORY
Joel Edgerton as the pharaoh Ramses, with Melissa George in the film *Felony*.



“WHAT I NEEDED TO KNOW WAS, WOULD I LOOK SILLY IN A GOLD SKIRT?”

I’ll never stop being that way. Even after they’re gone, I’ll still be thinking, ‘I wonder what my dad would have thought of this?’”

If *Exodus* is as successful as it’s predicted, he’s about to find himself in a whole new stratosphere of fame.

“I’m a little bit nervous about it, to be honest,” he says. “I’ve made baby steps towards where I am now.”

Edgerton has been kicking around Hollywood on and off for more than a decade. He went from the Australian TV series *The Secret Life of Us* to scoring a small

role as Luke Skywalker’s uncle in 2002’s *Star Wars: Episode II* and then *III*. More recently he’s appeared in the acclaimed Aussie film *Animal Kingdom*, 2011’s *Warrior*, 2012’s *Zero Dark Thirty*, and last year as the bullish Tom Buchanan in Baz Luhrmann’s glitzy, much-buzzed-about adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*.

Even so, he’s never felt the full glare of the spotlight: “It was never ‘Hey! You’re 22 and now you’re a f*cking movie star!’ It never happened to me,” he agrees. “And, frankly, I would have loved that. I’d be lying if I said I wanted it to be the way it is.”

Now though, no matter what happens, Edgerton says he’s grateful to have had time to acclimatise.

“Maybe *Exodus* will push me into a new place? But I think it’s pretty scary. I just worked with Johnny Depp [on *Black Mass*, a film about a Boston mafioso turned FBI informant] and the level of fervour that surrounds Johnny is a different level altogether.”

After back-to-back films, the self-described workaholic is taking a break. He laughs that he’s an “idiot”, though, because his version of a rest is to direct his first feature. He’s been slowly building up to it; he has a few

short films under his belt and some experience behind the scenes on bigger movies. He wrote and starred in *Felony*, which was released this year. He also co-wrote and appeared in the 2008 crime thriller *The Square*, directed by his brother. But this next film, *Weirdo*, about a guy forced to face his past, will see him go for the trifecta; he’s directing, writing and has a small role.

“If I like the experience and I don’t get laughed out of town, I imagine my future would be making a movie of my own every four or five years,” he says.

The careers of actor/directors Clint Eastwood and Ben Affleck provide him with a roadmap for his ambitions. “It was like [Affleck] was in the movie doghouse for a while and then he wrote and directed his way out of it,” he explains. “In a very classy fashion, too.”

This sense of control appeals to Edgerton, as well as the mental challenge of directing. “As an actor, you use a certain amount of your brain, but it’s really a lot of waiting around,” he says. “I just want to give it a try... Ridley didn’t make his first movie ’til he was 40, so there’s hope for me.”

And with that, Edgerton is off. No doubt heading to a Hollywood power lunch, where he’ll find himself nursing a kale juice, cursing his ill-timed health kick. **S**

Exodus: Gods and Kings is in cinemas on December 4.

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