

RAY PARK

EPISODE 1'S BREAKOUT VILLAIN LOOKS BACK ON HIS WHIRLWIND **STAR WARS** SUMMER, LOSES HIS HEAD OVER **SLEEPY HOLLOW**, AND GETS HOPPING ON **X-MEN**. ARE AUDIENCES FINALLY READY TO HEAR THE SITH LORD SPEAK? BY SCOTT CHERNOFF

Sold-out action figures, plentiful T-shirts in the schoolyard, those unmistakably evil eyes looming over all Episode I merchandise—in 1999, the message was clear: Darth Maul—the high-kicking, Jedi-killing, straight-outa-hell Dark Lord of the Sith—was a star.

For Ray Park, it was the screen debut he had always dreamed about. An international martial arts champion who broke into the movies as a stunt performer on the 1997 sequel *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, Park, now 25, was recruited by Episode I stunt coordinator Nick Gillard to help choreograph the film's final lightsaber duel, and ended up nabbing the role of Darth Maul in the process.

When Park, a lifelong *Star Wars* fan, gave us his first-ever interview a year ago (*Star Wars Insider* #42), he told the *Insider*, "All my life, I've always wanted to be in films. ... I really want to take off, and hopefully I might have a future in the film industry."

One year later, we're happy to report the future is now. Since making his debut at Denver's *Star Wars* Celebration—where his martial arts demonstrations and question-and-answer sessions played to standing-room-only audiences—and wowing the world with his powerful portrayal of Darth Maul in Episode I, the Scottish native has been working fast and furious.

Reuniting with Gillard, as well as actor Ian McDiarmid (Palpatine), Park played the Headless Horseman in Tim Burton's blockbuster hit *Sleepy Hollow*. While Christopher Walken played the soon-to-be-headless cavalry officer when he's got a head, it was Park who performed the character's impressive swordplay and fighting—everything but the horse riding, which was done by another stunt specialist. The *Sleepy Hollow* work was reminiscent of Maul in aspects ranging from the fighting to the fact that we don't hear Park's voice. (To meet Maul's voice actor, turn to page 28.)

But Park will be making a bold step forward with his next film. In the big-budget superhero movie *X-Men* (based on the classic Marvel comic), Park plays the villainous Toad in a cast that also includes Patrick Stewart, Sir Ian McKellen, Halle Berry, and Oscar winner Anna Paquin. Scheduled for release in June from 20th Century Fox and director Bryan Singer (*The Usual Suspects*), *X-Men* will mark Park's largest role yet—as well as the second summer in a row that Ray Park is one of the bad guys in one of the big flicks.

The flurry of work—and the increased exposure *X-Men* will bring him—go a long way

