

"THE MORE YOU TRAIN, THE LONGER IT TAKES TO GET A CERTAIN DEGREE. YOU DON'T JUST GET IT EVERY YEAR—IT COULD BE EVERY FIVE OR EVERY 10, SO YOU HAVE TO STUDY VERY HARD."



ceed in that and maybe it will take me on to other things. I thought, if I just get to a high level and try to win as many championships as I can, I might get discovered. That was my only thought, option, or guide. I knew that one day, I'd get into the movies."

His vision was clear, and right on the money. All that training and competing began to pay off when Park landed a gig as a stunt double in the martial arts-laden sequel *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, causing him to drop out of a world championship competition in 1996. "I was in Asia for four months training with my master in my martial arts," he recalled, but the movie "took priority." His introduction to filmmaking couldn't have come too soon, as only a month after finishing his first movie, Park received a fateful call from Episode I Stunt Coordinator Nick Gillard.

"I went down to see Nick, and he said he's got this fight he has to rehearse and show George Lucas," Park said, "but he said it could also help me because they're looking for someone to play Darth Maul, like a stunt person, an action person. So for a week we rehearsed this fight that Nick Gillard wrote, and on the last day we shot it and then he showed it to George. From there I had a call from Rick McCallum, and he said I had the job."

Park said he tried hard not to dwell on his own rather intense *Star Wars* fandom. "*Star Wars* was the first movie I saw when I came to London," he remembered. "I had all the figures and the *Millennium Falcon*. My younger brother was into *Star Wars* as well, so both of us were really into *Star Wars*. But when I was on the *Star Wars* set, I tried not to think about that or get so excited. I just kept my feet on the ground and got on with it."

"But when I would talk to my parents, they would remind me of what I was like when I was younger. I wanted to be Han Solo, and my brother wanted to be Luke. Han Solo seemed to be more getting in there, and he got the girl and everything. Maybe it's because I was older than my brother and Han was older than Luke as well, so my brother and I sort of portrayed that."

They also staged many at-home lightsaber battles. "I quite liked all the lightsaber fights, and all the mystical stuff behind it. I had one when I was younger, but it was one of the old ones with a big bulb and a big plas-

tic tube. When you turned it on, it didn't make a noise or anything. I always wished I had the real one from the movies."

For Episode I, that wish was granted, as Park discovered that as Darth Maul, he would have the honor of debuting the new—and deadly—double-ended lightsaber. "I could spin it around and give them moves they wouldn't expect," Park said of his weapon. "I had more options and could be more creative. Nick Gillard was fabulous," Park said. "I had never met him before, but he let me be creative in my moves."

Nevertheless, choreographing, rehearsing and perfecting the elaborate fight sequences of *The Phantom Menace* was hard, grueling work. "It was like training every day," he said. "We were there from the morning to late evening, working on different stunts or acrobatic moves, just getting them so they're 100 percent, so you can do it with your eyes closed, so you knew the moves inside-out. And the timing of it—you knew where the other person was going to be, you could read them."

Park said the extensive rehearsal helped him develop a strong rapport with cinematic sparring partners Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor. "The last fight that Ewan and I did together was really fiery," Park said. "We both really went for it. He fed off me and I fed off him. The energy we had was really good, and also with Liam."

But while Park's years of Wu Shu training guaranteed his confidence in pulling off the spectacular fight scenes, the novice actor, who hadn't acted since a high school play when he was 15, couldn't help but feel a little intimidated when it came to playing scenes in such accomplished and acclaimed company.

"I did question myself a bit, because it was my first time," Park said. "But I had confidence in myself, so I just thought I'd give it a go, and if I did it wrong then someone will tell me. I just thought, 'Well, I haven't got much acting experience, so I have to go on my ability.' The whole thing was a challenge, but it wasn't something that was out of my reach. I knew that if I'd never done something before, I could work on it. I knew I could do it."

Still, Park confessed it took him a few days to get completely into character. "At first I wasn't sure how the character was supposed to be played," he said, "but George seemed so cool about everything that he made me more confident. The more we did it, the more I felt I knew how the character was supposed to be, and no one questioned it. And the more

