

"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."



I did it, the more buzz I got out of playing the character. I was Darth Maul!"

Park said he knew early on that playing Darth Maul effectively was indeed within his reach: "Rick said to me, 'Ray, I really want you to play this character as a bad guy, and you've got to be mean and nasty, and I want you to scare everyone—no remorse. You have to be so cool.' Then from looking at the storyboards and reading the script, I thought, 'Yeah, this is my character. I can do this.'"

The actor, who couldn't come across as more mild-mannered and soft-spoken when he's not playing a remorseless Sith Lord, said his confidence was aided by his martial arts training. "It has to do with the Wu Shu style," he said. "There's a certain arrogance to the style as well, because you have to be very focused and strong. Your eyes have to be piercing."

He added, "I think it's also from spending most of my time in the bathroom, acting out different things in the mirror, when I was younger—I think most kids do that."

In addition, Park freely admits he got a powerful assist from Creature Effects Supervisor Nick Dudman and Chief Make-Up Artist Paul Engelen, who together crafted a look separate from Darth Vader but equally original. Said Park, "People on the set would get scared when I had the lenses in my eyes and the make-up, and my teeth. To me it was nothing—I was just looking at me in the mirror with the make-up on, but to everyone else, you could see it in their faces. They couldn't look at me in the eye when I was speaking to them."

Like many *Star Wars* actors before him, Park had to learn to adjust to spending the morning in the make-up chair. "At first," he said, "it was about two and a half hours, and they were still playing about with getting everything right. But it got down to about an hour and a half—an hour and a quarter to get all of the make-up on my face, and then taking time for contact lenses and all the final things before going down to the set. I would be there first thing in the morning and I'd be tired, and because Paul is really good, I'd just fall asleep without realizing it. It was so soothing with the make-up and music playing in the morning, that it'd just send me to sleep. But it was easy for him when I was asleep in the chair."

Park also shaved his head for the role, a sacrifice he was happy to make for the sake of the production. But the actor said that when he

showed up for the final pick-up shots with his full head of hair, some of his colleagues didn't realize it was him. "It was like the family was united," he recalled, "and it was really nice to see everyone. But everyone was used to seeing me with no hair, and my hair had grown back, so a lot of people didn't recognize me."

But Park was still happy to be on a set he called, "a kid's dream. My parents came down to the set to watch me," he continued, "and my dad was like a big kid again. He couldn't believe it. He likes *Star Wars* as well—we had the original videos when they first came out. We used to watch them all the time, like it was a part of the household, really. I have to thank my dad, because he gave me the guidance to do certain things."

Park said the whole *Star Wars* experience has only re-enforced his dedication to building a successful career as an actor. "It's all made me think I really want to get into acting more, do more movies, and use my martial arts more," he said. "I don't see myself playing Hamlet or anything like that—I see it more on the action side, using my skills. But I'm open to anything. I just want to get a bit more training and experience in acting, and be ready for anything that comes along. I never want to get so big-headed about anything or have my head up in the clouds. I want to keep my feet firm and just get on with everything."

But that's going to be difficult when Episode II is released on May 21 in North America. Having grown up with *Star Wars*, Park knows the power of what's about to be unleashed. "Sometimes I don't think about it," he said. "I just try to be normal about everything. But it's people around me who say, 'Wow, man, you're in *Star Wars*!' My cousin can't wait. He's about seven and he's really into *Star Wars* big time. He's got all the figures, so I promised him I'll get him one of my character," he said, adding, as if still trying the name on for size, "Darth Maul."

So far now Park is laying low. He's utilized his Wu Shu skills in a few British television commercials, was scheduled to play a pirate in an Edinburgh, Scotland, stage production of *Peter Pan* over December and January, and plans to head for China before the Episode I premiere, "just to keep my skills sharp."

But for the most part, he's biding his time until the premiere of the movie that has already changed his life—and musing on the memories of his whirlwind entrance to the *Star Wars* universe. Some of his favorite recollections involve just hanging out on the set with friends he made on the Episode I set, like Fight Arranger Andreas Petrides and Floor Runner Nathan Holmes.

"Even when we were resting between shots, we'd be talking about it," Park said. "Andreas is really into *Star Wars* and the mystical, spiritual side of it. We were on the same level, really, and we would say, 'What would it be like if you could do this with the lightsaber,' or, 'Imagine in Episode II or III if you could do this or that.' It was a bit like kids. We would be dreaming, fantasizing."

But for Ray Park, the fantasizing about *Star Wars* will soon give way to a new reality. Ray Park plays Darth Maul, and the Force will be with him. Always. ☺