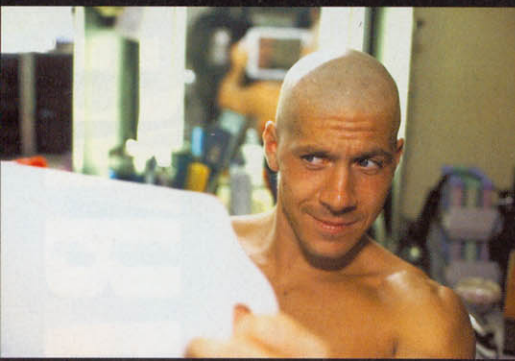




[LEFT] A shaved head was only the beginning of Ray Park's transformation into Darth Maul. Next came the makeup and costume, intensive fight choreography with Assistant Stunt Coordinator Andreas Petrides, and finally studio filming that combined Park's athletic prowess with his acting ability. Photos by Giles Keyte.

in London. While on a date, he and his girlfriend strolled by a pub where a group of drunken young men stumbled out and started heckling Park. "They were chasing us down the street," he remembers. "They had their minds set on beating me up. It came to a point where I was defending myself against a group of guys with knives."

The fight turned out nothing like the ones the teenager had seen in the movies. "I had practiced a non-contact version of Wushu, which doesn't allow physical fighting. But all the training and the physical fitness certainly helped." At one point he was stabbed in the neck when two of the guys were holding him back, which left a big scar that remains visible to this day. "Luckily it was winter, and I had about three layers of jumpers and a thick jacket on." Park walked away from the fight with only minor injuries, and his girlfriend was not hurt. The incident nonetheless left a strong impression. "It was a very scary experience that I would never want to go through again." He says he has learned to use this harrowing experience in his acting, possibly giving him the edge to play villains like Darth Maul convincingly.

"I never thought I'd get a part in a big movie," Park confides. "I was a shy kid with a cockney accent. I only dreamt about Hollywood."

FINDING THE SITH WITHIN

While doing odd jobs like coaching gymnastics and martial arts, Park auditioned as a stunt person for the 1997 film *Mortal Kombat 2: Annihilation*. "I did everything on that movie. I put boxes together, was the crash-pad man, and advised the actors on their fight scenes. That movie was my apprenticeship." He was working as a stuntman, even though he wasn't part of the union—but nobody else in the stunt register could do what Park did.

After the shoot was over, Park was ready to pack up his stuff and go live in the Far East. "I didn't know anybody in the movie industry, but after *Mortal Kombat 2*, everything started to happen."

Park's reputation as a martial artist preceded him all the way into the production offices of Lucasfilm and to Stunt Coordinator Nick Gillard. Rick McCallum and his production team were looking for an actor for the role of Darth Maul, the demonic apprentice to Sith Lord Darth Sidious, but they couldn't find anybody with the athletic skill the role required. "This person had to elevate Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor's performances," McCallum recalled



Photo courtesy of Internet Movie Database Inc.