

How did you approach playing Darth Maul? Did George Lucas give you a lot of ideas and guidance?

I asked him at the beginning and he gave me a brief insight into what the character should be. Plus, when I first came onboard, I saw the storyboards and the script, and I talked to a lot of other people on the film.

The character really came out within the rehearsal of the fights. It sort of came from me thinking about how I would play the character, listening to other people, and sort of using a bit of my attitude in [martial arts] competition and the way I perform. I gave George a certain look for the character and he loved it, and that gave me a basis to how the character should behave. I basically tried to not to show any feelings, and just tried to project a sense of terror.

It was very much like how I compete in Wu-shu. In Wu-shu, you show spirit through the eyes and head, without showing your emotion. You've got to show a good technique and good spirit, but don't go over the top and start doing noises or grimacing.

How much freedom were you given with your portrayal of Darth Maul?

I didn't have my hands tied at all. Because of my martial arts background, and because the stunt co-ordinator and I got on really well, he let me be free in the movie and show what I could do. We had a really good relationship. I really enjoyed working with Nick on that.

Were you ever worried about following in the footsteps of another legendary *Star Wars* villain, Darth Vader?

No, not at all. I was more sort of self-critical of my own skills and what I could do. When you're working on a film, you're never sure how it's going to turn out. I just concentrated on my work, and we had the fights down to being like a dance.

In my own heart, I wanted Darth Maul to be better than Darth Vader in a way. The film is set in a time where you can show what the Jedi and the Sith Lords can really do – and Darth Maul has a double-ended lightsaber. So if you just sort of jump around doing basic moves, you're wasting the weapon basically.

Speaking of the fight scenes, how did you rate your screen foes, Ewan McGregor (Obi-Wan Kenobi) and Liam Neeson (Qui-Gon Jinn), as swordsmen?

It was really good working with those guys. The style of fighting I did with Ewan was different to the style of fighting I did with Liam. Ewan picked up really fast. Liam is much taller, much bigger and he had his own preferences on what he wanted to do. He didn't want to jump around and wanted to do moves he was comfortable with.

I've got to say that those guys were really nice. We sort of rooted each other on. I would try and gear them up and just encourage them to play around a bit. They were very friendly and supportive.

