

15 MINUTES



PHOTO OF WILL FIGGINS AND DAUGHTER SARAI BY JOSH COZINE

Ready for battle

A lifelong *Star Wars* fan, Will Figgins remembers seeing the original trilogy in theaters as a kid. Ever since, he's been drawn to it, almost as if by some, ahem, force. In fact, back in the early 2000s, Figgins worked with LucasArts (*Star Wars* creator George Lucas' company) on the popular *Star Wars Galaxies* video game. Also a fan of martial arts, Figgins learned jeet kune do, a style of fighting developed by Bruce Lee. Figgins says he was taught in the 1990s directly by several of Lee's students. He went on to open his own studio, Black Dragon Academy in Paradise, in 2004. More recently, Figgins has been looking to combine his martial arts skills and love for *Star Wars* by adding a Japanese sword-fighting class to his academy (at 1184 East Ave. in Chico post-Camp Fire) using replica lightsabers. In doing so, however, he found that most of those for sale were either low quality or extremely expensive, and decided to do something about it. Finding a proprietary supplier in China, he opened Rebel Sabers at the start of the year. There, he offers several styles of dueling-quality lightsabers with sounds. Check out his online store at rebelsabers.com.

How do your lightsabers compare to others?

My main focus is more towards affordable dueling sabers. I do have some \$450 ones, but they're like the movie replicas. My "initiate series" starts at \$89 and can handle light dueling. Other brands ... go for \$500 to \$600. The \$25 Disney ones you can get from toy stores, I've gotten into some serious wars with those with them not breaking, but they also don't light up as much. They're kind of

short and really lightweight, and so trying to do real techniques won't really work.

What will your lightsaber class be like?

It's called SaberFit. The idea with it is you'll be learning real Japanese traditional sword fighting with lightsabers, but it's more in line with getting in shape. So it's high intensity most of the time and like a cardio class. I ordered everyone's sabers, and then they got stuck from the outbreak [of coronavirus], so we're gonna start that as soon as they get here. They're starting to ship now, so I imagine we're probably gonna start the class in April.

Original vs. prequel vs. sequel trilogy? Weigh in.

The originals are the gold standard—obviously—even *Return of the Jedi* with its more kid-friendly lightheartedness. I was a kid then, so it was all great. Then the prequels upped the ante on that. As an adult, when [*The Phantom Menace*] came out, I was definitely like, eh. ... All the lightsaber battles and Jedi stuff was awesome, and even the pod racing. But then, just everything else was kind of like, eh. The next two, [*Attack of the Clones*] and [*Revenge of the Sith*—both got better. I think Disney was playing it safe with *The Force Awakens*. It was good. It was just *Star Wars* rehashed, but it was good. Then the next one [*The Last Jedi*] was horrible. There's some good things about it, but just as a movie, it's horrible. I haven't seen the third one [*The Rise of Skywalker*] because of that, but from what I hear they kind of redeem it a little.

—JOSH COZINE



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