

MOVIES

Matt Sloan and Aaron Yonda discuss Chad Vader Episode 8
Interview with series creators covers season finale, future plans

Kristian Knutsen on Monday 05/14/2007 10:05:37.

Eager fans of [Chad Vader](#) are finally getting their fix of the popular short video series produced by Madison-based [Blame Society Productions](#). Some six weeks after shooting wrapped, creators Matt Sloan and Aaron Yonda released the eighth episode of their saga to general online audiences on Friday, May 11. This season finale of the grocery store-set story featuring a climactic confrontation between the title character and his nemesis, as well as sets up a second cycle of episodes.

The wait was due in part to a long series of negotiations between Blame Society and YouTube, the Google-owned online video behemoth on which *Vader* first became a hit swiftly after its debut last July. These talks concluded last week with the Madison filmmakers joining the company's recently announced revenue sharing program for a limited number of content-producing partners. Under the terms of their deal, Blame Society will be compensated by YouTube for publish their work to the site, the amount of which will be based upon the number of views their creations receive. Filmmakers will be able to upload anything, as long as they are done so on an exclusive basis for a brief period and at the frequency of three per month.

"It's a perfect world, with total creative freedom," says Yonda.

Sloan and Yonda sat down with The Daily Page a couple of weeks ago for some slices and cannoli at Supreme Pizza on East Johnson Street to talk about the season finale of *Chad Vader* and their reflections on the success of the series over the last year. This interview and Episode 8 (on which I worked in the crew) follows below.

The Daily Page: How did you approach making the season finale for *Chad Vader*?

Yonda: We definitely went into it with the mindset of trying to make it special. We wanted grand music special effects and stunts and had a lot of gracious help from donors who really made this episode possible. They made it possible for us to do something special.

Such as the choir in this episode's soundtrack?

Yonda: Craig Johnson arranged the people to be in the choir and Andrew Yonda composed the music. This has been the biggest music episode, too, as well as the most important. It really needs to bring people through the episode, and bring out their emotions...

Sloan: ...and maintain the excitement and momentum of the plot...

Yonda: ...and really cap off the season. We want our viewers to see something really amazing, and hopefully tune in for the second season.

What are you thinking about for the second season? There's the foreshadowing of a corporate takeover, for example.

Yonda: A corporation is definitely going to take over the store.

Sloan: We see a hint of Jeremy's potential at the end, so I think he is going to develop more as a character. He does something at the end that demonstrates he is a little more savvy than he lets on.

Yonda: He's got potential, a lot of potential.

Sloan: We also want to do more with Weird Jimmy. He's definitely a fan favorite, so we'd like to develop his backstory a little.

Yonda: We don't know what else is going to happen. We've got a lot of ideas, as well as plenty to discuss and figure out. I think it's going to be a lot of fun.

How much money have you made from the series? How do you finance your work?

Yonda: It's worked out that we've made enough off the sales of DVDs and T-shirts to pay for the budget of *Chad Vader* and the website, but not enough unfortunately to pay the cast and crew. This is where we want to go next. We're not making a profit off of it. If George Lucas ever asked us, we could just tell him it goes back into the budget. We've also had donors help us, and that has been enough money to keep things rolling.

Sloan: There has been other stuff too. We've had donations, we've done some commercial work for YouTube and a couple of corporate clients, and we're just starting to get speaking engagements.

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Yonda: Hopefully these production deals will come through, and that will be enough money to support ourselves and to pay everybody else involved.

How has *Chad Vader* impacted your career?

Sloan: It's given us a career, a legitimate career, a presence in an industry that's very hard to break in to. It's great that there's this new back door that people can use to get involved.

Yonda: What else is cool is that people in the industry are interested in other projects we want to do, not just *Chad Vader*. We've had pitch meetings where people have been really excited about other ideas we've had, and now we're in the process of finalizing those deals.

What will you be working on over the next couple of months when *Vader* is on hiatus?

Sloan: We just finished shooting another episode of *Morning Radio Mysteries*, and we have plans to do another episode of *Fun Rangers* soon. In a lot of the mail we get, we're delighted that everyone says they're favorite creation of ours is something different. That's great to hear. Not everyone is calling to say, "*Chad Vader* is great, and you should just make that." People want to see other stuff we make.

Yonda: Our output is going to increase drastically now too, because once we've got some of these deals wrapped up, we're going to have to go into production big time. We'll be making three videos a month for one person, and two or three for the other, so we're going to have a lot more work. But we'll have a lot more fun, so we'll actually be able to do that more easily. We'll just be working whenever we can.

You have been criticized for the series, particularly with regards to its *Star Wars* connection. What is your response to such comments?

Yonda: I think we've had other successes. We've had *The Life and Death of a Pumpkin*, which was featured on YouTube and has had over a million downloads across the Internet. It's played at tons of film festivals and won awards.

Chad Vader is just in the spotlight, partially because its *Star Wars* element gives it more of a hook. I know we're not a one-trick pony.

Sloan: We wouldn't be doing an eighth episode if we were. People wouldn't still be interested.

What kind of reactions have you gotten from your peers in comedy or creating short films and online video?

Sloan: We're pretty tight with the Channel 101 and Acceptable TV community.

Yonda: One friend from Acceptable TV really liked *Morning Radio Mysteries*, and said it was one of his favorite things we've done. That was cool.

Sloan: They're really nice, and also really honest. They'll tell you if they don't like something you did -- which people have -- and that's refreshing. You always want constructive criticism and people to be honest, and those guys are really good at that.

It seems that *Chad Vader* is keeping the *Star Wars* franchise in the public eye at a time when it is otherwise largely quiescent, with the feature films now complete and the planned television programs still many seasons away in its thirtieth anniversary year. Where do you think your series fits into the cultural phenomenon that is *Star Wars*?

Sloan: I think anyone who has created such a franchise, it's in their best interest to encourage it to flourish on its own and propagate itself. I think this is that kind of situation.

You have mentioned incorporating nods to *Star Wars* in the series without overdoing it. How do you walk this tightrope?

Yonda: I think we'll continue to have references in the second season.

Sloan: It's not just direct references, but the feel of the series, like the wipes, the sense of adventure, the way music interacts with the scene, things like that.

Yonda: There's always going to be a lightsaber and people using the Force, so there's going to be elements of *Star Wars*. It's just that the direct quotes from the movies can't go on forever, as we've already used most of them.

Sloan: I get the feeling we're going to be doing less of that, because by Season 2 we've already established our own world. It's got its own depth and its own complexities, and I think we less and less are going to need to make those nods to *Star Wars*.

Yonda: If we can find a place to use them, though, we will.

Sloan: It's always fun to integrate them in a cool and original way, one that you won't expect and doesn't seem forced or stupid. We will always look to do that.

What are you talking about in your pitch meetings? Will it be more comedy? What directions do you want to head?

Sloan: I think we definitely want to keep doing comedy. It's what we do, and what we do well. We definitely want to make more series and

more things that people like. We've love to make another *Chad Vader*, another thing that hits really big and is really popular.

Yonda: The way we're doing *Chad Vader* right now -- unfolding the plot over this series of short episodes -- is almost like doing a full-length movie. It's just done in shorter spans. It's such an effort to make a full-length movie over the course of three or four years of your life, and you don't know if it will be successful or not.

What we've done is started the movie with Episode One. People really liked it, so we thought, okay, well let's keep making the movie. It's like we showed people a preview of what the whole movie is going to be about. Now we're up to episode eight. Eight time five to six minutes apiece is not a full length movie, but there's still more to come.

It's a great way to tell a story. Start it, find out if people are going to like it or not, and gradually tell it. It really seems like the way to do it.

Sloan: We definitely would like to do more sketches. It's important to have a wide range of stuff. That's the great thing about a lot of these people we're talking to about making content for them. They're not saying, "We want you to make *Chad Vader*," or "We want you to make something like *Chad Vader* where you take another iconic figure and put them in an unusual place." They want us to keep doing the things we want to do, which is the only way to do it.

How does working in Madison impact your creations? Are you thinking more about moving closer to the entertainment industry as your work grows more prominent?

Sloan: It's great. Madison has a lot of potential that I don't think many people realize. In a lot of ways, it's a big film town. There's not many film productions going on all the time, but it's a town that supports things that are film and video related. We just want to stay in that supportive environment.

Yonda: There are many talented people around here who just didn't want to move to L.A. or New York, or they have a reason to stay, and are looking for something to do. We can hopefully pave the way for entertainment to be made wherever you are, rather than always being focused on specific cities.

We get our inspiration from being here. I'm sure we could go out to L.A. and be successful...

Sloan: ...but it definitely would be taking a step back. It would be like starting over. Why start over when we can just keep building the momentum we have right now?

***Chad Vader* rose to prominence hand-in-hand with last year's explosion of online video. Are you exemplars of this phenomenon? How do you think this kind of entertainment will develop?**

Yonda: Usually, it's really hard to get unfiltered ideas and humor out into the mass culture. Everything is watered down and meets five or six minds along the way and just gets sort-of disturbed. We want to take our vision, be there the whole way, and make it wholly ours without a whole lot of influence from other people.

Sloan: I think if we are seen as exemplars of online video or whatever, then that's a really good thing. You can say what you want about our sense of humor, and our writing or whatever, but we definitely put a lot of work into what we do. I don't think you always see that on the Internet. Sometimes you can have a guy standing in front of a webcam and doing something silly and it's great, but you don't want to see that a hundred times.

People also want to see quality products, and I think that's what we work towards with everything we do. I think if a lot of people start doing that, then places like YouTube are going to be a really great source for entertainment.

Yonda: That's what will build a lasting medium...

Sloan: ...and keep people coming back.

The *Chad Vader* season finale officially premiered on Friday, April 27, when it was screened with the first seven episodes at the Willy Street Co-op in a celebration for that primary location of the series. Persons purchasing the [new DVD](#) from Matt Sloan at the [Wis-Kino spring Kabaret kick-off](#) last Thursday also got an early look at the episode in advance of its official online release early Friday morning. [Episode 8](#) follows below.

This release marks the beginning of a two month hiatus from *Chad Vader* for Blame Society Productions. Though May and June, Sloan and Yonda will be focusing on their other series, including *McCourt's in Session*, *Fun Rangers*, and *Super Shooter* (with a new episode of the latter created in the Kabaret last weekend.) They plan to resume production on the second season of *Vader* in July.
