



Life is hard for Chad Vader, the younger, less charismatic brother of Darth Vader, who is the day shift manager of a grocery store.

"Our plans to make this station fully operational on Saturday may be jeopardized!"

EPISODE 1



In this episode, Chad finds a new apprentice and goes on a date. Then tragedy strikes!

"Strike me down with your hate, and claim your refund."

EPISODE 2



Major changes for Chad.

"Commander Wickstrom, take your squadron and find that dog. Do not return without it."

EPISODE 4



A tipsy Chad Vader faces a lameness crisis. He gets help from an unexpected friend.

"I love chocolatinis."

EPISODE 5

# May the Farce Be with You

*A long time ago, in a grocery store far, far away ...*

BY ERIN HUEFFNER '00

Life is rough for Darth Vader's little brother.

He has the black helmet. He has the deep voice. But Chad Vader doesn't command the Galactic Empire. Rather, he's struggling as a day shift manager at Empire Market, a small grocery store.

Chad may have less charisma than Darth, but he has millions of fans, thanks to the Madison filmmakers behind *Chad Vader: Day Shift Manager*, a YouTube sensation that George Lucas has honored with an award.

More than just another *Star Wars* parody, each five-minute episode features the challenges Chad faces at Empire Market: insolent employees, an unrequited crush, a demotion to night shift manager, and a general lack of respect despite his light saber and telekinetic powers. But Chad has one thing going for him — a loyal apprentice in Commander Wickstrom, played by UW grad Paul Guse '01.

"He just does these ridiculously stupid things in defense of Chad," says Guse of his character. "Probably things that aren't in Commander Wickstrom's own interests. He really wants to be like Chad. Which makes sense, considering the little helmet that he wears."

The *Chad Vader* saga, with eight episodes so far, was created a year ago by Aaron Yonda and Matt Sloan of Blame Society Productions. The idea came from a friend who thought it would be funny to place Darth Vader in a supermarket and film him on the job.

Many members of the cast and crew are from the Madison area, and the series was filmed during off hours at Madison's Willy Street Co-op. Much like Darth Vader's character, portrayed in *Star Wars*

by actor David Prowse and voiced by the famed baritone James Earl Jones, the part of Chad is a dual role. Yonda wears the costume on camera, while Sloan lends his impressively accurate imitation of Darth Vader's ominous voice. Everything about *Chad Vader* is well planned and thought out, giving the feel of a Hollywood set on a small scale.

"It's always a treat to work with those guys," says Brad Knight '93, who plays Randy, the store manager. "They run a very tight ship. On the flip side, Matt and Aaron are very open to changes on the fly. They have a rare combination of [being] extremely organized and very creative and flexible in the moment."

It wasn't long before *Chad Vader* went viral. Buzz about the series spread exponentially as word got out about the funny videos posted on YouTube, an Internet site where people can upload homemade films. Within the first year, Chad Vader had millions of views. Among the growing legion of fans is the Jedi Master himself, George Lucas, chair of Lucasfilm and creator of the thirty-year-old *Star Wars* space epic. Last May, Lucas chose *Chad Vader: Day Shift Manager* as his favorite fan film of the year from a record number of entries in the *Star Wars* Fan Movie Challenge. The first episode won the competition's grand prize: the coveted George Lucas Selects Award. *Chad Vader* was honored, along with other films that received official selections, at the *Star Wars* Celebration IV awards ceremony in Los Angeles.

"It's been a lot of fun," says cinematographer Tona Williams MS'97, PhD'06, of the making of *Chad Vader* and ensuing publicity. "You can't buy this kind of advertising."



BOB RASHIHO

Despite the acclaim, most of the cast and crew of *Chad Vader* are in it for the fun, which is fortunate, since the project is low budget. Where some might shy away from the challenge of producing such an endeavor with virtually no funding, the cast and crew have often pitched in their local connections to help the cause. For example, Knight is a member of Madison's Union Cab Cooperative, a credential that came in quite handy one day.

"We actually used one of our cabs in an episode of *Chad Vader*," says Knight. "I was the connection that made that one happen. It's the only time I know of when someone other than Aaron wore the Chad Vader outfit. I had to wear it while driving the taxi, since I had the taxi permit."

The actors may be unpaid, but they've certainly received a lot of attention. *Chad Vader* aired on the cable

network Spike TV after winning the Lucas award. In February 2007, the *Star Wars* spoof was featured on the VH1 cable show "40 Greatest Internet Superstars." And *Chad Vader* was featured on ABC's *Good Morning America* last year. It's all been a blast, says Guse, a Drake & Company recruiter in Madison who has enjoyed some unexpected notoriety from working on the series.

"It's really weird that people recognize me," he says. "One time, this guy came up to me and said, 'It's fantastic to finally meet Commander Wickstrom.' He didn't even ask me if I was the guy from *Chad Vader*. He just knew."

**W**hat's next for Chad Vader? The creators have capitalized on the antihero's popularity by selling T-shirts, coffee mugs, and a DVD of the entire

**The *Star Wars* spoof that features Darth Vader's "little brother," Chad, has hit it big with 18 million online views so far. From left: Brad Knight, Paul Guse, Aaron Yonda (Chad Vader), Tona Williams, and Matt Sloan film on location at Madison's own Willy Street Co-op.**

**Left: Chad Vader faces many challenges as day shift manager — undisciplined employees, cranky customers, unrequited love, and a rival out to get his job. But he survives it all, thanks to his Napoleon (or should we say Darth?) complex.**

series, all of which helps offset the costs of production. A second season is in the works, but as of press time, the release date was up in the air. Until then, viewers can chuckle at Chad's bumbling attempts to rule Empire Market online at [www.blamesociety.net](http://www.blamesociety.net). 🍌

Writer Erin Hueffner '00 has watched every episode of *Star Wars* at least a thousand times. She has always wanted a pet Ewok.