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Our First Time: *Chad Vader*



A creepy basement journey in Season Two.

By Scott Gordon January 5, 2010

Sometimes we may act like know-it-alls, but even The A.V. Club has holes in its Madison knowledge. So periodically we'll grab our fanny pack and camera (or in this case, fire up our DVD player) to check out some of the city's more famous attractions and events, and then report back on what you may or may not be missing.

The Kids In The Hall had this sketch once called "Premise Beach," in which Kevin McDonald and Dave Foley boogied around in the sand tossing out one-note sketch ideas, more pleased with themselves than any human being ever really should be. Maybe the segment helped them cool off from the frustrations of writing sketch comedy, but it could've predicted the age of viral-video comedy, where novelty comes to beat itself to death. At least, it pops up in the back of *The A.V. Club's* head whenever people start talking about whatever's new on YouTube or even FunnyOrDie.com.



That doesn't give you a fair mind for watching the Madison-made comedy series *Chad Vader*, in which Darth Vader's little brother tries to darkly Jedi his way through the workaday life of a supermarket manager in Madison. Still, considering the attention *Chad Vader's* two seasons have earned in town and out, and the fact that the show's Season Two DVD recently arrived in the mail from creators Aaron Yonda and Matt Sloan, we decided it was time to give the show a thorough look.

What to expect: The main running joke of the show is how Chad's cape, mask, and imperious manner clash with the bright mundaneness of the Empire Market (instantly recognizable as the Willy Street Co-Op). And yes, he can choke people with his mind, though he clearly hasn't abused the Force to the fullest extent: During Season One, Chad (Aaron Yonda, but voiced by Matt Sloan) battles with pudgy weasel Clint (Matt Sloan) to regain his position as day manager. He also loves chokolatinis: "They are my favorite little playmate. They don't betray you!" Still, *CV's* five- or six-minute episodes form broader (if understandably simple) story arcs, so yes, the show does more than just milk the bucket of "what if's such a character always offers. *CV's* writers have a bit of a challenge on their hands: They have to keep up this premise, move a story ahead while making us care about the characters, all while keeping the ho-hum atmosphere of a supermarket in the close background. Throughout, it's never quite clear whether Chad is entirely sympathetic, or just a pain-in-the-ass doofus with potential to destroy planets.

What to watch for: The supporting characters are where the show's writers really get a chance to play around. When the plot gets a little grave or involved, Empire Market stiffs like Lloyd (co-writer Rob Matsushita) pop up to bring the show back to its goofy and lighthearted origins. After Chad's new laser checkout system causes a can of beans to explode in a corporate manager's face at the beginning of Season Two, Lloyd just says, "Beans!" and walks away with a goony giggle. In other words, this may be a wacky universe next door to fan-fiction, but it's still focused on comedy at the end of the day.

A little voice-over announcement in Season One, Episode Two has the same effect: Chad's just challenged an unhappy customer (Damon Butler) to "strike me down with your hate, and claim your refund" when an announcement comes over the supermarket's speakers: "Chad Vader to aisle five for vomit cleanup. Chad to aisle five for vomit."

Highlight: For *The A.V. Club*, at least, *CV*'s best when it goes past goofy and gets hallucinatory. Our biggest laugh in this show came when Madison comic Sean Moore abruptly popped up as the Marshmallow Bandito, who doesn't seem to pose much threat beyond cackling and spitting marshmallows. Moore looks like he's enjoying the character's innocent idiocy enough that he might crack up a bit himself. At about the same point in the story, Chad's boss Randy (Brad Knight) gets booted over to the night shift, where he falls under the sway of Baby Cookie, an evil talking baby doll who wears nothing but shoes and a little mask.

But it's Craig Johnson, as hunched-sideways janitor Weird Jimmy, who really helps keep the show's sense of reality on edge on a more regular basis. He shares a genuinely creepy relationship with his mop, and with everyone else, probably because he's always screeching out things like, "What I do before noon would make a grown man cry and skip his breakfast!" Part of *Chad Vader*'s comedic steam comes from the hints that there are plenty of things in its universe stranger than Chad Vader. In this installment of the *CV* "training videos," it's clear that Jimmy is too much for our helmeted protagonist. (This is one of several Chad offshoots outside the main series, including "**Chad Vader Does RiffTrax**" and **Auto-Tuned Chad Vader**.)

Impress your friends: Sloan and Yonda's production company, Blame Society Productions, is responsible for many other acts of clever video-mutation. Our favorite right now is *Thor's Kitchen*, a cooking series hosted by the hammer-wielding Norse god himself (Brad Knight). Dionysus (Sloan) lingers drunkenly and insults Thor's cooking, while Hercules (Dan Davies) quests for such rare ingredients as "malted wolverine retina."

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