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He's Not the Heavy; He's His Brother

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By Ryan J. Foley
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MADISON, Wis. -- Chad Vader gets no respect, but he sure gets plenty of laughs.

Poor Chad, younger brother of the evil Jedi knight slayer Darth Vader, is stuck managing a grocery store in a series of short films that have become an international hit thanks to video-sharing sites YouTube and MySpace. The six wacky episodes created by Aaron Yonda and Matt Sloan have been viewed more than 9.5 million times on those sites alone.

The popularity of Chad's misadventures has allowed Yonda and Sloan, both aspiring filmmakers, to quit their jobs and negotiate a contract with a major media company they won't yet name.

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Aaron Yonda, left, and Matt Sloan prepare another Internet film. (By Andy Manis -- Associated Press)

Chad Vader is not strictly a "Star Wars" parody. The filmmakers say they wanted to build a universe of their own and avoid such cliches as "Luke, I am your father."

Instead, the episodes, which run about five minutes each, feature Darth's little brother being demoted, facing derision from colleagues and struggling to win over a crush -- even though he wields a light saber and can move objects with his mind.

"He doesn't command the respect that Darth Vader does. He has the powers, he could be great, but he's missing something," says Yonda, who transforms from a 34-year-old metal shop worker into Chad when he slips into his Supreme Edition Darth Vader costume.

Chad Vader has conquered the Internet very quickly. Yonda and Sloan previewed their first episode to a small group at a Madison coffee shop last year and were nervous when they got few laughs. They made changes and submitted it to a monthly film contest in Los Angeles and won.

YouTube started featuring the episodes and fans quickly began e-mailing them to friends. ABC's "Good Morning America" debuted their fourth episode and VH1 will feature Vader among its top 40 Internet superstars in April. Fan mail has poured in from around the world, including Tokyo, where Chad Vader was featured in a film

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The quality of the films has won over fans. Yonda takes 10 minutes to don the replica Vader suit, bought for \$600. Sloan, 33, does the Vader impersonation so well that LucasArts recently hired him to record Darth's voice for a new videogame. The two came up with a catchy acoustic version of "The Imperial March."

They say they plan to do two more episodes -- which take as long as 11 hours to film and cost up to \$1,000 apiece -- to finish the "first season" of Vader, and then film a second eight-episode season.

Sloan said the contract being negotiated by their talent agent -- Dan Shear of William Morris Agency -- will be with a major Internet site to create a new series. The two have also been in meetings with NBC and Cartoon Network executives to pitch ideas.

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