

## Wanted: Saber Fighting

By [Kevin O'Flynn](#)

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"Darth Vader," one commentator [wrote](#) Tuesday, "could soon be on the board of BP" and an image spun into the mind of the man who led the Death Star being quite at home among the men who drilled for oil in the Gulf of Mexico.

But the Vader in question is not the iconic man of cinematic, husky-voiced evil, but the husky-voiced Dark Lord of the Kremlin, Igor Sechin. Vader is apparently Sechin's nickname, for sartorial rather than evil incarnate reasons perhaps.

Nevertheless, today seemed a good time to get light saber lessons at [www.saberfighting.ru](http://www.saberfighting.ru).

"Star Wars" did not make it to Soviet cinemas so local viewers only got to see it on the big screen in 1991. For the showing, two local artists made four special new [posters](#) — rather wonderful if surreal reinterpretations of the "galactic western," as it was called. The posters now go for up to \$3,000 on eBay.

One commenter remembers watching "Star Wars" in Akademgorodok outside Novosibirsk in 1991 and how it was the only film at the time that was dubbed by different voices rather than

having the whole film spoken over by “that depressing guy.”

The Sechin-Vader nexus is not the first comparison of Russian politicians with “Star Wars” characters. The satirical television show “Kukly,” or “Dolls,” had what was supposed to be the first Russian parody of the film in 2001 where they cast Putin as ... Luke Skywalker. By “Star Wars” logic that makes Sechin his father.

The episode was a parody of American-Russian relations with lots of domestic politics thrown in. So you have Darth, supposedly Colin Powell, strangling Berezovsky in his telekinetic way. Later in the episode, Luke/Putin also strangles Berezovsky — just to make sure, probably.

Saber fighting, which is fighting the “Star Wars” way but without the deadly laser aftereffects, apparently came to Russia in 2000 and is now, the Interregional Federation of Saber Fighting’s site says, an official sport although it goes under the somewhat disappointing name of “art fencing” in the Sports Ministry’s books. I suspect none of those dreaming that they are Luke or Han tell their friends they are art fencing.

There are some photos of two kids saber fighting in Kirov — one with a bright red saber, the other bright blue. Both sabers spread a circle of vivid light on the snow. In the training videos at [www.saberfighting.ru](http://www.saberfighting.ru), they only use painted swords but say they use lit-up ones for special occasions.

Saber fighting looks like choreographed fights from old “Robin Hood” films in these videos, somewhat less nimble Errol Flynn’s swashbuckling, which is what the “Star Wars” saber scenes were to a certain extent. None of the saber fighters look like they could take on Darth Vader.

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