

## Monsters Ball

by Felicity Loughrey

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On a chilly December evening the queue of Brooklynites snakes around the block. Skater dudes, club kids and punk rockers are shivering in their vintage Pumas not for the latest New York music sensation, but for the chance to see a rabbit and a few streetfighting vegetables take on evil Dr Cube and his super-minions.

Imagine a live version of Jackass-meets-Godzilla-meets-World Wrestling Federation, and you'll get an idea of what Kaiju Big Battel (sic) is all about. In Kaiju - Japanese for 'mysterious beast'- four rival factions of foam costumed, breakdancing contenders vie for world supremacy. Heroes include American Beetle, Dusto Bunny and Silver Potato. There are also Rogue Fighters such as Kung-Fu Chicken Noodle - who recently killed Club Sandwich at the Brooklyn show - and lanky, menacing insects from Team Space Bug.

The Kaiju monsters rarely divulge their names, ages or day jobs. Although in *Mugshot* magazine, hip-hop Mc Akrobatik revealed he was part of the troupe. "Yeah, he's one of our performers," confirms David Borden, Kaiju's Boston-based general manager. "He came by [our studio] and we gave him a supporting role. When he's not doing hip-hop tours he comes along with us."

Back in 1995, Borden's brother Randy, a student at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, was making Japanese-movie monster costumes for a short film. Before the flick was made, a friend asked him to take part in a Halloween performance at Boston's Revolving Museum. The monsters wrestled and crushed cardboard props and proved a big hit with the audience. New characters were created and gradually the act began to involve music and merchandise (see the Kaiju website for T-shirts, fridge magnets, monster remnants and Dr Cube g-strings). Randy convinced David, who had experience managing live rock events, to come on board as general manager.

Since then Kaiju performances have taken place in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. They've made the news on CNN and Fox and MTV did a special coinciding with the launch of the Kaiju DVD, Terebi Sento. In February this year they released a book, *Kaiju Big Battel: A Practical Guide to City-Crushing Monsters*. Right now they're packaging their Manga-inspired madness into a cable TV show.

When I first saw Kaiju it was one of those eye-popping-out moments," says director/musician Liam Lynch, famed for 2002's slacker gimmick anthem "United States of Whatever". "For most of my life I've longed to see a can of soup kick a sandwich's ass, as well as a breakdancing potato. Kaiju is the perfect culmination of all my rock and nerd desires - sci-fi, ass-kicking, silly fun, supreme evil and lovable characters I can worship."

Godzilla's city block-smashing antics are generally held to represent Japan's nuclear angst after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Kaiju phenomenon has provoked discussion on post-September 11 US politics. "It's east to take in all the spectacle slack-jawed and drooling," Joshua Seidner wrote in *V* magazine, "but the thing is Kaiju closely mirrors our own social and political climate."

"It's a little more multi-faceted than regular wrestling," says Borden. "There's the cartoon violence, the Japanese packaging, the big costumes. But the bottom line is: people like monsters."