

## **Monster Wrestling: Performance art presentation showcases pop cult**

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Imagine, if you will, a giant sandwich battling a cup of soup to the death. Or a monster from outer space spewing toxic acid over a break-dancing baked potato.

Imagine such things, not on the page or on the screen, but taking place before your very eyes, so close that you are, in fact, struck by the mayonnaise spewing from an open wound on the sandwich.

Such a thing is not a dream, not a hoax, not an imaginary story. It is very real and I am here to say I have witnessed it. Every once in a while you hear about one of those million-dollar ideas so brilliant that you wish you had come up with it yourself. Such an idea is *Kaiju Big Battel*, which fuses Japanese monster movies, wrestling, and super-hero-esque pop-culture mayhem in a live-action spectacle.

The brainchild of a bunch of Boston art students, *Kaiju Big Battel* is a multi-media spectacular. ("Kaiju" is Japanese for Monster, "Battel" was a misspelling that was too funny to change.) Live shows include wrestlers in startlingly clever and original (not to mention sturdy) foam monster suits wrestling (complete with aerial moves) among cardboard buildings. That's right. They destroy buildings.

Shows are held at concert venues, and an announcer, Loudon Noxious, keeps up a running commentary of hysterical proportions, while video screens show the action as it unfolds and also hilarious interstitials and ads. (One such ad is for Midori no Kaiju Meat—it seems after the death of one gigantic monster, his tons of flesh were turned into jerky for other monsters.) Rock music, recurring characters (both human and Kaiju—Japanese for monsters), and storylines that continue from show to show make the whole spectacle a night of tremendous entertainment.

While much of the fun comes from wrestling-story-telling conventions—many of the monsters are divided into camps or posses which are always feuding, and a shot at the title is worth any amount of lying or cheating—it's the giant monster element and the zany humor that puts it over the top. On a recent night in New York City, I was witness to the return of Kung Fu Chicken Noodle (a giant can of soup brandishing a cleaver) against Unibouzu (a radioactive sea urchin). The combatants entered a cage full of cardboard buildings and proceeded to rampage across them in a savage rumble.

Also on the card that night: Dusto Bunny (a giant Easter Bunny with a dust buster) versus Gomi-Man (a toxic pile of trash). But the big storyline of the night was Los Plantanos, two plantains from south of the border. (The costumes consist of plantain suits over camouflage cargo pants and trainers.) News alerts throughout the night made it look as if the popular duo was turning bad. Could it be? Indeed, during a fan appreciation dance contest, Los Plantanos turned on the fans and beat them up. Oh, no! It was true! Suddenly, there were, not two, but four plantains in the ring. The bad Plantanos were revealed as CIA imposters who were trying to ruin Los Plantanos' reputation. Luckily, good triumphed, but not until after a four-man brawl.

The next match was a tag-team battle: Sky Deviler and Mota Naru vs. American Beetle and Slo Feng. Sky Deviler and Mota Naru are from Team Space Bug, a gang of giant intergalactic insects. (It's one of the conceits of the show that, even though the monsters are just normal-sized guys in suits, in reality, they are giant monsters the size of buildings.) American Beetle, a skinny guy in a red, white, and blue spandex suit wearing an insect head teamed with Slo Feng, who, it is confusingly explained, is from Sweden. Since so many tag-team matches descend into cheating, an ingenious method of keeping things real had been devised: In one corner of the Danger Cage, a giant anvil hung suspended by a pulley, while in the other heavy steel pipes were similarly hung. Each team member who was not "legal" in the ring would hold onto a rope. Should he let go to illegally help his teammate, the weights would come crashing down! Needless to say, before the night was over, there was *plenty* of cheating, and the crowd got to witness an anvil (made of foam) crashing down on a space bug.

The night's biggest match saw Silver Potato, the champ and "heroic" face of the squad, up against Hell Monkey, a flaming red, horned ape. Silver Potato wears a bulky silver-foil suit but is still able to bust loose in the ring with break-dancing moves. (He also had a beautiful human girlfriend to worry about him on the sidelines.) While our hero looked as if he was going to triumph, at the very end all heck broke loose, when Dr. Cube's posse showed up.

Dr. Cube is the most popular Kaiju, a human in doctor's scrubs with a cube for a head to cover his hideously scarred face. Cube is evil, as in eeeeeevil, and even gives out tracts at every show, urging folks to "Join the ever increasing and all-powerful Dr. Cube's posse." On this occasion, Cube's minions—misshapen experiments made from dead bodies—ganged up on the Potato and stole the belt from him, giving it to Hell Monkey. Evil had triumphed! It was a travesty.

I first encountered Kaiju at last year's Wizard World Philly Show. The minute I saw their gimmick—men in monster suits wrestling—I knew it was sheer genius. I've been to every Kaiju show in NY since then. (New York and Boston are Kaiju's usual stomping grounds, but this year's they are taking their show to the West Coast and points in between.) At the first show I went to, I managed to get right up to the Danger Cage, when Kung Fu Chicken Noodle ruthlessly skewered Club Sandwich with his own toothpick, resulting in a spill of "mayonnaise" on all who were too close. (Luckily, I had worn wash-and-wear clothes, which is always a good idea at Kaiju shows.)

At the next show, we were witness to such marvels as a slug from outer space taking 15 minutes to get from the locker room to the ring—and arriving just in time to make the pin—and an overweight American Beetle somehow being transformed in a box of Lucky Charms and battling a Leprechaun. (I'm not sure exactly what was going on there, to be honest.)

It's hard to describe how clever Kaiju really is. Studio Kaiju, which puts together the shows, has a complete vision, from the Japanese style newscast videos during the events, to the impressive engineering of Napalean, the biggest monster costume, a long-necked cousin of the Loch Ness monster which squirts the audience with water at inopportune times. Kaiju merchandise includes everything from videos to underwear—"Danger" thongs—and based on what I'm seeing, it is catching on with hipsters across the Eastern seaboard.

The wrestling isn't the greatest—although how good can you be in a 50-pound monster costume?—but where else are you going to see someone in a monster costume climb to the top of a 20-foot high chain-link cage and jump? Those kids must be crazy, whoever they are. (I've yet to see anyone who is inside the costume, although I've received word of a friend's roommate cousin who used to wrestle as a Kaiju.)

Between the popularity of Japanese monster movies, American style wrestling, and general pop-culture insanity. It's a wonder no one ever thought to put it together quite this way before. Where Kaiju Big Battel is going to end up I have no idea—maybe a Saturday Morning Show, with Doctor Cube introducing cartoons while carving up minions? But I suspect you haven't heard the last of them.

Kaiju will be back at this year's Wizard World Philly and putting on a show in town. Needless to say, they get my highest recommendation!