

Piledriving Godzilla: Kaiju Big Battel

by Justin Kovalsky

Newtype Magazine, March 2004

Japanese pop culture is evolving at an alarming rate. A recent article in *Time* magazine claimed that despite Japan's economic decline, its popular culture stands to rise above the ashes and claim a place as the hippest, most relevant on the planet. Our readers may know this, hopefully even outside the microcosm of anime and manga. Certainly, the East Coast-based creators of Kaiju Big Battel know it. They also know how to smash things up the good ol' fashioned way - while dressed like Mothra's nut-job American cousins.

An assortment of junk culture quirkiness, Kaiju Big Battel was the brainchild of Dave Borden in 1994. Originally an art project turned ploy to perform with friends and break as many things as humanly possible, KBB soon evolved into a unique breed of kaiju (Japanese monster) professional wrestling. Touting a plot revolving around the universal struggle of good and evil, a real life ring, tongue-in-cheek commentary and a fully realized cast of characters, Kaiju Big Battel live matches have gone off in New York City, and a full line of merchandise, from T-shirts to punk rock pins, is available online. In September 2003, the first DVD was released in the States, comically titled *Terribi Sento*, and in February 2004, a book was published chronicling the exploits and stats on the Kaiju Big Battel cast of characters (hit www.kaiju.com for more info). And what a cast it is.

Whether the blue collar chaos of a can of martial arts soup, Kungfu Chicken Noodle; the nefarious nuttiness of the king of the space bugs, Uchu Chu; or the menacingly evil caricature-of-cute-as-commodity, Dr. Cube, there's no lack of inventiveness or understanding of the pulsating Japanese pop culture current in the KBB heroes and villains. These are characters you can love, hate and dig for purely self-indulgent, insane reasons. But where does all this come from and where is it headed?

Kaiju Big Battel falls in with a unique tradition Stateside. In underground hipster culture, whether indie-rock, graffiti or skateboarding, tastemakers have long recognized some of the wacky, cool things in Japanese pop culture. KBB continues in this tradition by incorporating US underground rock bands, monsters and slick J-pop design aesthetics into their live shows and marketing. For example, on the DVD, the indie-rock band Piebald gets a music video, complete with the Kaiju Big Battel crew causing havoc to their tunes. But the question is: Can KBB cross over into a larger market?

From a pure entertainment perspective, the answer is likely yes. And with recent exposure on MTV and MTV2, people are taking notice of this wacky conglomeration of parts. The DVD release packs in far more than monster suit wrestling matches (though these are awesome). From a J-pop music video starring the break dancing, back-flipping superhero Silver Potato, to parodies of Japanese-style TV commercials boasting KBB wrestlers and severely off-kilter comedic devices, KBB has a lot to offer -and hopefully there's a lot more to come. A Dr. Cube action figure or KBB anime anyone?