

KAIJU INTERNATIONAL WANTS TO
TAKE OVER THE WORLD WITH
WARRING RUBBER GIANTS, POP-
CULTURE KITSCH, AND A HEALTHY
DOSE OF BIZARRE HUMOR

WWE MONSTER WRESTLING!

BY CAMILLE DODERO

DESPITE THE GEOMETRIC implications of his surname, Dr. Cube isn't the slightest bit square. Actually, he's insanely brilliant, a walking embodiment of knife-like intellect wrapped in powder-blue scrubs, rubber gloves, and a stethoscope tie. A former University of Oxford medical-school student, Cube is the kind of self-proclaimed mastermind who distances himself from the masses by addressing other people as "humans," prefers isolation to interpersonal interaction, and long ago snipped the tightrope between genius and madness before ever trying to navigate it. And so far, eschewing the tenets of social responsibility has served Cube well: at 27, he's already poised to take over the world—that is, the world of Kaiju International.

Kaiju, which means "mysterious beast" in Japanese, is a Boston-based monster-wrestling league that stages full-scale matches, contests, and tournaments. Influenced by Japanese anime, World Championship Wrestling subplots, and the kitsch of



STEEL MATE: Makun No Kaiju goes for the kill at Kaiju's first steel-cage match ever, held this past October.

clashed monster-movie-classics like *Ultraman*, Kaiju cultivates a sense of wonder that includes early monsters like the giraffe-sustained Dino-Kang, alien helicopters like Space Big, and chicken-buzzards like Dr. Cube.

Kaiju also houses an air of mystery and a desire to keep its legacy inviolable, which is why Dr. Cube agreed to grant an interview only via e-mail. "We're really trying to distance ourselves from the character," says David Birkley, PH guy for Seattle's Kaiju and brother of one of the studio's founders. "We really want the characters to speak for themselves."

Cube himself has other reasons. Explaining why he does only e-mail interviews with the press, he says, "I prefer speaking to humans on a one-to-one basis. Humans tend to think and to communicate in such an incredibly slow pace."

But communicating with Cube is worthwhile: his responses illustrate his meticulous detail, the dry humor, and the baroque imagination involved in this reptilian wrestling federation.

Like any prodigy, Dr. Cube came unexpectedly. He began as a "critiker" and has accumulated a gallery of quotes, cars, cars, birds, and "black boxes of Truck and Drive." His aesthetic tastes tend toward the lightbulb; he calls classical music "the ultimate expression." He cites Howard Hughes, Jim Michael Vincent, and the

Bananasplit Man as his heroes. Asked where he lives, Cube explains that his independent wealth allows him to reside in a renovated mansion in the Boston area—but being the mysterious fellow that he is, he won't divulge the precise location of his compound. "The complex is totally wired," he brags. "I can charge my hands and have my car pool automatically cleaned." Picked to reveal his first name, Cube scratches. "Do you have trouble understanding the concept of first name and last name? Doctor is the first name. Cube is the last name. It's quite simple if you would take a minute to think about it."

Cube is plainly dismissive of sci-fi's archetypal mad scientist: he disdains popular monsters that seemingly borrow supporting Kaiju characters, such as the batlike Cyclops named Hell Monkey. He's also a surgeon whose Dad complex scores a 12 on the one-to-10 scale: he wields a butcher knife instead of a scalpel, fraternizes with soaked victims instead of nerves, and when queried about his credentials, answers strongly. "Many impressive degrees grace the walls of my laboratory." Finally, he's a goof on the inside: perceptive, humorously-literate intellectual. Asked to identify the most disgusting part of the human economy, he quips, "The mouth."

So far, Cube and his cohorts have wrestled only in Massachusetts, at venues like Davis Square, the lobby of the Museum of Fine Arts School, and Fitchburg State College. But like its arch-rival Dr. Cube, Studio Kaiju wants to be bigger, better, and grander. And now, in a pop-culture climate where Vince McMahon is the poor man's Bill Gates, Kaiju just might have a shot at ruling the world.

THIS DIDN'T all happen overnight," says Timothy Sarason, a former Museum of Fine Arts student who's been active in Kaiju since 1997. "Kaiju has evolved. It started as kids in art school who all had this common interest [in wrestling and kitsch] and decided to put on a spectacle." According to Kaiju lore, the first so-called spectacle unfolded on Halloween in 1994 at



ALIEN VS. DEMON: Uncle Chu the Space Bat kicks Hell Monkey, one of Cube's diabolical creations.

UCHU CHU,
THE SPACE BUGKUNG-FU
CHICKEN SOUP

MIDORI NO KAIJU



OYO NARU



DR. CUBE

Kaiju evokes the World Wrestling Federation without the gratuitous T&A, Pokémon without the cloying childishness, and Godzilla with a sense of irony.

Boston's *Kaijuring* Miyamoto, and featured characters like the *Arctus* Cannon in massive point-and-click disposable cannon, *Power Ranger*-inspired *Ampl*, and *Midori No Kaiju* ("a greenish terror lizard" whose height is listed as "73 Osaka City Blocks"). "The group did a couple more shows, got a good response, so they kept going," Saraceni recalls. "And then it gained more interest, more people joined, and the older people left. Now, we're on a second generation."

That second generation transformed *Kaiju* from a wicked-out amateurish hobby for a handful of art-school students into a mammoth live show with thousands bawling in the Boston underground. "At first, we never thought of a show as A to B, beginning, middle, and end, like a play," Saraceni says. "Only within the last year or so did we start thinking of our events as complete shows with cohesive plots, rather than just a string of separate sketches."

As the sketch behind *Kaiju* came to replace matches between big, mean monster attack attention, but once the necessity of wearing rubber gloves was off, the audience's enthusiasm was high. "The minute you see four matches with goofy costumes, it's just the goofy costumes," says Saraceni. "We realized that the viewers didn't understand who was wrestling whom. There were no consequences of the matches, no real reason why a big sword-wielder would be cloying someone out in the head."

So these days, when the character named *Cube* Sordich — two slabs of white bread with lettuce rings — whacks someone on the noggin with a prehensile skull, there's actually a reason for the beating. And when *Dr. Cube* stalks *Super Akuma*, a bipedal

bioengineer who sold his soul to the devil for "death," as Saraceni says, it's because *Super Akuma* chastised the *Kaiju* chastisingly for from the square-headed physician and tried to kill the trophy on eBay.

The bioengineer isn't the only thing that's improved. "Within the last year or so, we've also stepped up the business side," Saraceni explains. Specifically, stepping up the business side means hiring a full-time marketing, accounting, scheduling, and public-relations jack-of-all-trades, which for a loosely challenged group like *Kaiju* came in the form of PR guy David Borden.

"They needed help setting it up as a business," Borden explains. "Before then, they didn't really do anything besides sending out, like, the press kits, and selling the videos at the shows." Now *Kaiju* actually has a small enterprise that offers merchandise online and at live shows: T-shirts, trading cards, lunch boxes, wall clocks, pins, stickers, hand-held printed games, magnets, videos — even hot sauce named after one of *Cube*'s lovely monsters.

And within the last few weeks, *Kaiju* has consolidated its forces by moving from four locations into one, a studio space in Jamaica Plain with ample storage, room for construction, and a second-floor office that Saraceni kiddingly calls "the Headquarters Hideout."

When I first took into the Headquarters Hideout, or, Studio *Kaiju*, the black-clad Saraceni — who is qualifying as a builder, designer, and driver, has been busy preparing the skeleton of the steel cage that'll be used in the next *Kaiju* "Big Battle" — greets me. It's immediately obvious that this sleek, second-floor office is an unusual place: one of the first things I notice is a dry-erase board, with the words "surgical masks" scrawled in blue marker.

Aside from scripting the actions of *Kaijuring* sketches, *Cube*, Saraceni and his colleagues work every day to create a physical and topical realm that evokes the World Wrestling Federation with-

do for the spectacle.

Besides wrestling, *Kaiju* also features other sorts of spectacles. Spectacles like 40 pounds of *Arctus* piled on a table. Spectacles like hip-hop MCs who rap at between matches and also announce the action. Spectacles like a group of where you could get grunted up like a wrestler. "Girls in hot pants and dudes in bandanas who would grunt you up if you wanted to," Saraceni explains.

KAIJU'S NOT about being cool — *Kaiju*'s the most precious thing that you could ever see," Borden says. But so much so that Borden says, *Kaiju* is cool. At its last two live appearances, it shared the stage with indie bands like the Explosives and Cave-In, and both events drew in-crowd hip audiences of local rockers and artists. As the press release for *Kaiju*'s latest video, *Mayhem in the Arctus III*, reads: "This Boston-based pop phenomenon hasn't sold-out events, making hypotes fight for standing room only."

And while underground rock is definitely important, *Kaiju* says more. "We're not short on ideas," Saraceni says. "We're just short on money to make those ideas happen."

Saraceni tries to explain the diversity of *Kaiju*'s demographic this way: "It's weird — you'll have college kids, older people, and then you'll have 40-year-old parents bringing their young kids to their shows. Plus, we're really fortunate to have a good mix of males and females. Because it's really fun to go to a wrestling show and the whole audience is for, angry kids with *Long Black* shirts."

And *Kaiju* Big Battle doesn't see itself as a WWF knockoff. "We don't want to be just a wrestling imitation," Saraceni admits. "We couldn't make an imitation. And we wouldn't want just strictly wrestling fans. We kind of grow for high school and up. It's kind of geared to the 13 and above market. That's the parameter we set for ourselves."

"Now *Kaiju* is the next place we're pushing," Borden says of *Kaiju*'s strange plot. "As soon as *Kaiju* is under wraps with a strong fan base and

Dr. Cube is plainly derivative of sci-fi's archetypal mad scientist: he bioengineers popular monsters that inevitably become supporting *Kaiju* characters. He's also a goof on the erudite, pompous, humanity-hating intellectual. Asked to identify the most disgusting part of the human anatomy, he quips, 'The mouth.'

out the gratuitous T&A, *Kaijuring* without the cloying childishness, and *Godzilla* with a sense of irony. They construct steel cages, assemble monsters' costumes, and engineer alliances between warring brutes. And they live out the details of each *Kaiju* Big Battle — live events where spectators get to see, hear off top ropes, and sometimes even being caught other with garbage cans and metallic ladders.

Plus, can you imagine featuring excerpts from these live events. While watching a match billed as "Kaiju's most brutal battle," where one monster leaps off a balcony and another gets flung into a wooden table, I can't help wondering whether anybody ever gets hurt. "When you're hitting people with ladders, jumping off of things that are like eight feet high, there is a potential for getting hurt," admits Saraceni, who is himself a wrestler. "Things can happen — sometimes someone gets hurt. My friend from Florida, who comes up to perform, broke his foot. I've dislocated my planks. I've broken noses. We had several concussions."

But he emphasizes that the violence is a side effect of wrestling, and not the intent. "We don't try to be violent. Actually, some of our characters can't wrestle. Like, say, the Chicken Soup guy. It's hard to see or move in there because you feel like you're in a stockade. But whatever we do, we

completely support. New York is the next place we want to go. We're already trying to set up a street team there, so by next fall we'll be doing heavy promotion there. And after New York... well, New York is the launch pad for the rest of the country."

Kaiju's next campaign involves producing a short film television show. "There'll be scenes outside of the ring, there'll be backstage, and there'll be jets, tanks, and cityscapes blown up," Borden adds, shaking out loud. "This is desirable for us to get it out of Boston."

"There's no reason why it couldn't go on now," says Saraceni, smiling. "There's no reason why it couldn't be a television show. There's no reason why there couldn't be more figures."

Borden adds, "We're not at all scared of getting that big."

But Dr. Cube puts it best. Asked to cite his ultimate goal, he writes: "Spencer Gifts is the ultimate."

Caville Dudley can be reached at cdudley@phx.com. The next *Kaiju* Big Battle will take place May 14 at 12:30 p.m. on the Northeastern University Quad. It's free. Visit www.kaiju.com for more information. For a Q&A with Dr. Cube, visit the Phoenix Web site at www.phoenix.com.

Live monster wrestling!

by Camille Doderó

The Boston Phoenix, April 27-May 3, 2001

DESPITE THE GEOMETRIC implications of his surname, Dr. Cube isn't the slightest bit square. Actually, he's insanely brilliant, a walking embodiment of knifelike intellect wrapped in powder-blue scrubs, rubber gloves, and a stethoscope tie. A former University of Oxford medical-school student, Cube is the kind of self-proclaimed mastermind who distances himself from the masses by addressing other people as "humans," prefers isolation to interpersonal interaction, and long ago snipped the tightrope between genius and madness before ever trying to navigate it. And so far, eschewing the tenets of social responsibility has served Cube well: at 27, he's already poised to take over the world - that is, the world of Kaiju International.

Kaiju, which means "mysterious beast" in Japanese, is a Boston-based monster-wrestling league that stages full-scale matches, contests, and tournaments. Influenced by Japanese anime, World Championship Wrestling subplots, and the kitsch of dubbed monster-movie cult classics like Ultraman, Kaiju cultivates a roster of wrestlers that includes surly monsters like the genetic mutation Dino-Kang, alien hemipterans like Space Bug, and choleric humans like Dr. Cube.

Kaiju also fosters an air of mystery and a desire to keep its legacy inscrutable, which is why Dr. Cube agreed to grant an interview only via e-mail. "We're really trying to distance ourselves from the characters," says David Borden, PR guy for Studio Kaiju and brother of one of the studio's founders. "We really want the characters to speak for themselves."

Cube himself has other reasons. Explaining why he does only e-mail interviews with the press, he says: "I loathe speaking to humans on a one-to-one basis. Humans tend to think and to communicate at such an incredibly slow pace."

But communicating with Cube is worthwhile: his responses illustrate the meticulous detail, the dry humor, and the fantastic imagination involved in this mythical wrestling federation.

Like any prodigy, Dr. Cube oozes eccentricity. He fancies himself "a collector" and has accumulated a gallery of exotic cars, rare birds, and

"back issues of Track and Driver." His aesthetic tastes tend toward the highbrow; he calls classical music "the ultimate expression." He cites Howard Hughes, Jan-Michael Vincent, and the Renaissance Man as his heroes. Asked where he lives, Cube explains that his independent wealth allows him to reside in a retrofitted mansion in the Boston area - but being the mysterious fella that he is, he won't divulge the precise location of his compound. "The complex is totally wired," he brags. "I can clap my hands and have my carp pond automatically cleaned." Probed to reveal his first name, Cube scorches, "Do you have trouble understanding the concept of first name and last name? Doctor is the first name. Cube is the last name. It's quite simple if you would take a minute to think about it."

Cube is plainly derivative of sci-fi's archetypal mad scientist: he bioengineers popular monsters that inevitably become supporting Kaiju characters, such as the boarlike Cyclops named Hell Monkey. He's also a surgeon whose God complex scores a 12 on the one-to-10 scale: he wields a butcher knife instead of a scalpel, fraternizes with masked minions instead of nurses, and, when queried about his credentials, answers smugly: "Many impressive degrees grace the walls of my laboratory." Finally, he's a goof on the erudite, pompous, humanity-hating intellectual. Asked to identify the most disgusting part of the human anatomy, he quips, "The mouth."

So far, Cube and his cohorts have wrestled only in Massachusetts, at venues like Davis Square, the lobby of the Museum of Fine Arts School, and Fitchburg State College. But like its arch-villain Dr. Cube, Studio Kaiju wants to be bigger, better, and grander. And now, in a pop-culture climate where Vince McMahon is the poor man's Bill Gates, Kaiju just might have a shot at ruling the world.

THIS DIDN'T all happen overnight," says Thommy Saraceno, a former Museum of Fine Arts student who's been active in Kaiju since 1997. "Kaiju has evolved. It started as kids in art school who all had this common interest [in wrestling and kitsch] and decided to put on a spectacle." According to Kaiju lore, the first so-called spectacle unfurled on Halloween in 1994 at Boston's Revolving Museum, and featured characters like the Atomic Cannon (a man-size point-and-shoot disposable camera), Powa Ranjuru (a Power Ranger-helmeted angel), and Midori No Kaiju ("a greenish terror lizard" whose height is listed as "75 Osaka City Buses"). "The group did a couple more shows, got a good response, so they kept going," Saraceno recalls. "And then it gained more interest, more people joined, and the older people left. Now, we're on a second generation."

That second generation transformed Kaiju from a wacked-out extracurricular hobby for a handful of art-school students into a monolithic live show with thunderous buzz in the Boston underground. "At first, we never thought of a show as A to B, beginning, middle, and end, like a play," Saraceno says. "Only within the last year or so did we start thinking of our events as complete shows with cohesive plots, rather than just a string of separate matches."

As the minds behind Kaiju came to realize, matches between bulbous monsters attract attention, but once the novelty of warring rubber giants wears off, the audience's enthusiasm can lapse. "The minute you see four matches with goofy costumes, it's just the goofy costumes," says Saraceno. "We realized that the viewers didn't understand who was wrestling whom. There were no consequences of the matches, no real reason why a big sandwich would be clubbing someone in the head." So these days, when the character named Club Sandwich - two slabs of white bread with lettuce fringe - whacks someone on the noggin with a prehistoric club, there's actually a reason for the beating. And when Dr. Cube stalks Super Akuma, a Japanese businessman who sold his soul to the devil (or "devils," as Saraceno says), it's because Super Akuma shanghaied the Kaiju championship belt from the square-headed physician and tried to sell the trophy on eBay.

The backstory isn't the only thing that's improved. "Within the last year or so, we've also stepped up the business side," Saraceno explains. Specifically, stepping up the business side meant hiring a full-time marketing, accounting, event-scheduling, and public-relations jack-of-all-trades, which for a fiscally challenged group like Kaiju came in the form of PR guy David Borden.

"They needed help setting it up as a business," Borden explains. "Before that, they didn't really do anything besides sending out, like, five press kits, and selling the videos at the shows." Now Kaiju actually has a small enterprise that offers merchandise online and at live shows: T-shirts, trading cards, lunch boxes, wall clocks, pins, stickers, handheld pinball games, magnets, videos - even hot sauce named after one of Cube's toady monsters.

And within the last few weeks, Kaiju has centralized its forces by moving from four locations into one, a studio space in Jamaica Plain with ample storage, room for construction, and a second-floor office that Saraceno kiddingly calls "the Honeycomb Hideout."

When I first walk into the Honeycomb Hideout, er, Studio Kaiju, the black-clad Saraceno - who, in multitasking as a builder, designer, and driver, has been busy preparing the skeleton of the steel cage that'll be used in the next Kaiju "Big Battel" - greets me. It's immediately obvious that this clean, second-floor office is an unusual place: one of the first things I notice is a dry-erase board with the words "surgical masks" scrawled in blue marker.

Aside from scripting the actions of Luciferian shogun Cube, Saraceno and his colleagues work every day to create a physical and mythical realm that evokes the World Wrestling Federation without the gratuitous T&A, Pok mon without the cloying childishness, and Godzilla with a sense of irony. They construct steel cages, assemble monsters' costumes, and engineer alliances between warring brutes. And they iron out the details of each Kaiju Big Battel - live events where ogreish goliaths duke it out, leap off top ropes, and sometimes even bang each other with garbage cans and metallic ladders.

Fans can buy videos featuring excerpts from these live events. While watching a match billed as "Kaiju's most brutal battel," where one masked wrestler leaps off a balcony and another gets fiercely tossed into a wooden table, I can't help wondering whether anybody ever gets hurt. "When you're hitting people with ladders, jumping off of things that are like eight feet high, there is a potential for getting hurt," admits Saraceno, who is himself a wrestler. "Things can happen - sometimes someone lands wrong. My friend from Florida, who comes up to perform, broke his heel. I've dislocated my pinkie, I've broken noses, I've had several concussions."

But he emphasizes that the violence is a side effect of wrestling, and not the intent. "We don't try to be violent. Actually, some of our characters can't wrestle. Like, say, the Chicken Soup guy. It's hard to see or move in there because you feel like you're in a stockade. But whatever we do, we do for the spectacle." Besides wrestling, Kaiju also features other sorts of spectacles. Spectacles like 40 pounds of bananas piled on a table. Spectacles like hip-hop MCs who rap in between matches and also announce the action. Spectacles like a grease pit where you could get greased up like a wrestler: "Girls in hot pants and dudes in Speedos who would grease you up if you wanted to," Saraceno explains.

KAIJU'S NOT about being cool - Kaiju's the most uncool thing that you could ever see," Borden says. But no matter what Borden says, Kaiju is cool. At its last two live appearances, it shared the stage with indie buzz bands like the Explosion and Cave In, and both events drew incredibly hip audiences of local rockers and artists. As the press release for Kaiju's

latest video, Mayhem in the Atrium III, reads: "This Boston-based pop phenomenon boasts sold-out events, making hipsters fight for standing room only."

And while underground cachet is definitely important, Kaiju wants more. "We're not short on ideas," Saraceno says. "We're just short on money to make those ideas happen."

Saraceno tries to explain the diversity of Kaiju's demographic this way: "It's weird - you'll have college kids, older people, and then you'll have 40-year-old parents bringing their young kids to their shows. Plus, we're really fortunate to have a good mix of males and females. Because it's really tiresome to go to a wrestling show and the whole audience is fat, angry kids with Limp Bizkit shirts."

And Kaiju Big Battel doesn't see itself as a WWF knockoff. "We don't want to be just a wrestling federation," Saraceno admits. "We couldn't pass as wrestlers. And we wouldn't want just strictly wrestling fans. We kind of gear for high school and up. It's kind of geared to the 12-and-above market. That's the parameter we set for ourselves."

"New York's the next place we're pushing," Borden says of Kaiju's strategic plan. "As soon as Boston is under wraps with a strong fan base and community support, New York is the next place we want to go. We're already trying to set up a street team there, so by next fall we'll be doing heavy promotion there. And after New York ... well, New York is the launch pad for the rest of the country."

Kaiju's next conquest involves producing a short film/television show. "There'll be scenes outside of the ring, there'll be live footage, and there'll be jets, tanks, and cityscapes blown up." And Borden adds, thinking out loud, "This is do-or-die for us to get it out of Boston."

"There's no reason why it couldn't go on tour," says Saraceno, smiling.

"There's no reason why it couldn't be a television show. There's no reason why there couldn't be action figures."

Borden adds, "We're not at all scared of getting that big."

But Dr. Cube puts it best. Asked to cite his ultimate goal, he writes: "Spencer Gifts is the ultimate."

Camille Dodero can be reached at cdodero@phx.com. The next Kaiju Big Battel will take place May 14 at 12:30 p.m. on the Northeastern University Quad. Visit www.kaiju.com for more information.