

Explosion is a blast on film

Bomb squad gets practice.



Parker Eshelman/Tribune

Spectators watch a car burst into flames after Columbia firefighters set off an explosion Friday night at the fire department training center. The explosion was filmed for a scene in a movie.

By JODIE JACKSON JR.

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With a full moon scraping the treetops breaking through a cluster of clouds, the setting was perfect for a resurrected Aztec chief and a masked Mexican wrestler.

But the main focus on the set last night at the Columbia Fire Department training center at 700 Big Bear Blvd. was a car explosion for the cult movie "Revenge of the Aztecs."

A small audience of crew members, production staff and their families applauded when freelance filmmaker/director Aaron Crozier shouted, "Cut!" after the impressive pyrotechnics.

"We're taking all the precautions we can to blow up a car and keep it safe for everyone," Crozier said before the blast. The fire department was "calling the shots as far as the explosion goes, and we're just here to film it," he said. Because of budget constraints, the blast was not done at the University of Missouri, where most of the film has been made during the past month.

The movie's script was penned by Jeffrey Uhlmann, an MU engineering professor. It is his third script in the genre of *lucha libre* and a sequel to the film, "Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy." The "masked wrestler genre" is a Saturday-morning entertainment staple for children in Mexico, Uhlmann said.

The 90-minute film should be ready for screening in about a year. The first two films in the series are likely to be screened at MU's Fall Welcome, he said.

Rather than just a cult-hero picture, the film is a collaborative effort among numerous academic departments. Uhlmann said the production's financial support came from the Interdisciplinary Innovation Fund through the university's Office of the Provost. The production includes the art, theater, engineering, film studies, information technology, textile and apparel design departments.

Crozier is teaching a course that allowed students an opportunity to be involved in the film's preproduction and planning stages. Some students also successfully auditioned for roles.

"I think it's very appealing to a large audience," Uhlmann said, expressing hope that the genre popular in Latin America will someday become more popular across the United States. "I think it will have broad appeal."

Uhlmann's sequel tells the story of a resurrected Aztec chief who hypnotizes students into doing his will. Cult hero and *luchadore* Mil Mascaras gets the call to save the day.

Columbia fire Capt. Eric Hartman said the fire department offered to help as a way to get training for its bomb squad and other firefighters. He said the explosion was made using gasoline, detonation cord and a blasting cap. The explosion gutted an old white sedan.

"It's more of a visual effect," Hartman said. "The one thing we wanted to make sure was we didn't create shrapnel."

Hartman said the event was "mutually beneficial" for the fire department and the university. "It's certainly not very often you get to detonate a car for training," he said.