

*The Aztec Mummy (played by Jeffrey Uhlmann) and his entourage pose alongside poster art for their film, *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy*.*

An Interview with Producer JEFFREY UHLMANN the Man Behind the Other Mask!

MI L MASCARAS VS. THE AZTEC MUMMY SEEMED TO come out of nowhere when it landed on the international film festival circuit back in 2008. Since then it has screened around the world to rave reviews from both critics and audiences. The story of the film is almost as interesting as Mil himself, and it involves another person, Jeffrey Uhlmann, who also has an unusual and colorful background.

Uhlmann was born, fittingly, on the border between the U.S. and Mexico in El Paso, Texas. In the late 1970s, he acquired something of a cult following for his minimalist electronic music recordings and short animations. Down the road, he obtained degrees in philosophy, computer science, and even a doctorate in robotics from Oxford University in England. And along the way, he happened to meet Mil Mascaras. They talked for less than an hour, but that meeting set the stage for Mil's triumphant return to the silver screen over a decade later in **Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy**, which Uhlmann wrote, directed, produced, and played multiple characters, including a robot and a mummy.

FAX: Let's begin by saying that I do see some resemblance between you and the mummy. (laughs)

UHLMANN: It's funny you should say that because my kids recognized a picture of me in the full mask before being told it was me. I guess it's because it was molded from a cast of my head. Maybe my eyes give it away.

FAX: You also played the robot.

UHLMANN: That's right. For one I was encased in latex and the other was glass and plastic.

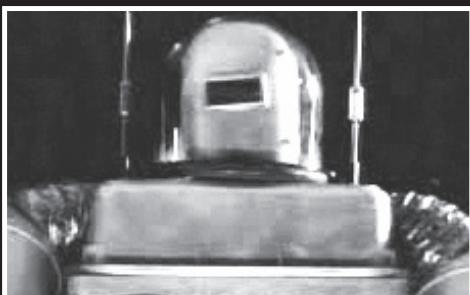
FAX: The film was shot in Missouri. What was it like when a man in a wrestling mask first arrived there on the set? Surely he attracted a lot of attention, and maybe even some concern wherever he went.

UHLMANN: People obviously took notice, but there was never any big deal about it. Quite a few times we'd have

people who would recognize him and come up and ask if he was really Mil Mascaras, and he'd sign autographs and let them take pictures with him.

FAX: So, he would go to eat at restaurants, wearing his mask, and the waiters and waitresses didn't react?

UHLMANN: Most times I would give some explanation and ⇨



Idaktor the robot, seen briefly in Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy, is also featured in Aztec Resurrection. Jeffrey Uhlmann, who coincidentally holds a degree in robotics from Oxford University, inhabited the robot.

and then it wasn't a big deal. He tips well so they looked forward to seeing him return. What was most interesting for me was watching events like I'm watching one of his movies. I often tell the story of one time when a waiter delivered his soup and Mil switched masks to one with an open mouth for eating. He did it in a single motion where he slips on one mask while the other is removed—just like he did in his old films—but here I was seeing it in real life. That's what's so surreal about working with him and Santo. It's hard to distinguish whether they play themselves in their movies or whether they're film characters who have stepped off the screen into the real world. There's just no equivalent to it that I know of from any other culture.

FAX: What was the first day of filming like, when Mil arrived on set in full costume.

UHLMANN: Ah, you hit on it with the full costume. Everyone had met Mil before filming began. Usually, he wore a suit with his iconic black-and-white mask. But when he stepped onto the set with one of his most colorful masks and elaborate costume, well, people were mesmerized.

FAX: Didn't Mil speak his lines in Spanish, which were later dubbed in English?

UHLMANN: I planned for Mil to deliver his lines in English, but in rehearsal we began



The Aztec Mummy sits menacingly on his ancient throne.

to realize that there was a problem. When Mil reads lines in English, he actually memorizes them in Spanish, then translates them back in English when he says them. Sometimes they would change a bit in the process, but that wasn't really a problem. What was a problem is that his body language was very different, much less animated. It's a night-and-day difference between his performance in Spanish and his performance in English, so we just had him do most everything in Spanish.

FAX: On the plus side, you have all his lines ready for a Spanish-language version.

UHLMANN: Unfortunately not. Some scenes he did speak in English, while others are a mix of Spanish and English.

FAX: That had to get confusing at times. Was it a problem for the other actors to have him speaking in Spanish?

UHLMANN: Surprisingly, that didn't turn out to be a problem. What's interesting,

though, was seeing the raw cut of the film with conversations half in English and half in Spanish. It actually creates a strange world where the characters are so fluently multilingual that it doesn't matter whether someone says something in English or Spanish at any point in the conversation. The Police Chief will ask Mil a question in English, Mil will answer in Spanish, and the Professor will follow up in English again and none of them seem to think it's unusual that they're talking in different languages.

FAX: That would make for a great extra audio track on the DVD!

UHLMANN: I do plan to include a scene like that as an extra on the Blu-Ray. You'll see that it really adds a cosmopolitan dimension to the proceedings.

FAX: As far as extras, you've got to have some gems with Mil.

UHLMANN: We definitely have some wild stuff. I think my favorite comes from *Academy of Doom* (2008).

FAX: That was made after the mummy?

UHLMANN: That's right. Actually the third and final shoot of the mummy film was done at the same time as principal photography for *Academy of Doom*. Anyway, there's a scene in *Academy* in which Mil is supposed to hit a creature over the head with a wooden board. The creature was played by a wrestler, Dan Flynn, who was also in the mummy film. The board was scored so that it would break easily when it hit Dan's head. The action started, Mil picked up that board and walloped Dan on the head. Unfor-



Mil poses with the evil pink vinyl twins from Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy.

tunately, the board didn't break, and it made a horrible sound when it hit his head. Dan dropped to one knee and was clearly dazed. Now I should point out that safety is always our highest concern, and this is exactly the kind of thing we try to avoid. However, Dan and Mil are both professional wrestlers, and both have done professional stunt choreography, so they called the shots on that thing. Anyway, Dan regained his bearings and prepared for the close-up. This time the board was scored so that even the slightest impact would cause it to break. The action started again, Mil picked up the board and hoisted it over his head, but the end broke off in the process. Unfortunately, Mil didn't realize what had happened. I remember as if it were in slow motion as we're all yelling for him to stop—but it's too late. Mil swings down, the board hits Dan's head with the same horrible sound, and Dan dropped like a rock. Thank goodness he was okay, but I'll never forget that sick feeling I had seeing it. In the end, though, what could have been a very bad incident can now be cut into a pretty amusing extra.



Mil with The Son of El Santo in Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy.

FAX: It's better than an accident in the flame-thrower scene.

UHLMANN: The most dangerous-looking scenes actually tend to be the safest. That's because so much care and attention is devoted to guaranteeing that nothing will go wrong.



The murderous Mummy prepares to stab Mil in a scene from *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy*.

FAX: Speaking of *Academy of Doom*, can you explain how that came into being?

UHLMANN: Initially, it was planned to be shot independently of anything having to do with the mummy film. As things turned out, there was need for a third shoot for the mummy film, and *Academy* didn't have the resources to shoot as long as needed, so the two shoots were combined. The director of *Academy*, Chip Gubera, taught a film production course in which students did all the pre-production and then worked on set during filming. Some of those students also chose to work on set for the final mummy scenes. Over the three shoots for the mummy film and production on *Academy*, over 100 students got experience on set, and that doesn't include experience

students got in post-production.

FAX: You're also a professor at the University of Missouri and students played a big role in producing these films.

UHLMANN: Right. That's why we made the films in Missouri rather than Mexico or elsewhere. Mil loves supporting universities and working with students so it's a perfect arrangement.

FAX: It's interesting that you're a professor of engineering and organize film productions.

UHLMANN: It makes a lot of sense when you consider the extent to which technology is used in almost all aspects of the film-making process. We used a Sony CineAlta HD camera, which was pretty much state-of-the-art when we began filming in 2004, and we used computers for editing the film and for visual effects. I like to say



Above: Luchadors on the march in *Academy of Doom*. Inset: Poster art for the film.

the only thing that distinguishes film-making from a theater production is the technology.

FAX: Do the students make things easier or harder?

UHLMANN: That's a good question. The process definitely goes slower because we want to make sure that students are engaged and understand what's going on at a higher level. On a Hollywood shoot each crew member has narrowly-defined responsibilities. Students on our shoots assume the same positions

but they're not divorced from the big picture. Sometimes we'll take a time-out and have everyone get together to talk about how to address an issue that's popped up. In the end everyone feels like the final product is their film, not just a film they worked on. That's how so much can be done with such limited resources.

FAX: Do you hope to eventually get larger budgets to work with?

UHLMANN: I'm not particularly bothered by budget limitations because half the fun and challenge is trying to get the most from limited resources. Few of our students are likely to have million-dollar budgets for their own projects, so these films are a great exercise in getting the most bang for the buck. They learn that there are trade-offs. Like with *Academy*—a lot of cinematic polish was sacrificed so that other things could be achieved.

FAX: Sometimes the effects of a low budget can add to the experience.

UHLMANN: Our latest film with Mil, *Aztec Revenge*, had an even smaller budget, but benefitted from the lessons learned making *Academy*. Fortunately, there are only a few ragged edges on the mummy film, and that's because we had a much larger budget.

FAX: Mil has to be very pleased with it.

UHLMANN: Yes. And he's had other things to be pleased about. He had some postage stamps released in Mexico with images from his career (see stamps on page 49), and a new statue of him also has been unveiled. I was there for the big event in Mexico City, for the official release of the stamps. It's an amazing honor, especially for someone still alive!

FAX: Are there any big plans for the future involving Mil?

UHLMANN: Absolutely. Hopefully, there will be something official to announce sometime early this year. Ω



Jeffrey Uhlmann was also behind the mask as Lector in *Academy of Doom*.

Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy can be bought on Amazon.com and its website www.MMvsAM.com