



MIL MASCARAS

An Interview with "The Man of a Thousand Masks"

Article and Interview by MICHAEL ERIKSON

E IS AN ICONIC FIGURE WHO HAS STARRED IN over 20 films that continue to be shown in countries around the world. In his films, he vanquished both natural and supernatural villains—one with John Carradine as a vampire and another with Carradine as a maniacal Nazi. He also is an athlete who revolutionized his sport,

The Most Amazing Movie of its Kind Ever Fillian

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Poster art for Mil Mascaras versus the Aztec Mummy.

as well as being an accomplished artist. He is a cultural ambassador from his native country and he appears on three of its postage stamps. Oh, and in real life, he always wears a mask...

Of course, he is Mil Mascaras, Man of a Thousand Masks. The term "living legend" is often applied, but rarely is it more appropriate than in the case of Mil Mascaras.

Now in his 70s, he continues to wrestle around the world, and currently appears in *Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy* (2008) Maybe it's the mask, or maybe his well-maintained physique, but one would have to look very closely to distinguish him now from his films of over 40 years ago. Recently, Mil found time between his painting and busy schedule to talk with *Filmfax* about his life and career.



Mil Mascaras as seen in one of his early films, Champions of Justice.

AX: It's hard to know where to begin. You recently were honored with a series of postage stamps commemorating your amazing career. That must have been a very satisfying event for you.

MIL MASCARAS: Well, you know, it's good to have a reason to meet again with old friends and look back. Is better than a funeral! (laughs) The stamps sold out in only a few days so many people must have liked them.

FAX: I notice they didn't include any images from your films. Is there a reason for that?

MIL: No, no reason. I wrestle in my movies, too, so it's all the same.

FAX: Can we talk about your movies? I think you've made 17 or 18 films.







Original poster art from some of Mil Mascaras' early Mexican language films. Across top from far left [titles translated into English]: Champions of Justice (1970), The Vampires of Coyoacan (1973), The Theft of the Mummies of Guanajuato (1972), Mystery in Bermuda (1977), and The Vampire Women (1968),



This set of Mexican postage stamps featuring Mil Mascaras sold out within a few days of its release.

MIL: No. is 20, I think.

FAX: That's a lot of films, and they include many big stars, not just wrestlers, but actors like John Carradine.

MIL: Yes, I make two films with him, Las Vampiras and Enigma de Muerte (both 1968).

FAX: What was he like to work with?

MIL: Very professional. He treated each film like it is the most important he ever made. Show him a film and he would say that its story is the same as one of Shakespeare's plays. He understood stories and characters and knew exactly what he needed to do. I like to learn from everyone and I learned a lot from him, that it doesn't matter about anything else if you do your part right.

FAX: At that time, quite a few older Hollywood actors found work in Mexican films.

MIL: Yes, and many young actresses from the U.S.! (laughs) John Carradine could work as much as he wanted on American television. He tell me he was in a show years earlier and had to play the same character. They want him to do it again but he doesn't like it. They were

westerns, I think, but he come to Mexico instead.

FAX: So it wasn't just for the money.

MIL: People don't come to Mexico to get rich back then! (laughs) No, he come to Mexico to make different movies. He wants to perform, so the producer let him do what he wants. He gets to perform as a circus clown. Things not in the script. He talk at the beginning of the film like it's a Shakespeare play.



Son of El Santo with Mil Mascaras at Mil's commemorative stamp ceremony in Mexico City, May 11, 2011.

FAX: Did David Carradine appear anywhere in the film?

MIL: No. he just visit.

FAX: What did he think of the film his father was working on?

MIL: He was more interested in my masks!

FAX: It was strange that Carradine and the other Nazis in the circus changed into their Nazi uniforms when they had their meeting. then changed back into their circus costumes.

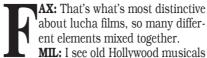
MIL: (laughs) Well, those films were made for kids, too, A clown can't be bad, so kids have to see him in a Nazi uniform.

were tailored to children?

MIL: You know, the producers want to make their money back. They want kids to watch the film. They include musicals for the mothers. Like what they do with Hollywood films. It's no difference.

FAX: Except for the wrestling.

MIL: That's right. In Mexico back then, wrestling's not shown on television, so producers show it in the movies. Sell more tickets!



that do the same thing. If you go to India or wherever, it's all the same. The produ-

> cer makes what will sell the most tickets. Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy (2008) is totally different. Jeffrey [Uhlmann] want to make a film with elements that make the original films special. It's not to imitate. Name any film and watch the two together and see which is best. I think all my films have something people remember.

John Carradine as one of FAX: How much of those films the maniacal circus Na- FAX: In Enigma of Death (1968) zis in Enigma of Death. you battle John Carradine at the

end, and there's a fight on a ferris wheel at the beginning.

MIL: I have to hang on as it goes around. It's good I have strong arms!

FAX: So that wasn't a stunt man?

MIL: No. Jeffrey [Uhlmann] ask me aboutthat one time. I tell him, "What can a stunt man do that I can't do?" I can fly a plane or ride a motorcycle, whatever is needed.

> **FAX:** So there's no stunt that's too dangerous to use a stuntman?

> MIL: Let me tell you this, if a stunt is too dangerous for me, it's too dangerous for a stuntman. In one movie, I tell the producer it's too dangerous to jump off a motorcycle going off the road because of trees. The producer says it's not so dangerous because I supposed to jump off before the motorcycle reaches the trees. The producer doesn't understand physics. I tell him that the driver keeps going after he jumps. He doesn't stop. Anyway, the producer gets a stunt man to do it and he's almost killed when he hits the trees.

> FAX: In Enigma of Death. you had to hang on as that ferris wheel went around?

> MIL: Yes. They speed it up on the film. I had to hang on for many minutes as it went around. Maybe I don't do that now! (laughs) **FAX:** How was it doing stunts for Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy?

> MIL: It's no problem. I do the



Young Mil Mascaras makes a dramatic entrance in his fourth film, Champions of Justice.

fights, some jumps, it's no problem.

FAX: Some stunts can be done with special effects now that weren't possible in your earlier films.

MIL: Yes, but some of the effects in movies are no good. I can see somebody jumping with strings even if I can't see the strings, and I don't like it. Some effects are okay, but the real thing is always better. That's why I say it's better to get wrestlers who are good actors and can do their own stunts. In the mummy film, we do real stunts.

FAX: So wrestlers make the best actors? **MIL:** It's true! Good wrestlers know how to perform, to have big personality so the audience has interest. It's part of the sport. It's in nature too. Sometimes two animals the same size face each other, but one has a bigger personality and intimidates the other to turn away. It's the same with acting. **FAX:** So your experience as a wrestler helps make you a good actor?

MIL: Yes, but I also study acting. If I do something I go to understand it to do it well. I study to perfect my acting like I study to perfect my wrestling. The same with my painting and everything I do.

AX: So, you are not only a world famous wrestler, but you also are an accomplished artist.

MIL: Yes, that's right. I have exhibitions with over a hundred of my paintings. **FAX:** When did you begin painting?

MIL: Many years ago. I start out, interested in the geometry of perspective. After my first wife pass away everything changed. She tell me that I'll be her eves when she's gone, so now I paint for her.

FAX: How would you describe your style of painting?

MIL: It's like nobody else. In the churches and pyramids I see paintings that come from deepest emotions. I try to paint the feelings. I didn't do that before.

FAX: By pyramids, do you mean Aztec? MIL: Yes, and Egyptian. All cultures ex-



Mil Mascaras (also "the man of a thousand talents") works on a painting in his sunlit art studio while wearing one of his distinctive masks.

press through images. One time I visit a pyramid in Egypt and the person says that the Egyptians didn't understand perspective because their pictures are flat with a full eye on the side. I tell him it's bullshit. The solitary eye was a symbol of the soul for them. They can't show the full face with two eyes. The pictures aren't supposed to be like photographs. Look at the pyramids and other works of the Egyptians. How could he think they didn't grasp the geometry of perspective? **FAX:** Maybe he thought of the pictures as being like cave paintings.

MIL: And maybe cave pictures are also not understood. Maybe those cave people drew simple pictures to entertain their children. Maybe children drew them to entertain themselves. Maybe they don't



Mil seems as comfortable in front of a stretched painting canvas as he is on the stretched canvas of a wrestling ring.

say anything at all about the people who lived in those caves. What do pictures spray-painted on buildings and bridges say about people today?

FAX: That's a good point.

MIL: At one time I make paintings of what I see. Now I make paintings of what I feel when I think of something. Somebody could look at one of my paintings and say that I don't understand perspective. If you want perspective you can look around and see it everywhere. A good painting should let you see something more than what you can see everywhere. The same is true in films. Somebody might watch Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy and say it's not like other films. That's why it's worth seeing.

FAX: I completely agree.

MIL: It's my philosophy. Why do the same if it's already been done? Same with wrestling.

AX: On lists I've seen of the greatest wrestlers of all time, you appear on all of them. That must be gratifying.

MIL: Well, I'm interested sometimes in how somebody makes such a list. If people who really know wrestling write down a clear way to compare wrestlers, I would be at the top, or near, in every case. Even somebody who doesn't like me or the way I manage my ca-

reer should have the same conclusion.

FAX: In looking at what people have said about you over the years it's amazing the amount of respect and admiration there is. But it seems, as you say, that you've also made your share of enemies.

MIL: No, some people don't like some things about me, but I'm nobody's enemy.

FAX: Well, the knock against you—according to some—is that you talk a lot about your success and are sometimes critical of other wrestlers.

MIL: It's not untrue, but I don't criticize anybody in public. I've been in this business almost 50 years, and I see so many wrestlers come and go. Many sad stories. A guy becomes famous and spends money like he's famous forever.

When the fame goes the money goes with

it and he has nothing. I have a good life. a good family, plenty of money, because I'm careful about evervthing I do. I see a guy blowing all his money at casinos or buying five cars and I tell him it's stupid. If he just puts half away he'll be okay in the future. Aristotle said moderation in all things. and he was right. I only say this once to people and they can decide what they

want. They can say



Mil Mascaras dominates the cover of this issue of Pro Wrestling Illustrated (March 1983).

Mil Mascaras is an arrogant piece of shit. It's okay for me. I tell them all this once and I can sleep okay no matter what happens.

I tell them to protect your knees. Protect your neck and back. Eat right. Don't take drugs and steroids. Take care of your body. Take care of your money. Most important, take care of your family. Kids don't think about the future. I know that. They see

me and they think that's their future because they don't see all the old guys who have no money and are in pain all the time. Nobody thinks they'll be like them, because they'll be famous and healthy forever. Who do they know who is healthy and making money when he's 70 years old? If they want to be like that, then maybe they listen to what I say. But I say it only once and after that I don't judge anything. Some of the people in wrestling business don't like me to talk, but I say the truth, nobody has a contract over me.

FAX: Some critics say that in the ring you sometimes don't sell moves to make your opponent look good.

MIL: Come on! There is more video of me wrestling than anyone, so anyone can look. One problem is that in the U.S. some wrestlers focus more on their image than their skills. I understand because

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I understand the business. I don't criticize them for that, but they should understand that for me wrestling means something more. If a guy doesn't execute a move I don't pretend that he did. If I miss a move, then I don't ask anyone to make me look good.

FAX: How do you feel about mixed martial arts—"ultimate fighting?"

MIL: Well, every sport has its good and bad. A friend told me I should compete to show my skills at real fighting, but I tell him it isn't real. I know because I am an expert in martial arts. Really, really! The MMA is not real fighting because they don't allow moves that are most effective in real fights. It's good because those moves would make every match end in bad injury or death. Professional wrestling and MMA allow fighters to show skills without risking their lives or health. It's no difference. MMA doesn't allow many moves that professional wrestling allows to be demonstrated, but I understand its appeal because it's martial arts scored like boxing. That's all.

FAX: That's an interesting take.

MIL: It's true. Somebody attacks me, and threatens to kill me, then I'll kill him first. Maybe I do it in one move with a shot to his



Mil Mascaras, glittering as he glares for a promo shot.



Mil in a scene from Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy.

throat. Maybe he knows how to defend. Then I take his eyes and I put him to sleep after two moves. Maybe he's a good wrestler and locks first. Then it's over in three moves or it's a draw until one of us wears

down. That's the only way it can happen with people who know how to fight. It's not like what you see in MMA because any position is vulnerable with eyes, groin, or fingers, or it's a neutral lock. Boxing takes that away with gloves and no grappling, and MMA takes that away with rules against those moves. Boxing, wrestling, and MMA just allow to demonstrate different skill sets.



Jeffrey Uhlmann inside the mask as the titular monster in Mil Mascaras vs. the Aztec Mummy.

AX: You're a very eloquent spokesman for your sport.

MIL: Well, this profession has given a heart of this Living for the

en me a beautiful life. I wish for the young wrestlers to have the same kind of life. That's all.

FAX: And will there be more films?

MIL: I already make films that should come out soon. The university is very slow! (laughs)

FAX: That's the University of Missouri.

MIL: Yes, many students work on the films. Not too much money, but many people who are very smart and work hard. Things have to be done in classes so it takes a long time to finish.

FAX: There's Academy of Doom (2008) and Aztec Revenge (in post production) that you've done after the Aztec Mummy film. Do you think they'll turn out as well? MIL: The Academy of Doom is completely different. I think I'm only in half the movie. Aztec Revenge was made with no money, but maybe it's more like the mummy film. Jeffrey made sure the mummy movie turned out the way he wanted, but I think he only wrote the arguments for the next ones.

FAX: The reviews for *Academy* have been good. You haven't seen it?

MIL: I saw it in Los Angeles a few years ago with Jeffrey when I watched the complete mummy movie for the first time. I tell him I was right that he should play the villain (Luctor).

FAX: Jeff wasn't first cast to be Luctor?

MIL: No, the director want to use somebody else, but I tell him that Jeffrey has to do it. Jeffrey made the mummy big and he did the same for Luctor. Really terrific.

FAX: Did you have to convince Jeff to do it? **MIL:** No, he wanted to do it, but sometimes he's lazy. If somebody else wants to do it, he lets them. I tell him he has to do it, so

he does it.

FAX: Did you have a lot of creative control?

MIL: Yes, but the mummy film was different. Jeffrey wanted everything a certain way, so I have to convince him sometimes.

FAX: Can you give an example?

MIL: Well, one time I supposed to fight the robot after it malfunctions. I don't want to do it because there is no way to make it look good,

but Jeffrey disagrees. I tell him, okay, if you let me flip you in the robot suit, then we can go to do it.

FAX: And he saw your point?

MIL: You don't see me fight the robot in the movie. One time, I tell Jeffrey that he should build a real robot that can take a bump. He has a doctorate from Oxford in robots, why doesn't he build one?

FAX: That's a good question.

MIL: Like I said, sometimes he's lazy.

FAX: Maybe for the next film. What is the plan for the next film?

MIL: I don't know. Producers come to me to make other movies, but I'm very careful. One of them tells me he has ten million dollars to make a film. Money is important, but one thing I've learned in this business is that trust is most important. I'll study it and maybe go to do it. I plan to be very busy with other projects soon, but I can't talk about them right now.

FAX: In past interviews, you've talked about your interest in getting into politics. Does that have anything to do with your current plans?

MIL: All I can say is that I always am planning something. Ω



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

IL 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 late1970s, 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.

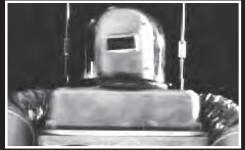
FAX: The film was shot in Missouri. What was it like when a man in a wrestling mask first arrived there on the set? Surely he attracted a lot of attention, and maybe even some concern wherever he went.

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.

AX: 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

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

of his most colorful masks and elaborate



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



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

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.

FAX: It's better than an accident in the flamethrower 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.

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 visu-

al effects. I like to say the only thing that distinguishes filmmaking 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.

AX: 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 himalso has been unveiled. I was there for



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

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

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

AX: 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



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