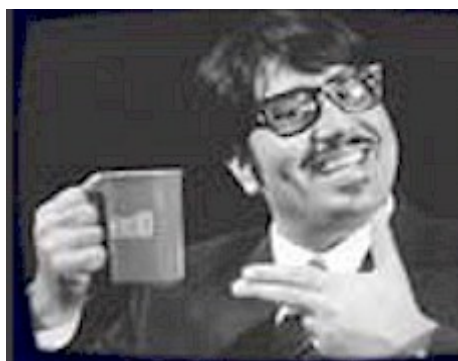




## HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

The following article about "Mr. Lobo" from "Cinema Insomnia" appeared in the Sacramento News & Review in January 2003.



### MR. LOBO PRESENTS CINEMA INSOMNIA!

by Keith Lowell Jensen

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TV horror hosts are a strange breed. From the Mellow Mannered Bob Wilkins, who alerted viewers to the dubious nature and questionable quality of the films he presented to that Queen of camp, Elvira, whose natural, uh, talent rendered her audience thrilled to have their film viewing interrupted for a few words from the sponsors. The tradition goes back further still, starting with Vampira in 1954 who was followed by all manner of ghouls, mad scientists, geeks and other creepy types. For as long as there have been bad movies there have been spooky, kooky, silly or sexy horror hosts to assist you in finding those elusive redeeming qualities. Just as low or no budget horror, sci-fi and fantasy films have developed a cult following so too, do horror hosts, classic and current, boast their own devoted fanatics.

There are countless websites dedicated to horror host history as well as groups like Horror Hosts Underground who maintain a database of current horror hosts. Perusing the impressive list at [www.tvhorrorhosts.com](http://www.tvhorrorhosts.com), you find former Star Trek Captain, Will Shatner and his "Full Moon Fright Night" on The Sci-Fi Channel. You will find the drag-erific Peaches Christ who has gone off the air, having proven too hot for even San Francisco Cable Access to handle or Sarcofiguy, the world's only African American horror host. On small network affiliates or cable access channels the tradition continues throughout the US as these vampires, ghouls and drag queens put a tremendous amount of energy and creativity into shows that promise very limited returns. Why do they do it?

Why spend the precious hours not consumed by their day jobs covered in face paint and fake blood, sitting under hot lights, hamming for the camera?

We can speculate that there is a magic feeling to being a part of the crazy world of late night television. The world where we all learned about the finer things in life, like Bruce Lee Movies, the amazing products of Ronco, Japanese monsters and gratuitous cleavage. Why not ask Sacramento's own Horror Host Extraordinaire. Yes, that's right. There on the list, between Lizzy Killmeister of Athens Ohio and Los Angeles Kung Fu Horror Theatre Host, Nightshadow, our beloved city is represented by the smiling, bespectacled face of it's life long resident; Mr. Lobo.

Mr. Lobo presents Cinema Insomnia every Saturday Night on Cable Access channel 74. CI is new to cable access having started on News10, the local CBS affiliate but the show may have succeeded itself right off the air. Mr. Lobo continues to shop the program to other affiliate stations while showing amazing gumption by continuing production with little in the way of sponsors or other financial support. But, that's the kind of guy Mr. Lobo is.

Lobo's been drawn to entertaining since he was a wee lad.

"I was very introverted as a kid and I used to draw cartoons. Then at some point I got the courage to talk into a tape recorder. I used to take my tape recorder and record kind of funny voices and then pause it and get music off of TV." he tells us.

This hobby evolved and little Lobo was soon producing radio-theater for UCD's KDVS "They thought I was a college student. They didn't realize that I was just a high school student."

Around this time, Lobo also began experimenting with the video camera.

Even then, movies were Lobo's real passion. Neither radio nor the consumer quality camcorder gave quite the results he was looking for with his screenplays. Lobo turned to comics.

"The first comic book I did was called Nuke Nova, which was a post-apocalyptic humor publication." The comics, named for Lobo's true ambition, were released as FAL (Filmmakers At Large) Brand comics.

Ambitious from the beginning, FAL comics, unlike most independents were full color and thanks to a deal with Diamond Distributors they received national distribution. The Comics sold especially well in the Bay Area.

Lobo also received notice in the bay area with his continued dabblings in video production like his documentary, "Street Art" about an artist, who with help from a few friends in official looking hard hats blocks off a street and stages an art show. The art show, and the documentary end with the arrival of the police.

Realizing the denizens of the bay seemed to have an appreciation for his creations Lobo packed his bags and headed for the big city. A move that didn't pan out quite as planned.

"We realized that if you don't have money that city will eat you up alive!" Lobo laments.

In addition to the expense of life in San Francisco Lobo failed to find the kind of creative community he'd enjoyed in Sacramento. Finally the money ran out and the artist came home.

"That's when I got hit in the face with Sacramento-ness. I'd never noticed that Sacramento had any discernible culture at all until I went somewhere else and came back. [Sacramento has] a very distinct sense of humor, a regional sense of humor. We're very smart. We're a geek market. The x-files, Star Trek, these things get big here first. You got a lot of schools, you got a lot of people in technology business, you got a lot of people in government, you got a lot of dorks, dork central. And I'm thinking, wow, if they get dumber as you move a way from Sacramento, I'd better stay. If this represents the smartest America has, I'm screwed. It's dangerous out there."

Recognizing his town's uniqueness and frustrated with being trapped by it Lobo decided he'd pay tribute while venting his bitterness at the same time. He produced the now legendary "Sac Blows" trading cards. The cards depicted local icons like news anchorman Stan Atkinson who's card describes him as "Lifelike" and notes that "His voice has been mysteriously different since Muppets Creator Jim Henson Died" as well as more widely known locals like then governor Pete Wilson. The back of his card reads "No data available". Each pack of 9 cards came complete with "Stale Gum Shards".

You can see the Horror Host appreciation in this early work as Lobo stretches the definition of Local in order to include Creature Feature host Bob Wilkins.

The cards were very popular and Lobo barely kept up with the demand for them. Turned on by the success but burnt on doing cards he threw himself into writing, turning out short skits for The Moe Betterman Show as well as new radio and stage plays and short video pieces. After a painful week spent trying to get some scripts looked at in Hollywood it was back to comics.

FAL Brand Funny Pages was born out of a collaboration between Mr. Lobo, Tom Working, Joe Sweden and several other local artists.

"I always imagined myself as being part of an ensemble. My idols growing up were Monty Python, Saturday Night Live, Second City. I always imagined myself as being in the Super Friends, one talented guy in a group of many talented people."

FAL Brand Funny Pages were distributed worldwide thanks to a relationship developed with Tower during the Sac Blows project. Despite Lobo's success, he seemed to have reached a peak.

"I reached a point where I said you know there are a lot of people who respect my work in a lot of different areas, but I don't think they've connected the dots to know that it's all coming from the same person."

Enter Mike Strange. An employee of channel 10 and a big fan of FAL funny pages Strange felt that he had found something special in Lobo and he sought to give him a forum for his diverse talents.

The two began shooting demos on camcorder and playing with the idea of a Bob Wilkins type horror show. Lobo had landed a job at Channel 10 as well and after noticing that the 3 a.m. movie, with six minutes of PSAs interrupting the film every 10 minutes had definite room for improvement Lobo and Strange pitched their idea for "Cinema Insomnia" as a better option for the time slot.

The bosses allowed a pilot to be shot. Surprisingly to Lobo and Strange who had not intended the pilot to be seen outside of the studio it was aired. The two scrambled to churn out a show a week in order to keep up with their sudden and unexpected success. This went on for 18 weeks.

Lobo's comedy material was often the type that keep censors employed but no one was censoring.

Indeed no one at the station seemed to pay much attention to what the pair were up to at all. And so the material got funnier and riskier as the boundaries were tested.

"Every time we did one I knew it could be the last one. I knew we were on thin ice."

Around episode 13 the mail began coming in, proof that a viewership did exist. Lobo and Strange were anxious to up the shows promotions as well as the quality of the films they screened. The station did not necessarily want to further associate themselves with this non-family value oriented program especially as CI planned to become better known and further depraved.

When show [number] 18 was complete and one whole season was in the can, Cinema Insomnia season two was put on hold by management. Having brought a dead time slot to a point where it was earning ratings, generating viewer mail and bringing in advertising dollars, Lobo and Strange felt they'd been a success. The management and Channel 10 did not seem to realize or appreciate this success. This coupled with the mounting differences in image led Lobo and Strange to conclude that it was time to move on.

Rather than let the show lose its momentum, CI was put almost immediately on Cable Access channel 74. With the creative freedom allowed by such a station and the power to show whatever films they manage to get their hands on Cinema Insomnia is better than ever. Lobo is fielding offers, but is being picky so as not to let history repeat itself. He is in no hurry as he is content to let the show continue to develop its comedy and its fan base.

Mr. Lobo is often recognized now when out on the town and has been treated with celebrity status at film festivals and rock show's that he has recently been invited to [emcee].

He's had guests on his show like his mentor Bob Wilkins, and leftist documentarian Michael Moore. Mr. Lobo takes no notice of the stigma of being on cable access alongside naked preachers and backyard wrestlers. He is more than happy to sit on his stool at the freak show - so long as the audience continues to ogle.