

ISSUE 54

WITH AN EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK AT GODZILLA MINUS ONE

# SILVER SCREEN

WINTER 2023 SPECIAL ISSUE HONORING GODZILLA AND OVER 100 YEARS OF MONSTER MOVIES



THE BIRTH  
OF A LEGEND

TOP 10 MOST OBSCURE  
MONSTER MOVIES

TITANS FROM  
OTHER TURFS

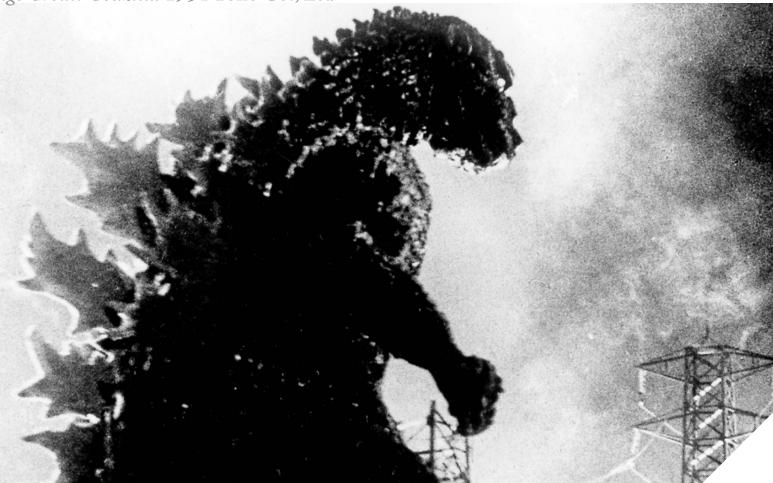
HOLLYWOOD'S  
FAVORITE GIANT APE



# THE BIRTH OF A LEGEND

THE KING OF THE MONSTERS CREATION AND RECEPTION

By the Editors

Image Credit *Godzilla* 1954 Toho Co., Ltd

**T**hough a handful of films about the atomic bombings were produced during the Occupation, film critic Tadao Sato notes that, "Only very sentimental treatments of the subject were allowed, such as *Eternal Song of Nagasaki Nagasaki no kuta wa wasureji, d. Tomotaka Tanaka, 1952* or *The Bells of Nagasaki Nagasaki no kane, d. Hideo Oba, 1950*," the latter a true-life story about a physician who contracted leukemia while treating irradiated patients. *Godzilla* is now understood to be among a small but important number of movies about the bomb that appeared after the Occupation ended and its censorship policies ceased. These films were far different from Hollywood's version of nuclear armageddon, as seen in films such as *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959) and *On the Beach* (1959), which follow the plight of isolated survivors. Japanese filmmakers knew of the death and destruction wrought by the bomb, and its physical and psychological effects.

In terms of tone and content, *Godzilla* closely follows two films that immediately preceded it, both commissioned by the Japan Teachers Union JTU to educate the public about the atomic bomb's horrors. The first, Kaneto Shindo's *Children of the Atom Bomb Genbaku no ko, 1952, aka Children of Hiroshima*, about a schoolteacher who returns home to find Hiroshima still in ruins, included a limited yet terrifying flashback reenactment of the bombing; even so, it was dismissed by critics as a "tearjerker" and a self-indulgent art film, and so the JTU immediately commissioned another production to illustrate the tragedy more straightforwardly. Directed by Hideo Sekigawa, *Hiroshima* (1953) had a harrowing, graphic, and lengthy explosion sequence, with scorched victims fleeing through a burning city littered with dead bodies. Both *Children of the Atom Bomb* and *Hiroshima* showed survivors crammed into makeshift shelters and wailing children watching their parents die of burns and radiation sickness, presaging similar scenes in *Godzilla*. Together, these three films form a de facto trilogy of early atomic-bomb cinema. Not only do they dramatize the catastrophe in similar ways, each one has a haunting, elegiac score by composer Akira Ifukube, bridging the films musically and thematically. They expressed what historian Donald Richie called Japan's "sympathetic sadness" and foreshadowed later Hiroshima-themed works such as Kurosawa's brilliant *I Live in Fear* (1955). In *Godzilla*, Honda alludes directly and repeatedly to the war, the bomb, and the hibakusha, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Warplanes, tanks, and convoys are deployed. Artillery units shoot and depth bombs explode, depicted with real military stock film. The monster's onslaught is a slow-moving shockwave, its radioactive breath incinerating people, cars, and buildings. Mass evacuation is ordered; people huddle in shelters. A mother comforts her terrified kids as *Godzilla* nears, saying they'll soon be in heaven with their father. Tokyo's ruins unmistakably resemble photographs of Hiroshima's aftermath.

A final plea for disarmament comes via the beleaguered Dr. Yamane: "If we keep on conducting nuclear tests, it's possible another *Godzilla* might appear, somewhere in the world, again."

Over the years, Honda would repeatedly cite the metaphorical connection between the monster and the bomb. He told Kimi, "Having seen the terror of the atomic bomb in real life, it is most important to weave this element into the film well, so that everyone will understand." He also told journalists that *Godzilla*'s destruction of Tokyo was meant to resemble the American firebombing of Tokyo.

Even so, assistant director Kajita said Honda never discussed the matter with his *Godzilla* crew. Kajita believed the film was not political.

"Honda didn't incorporate such a message into the film," he said. "He directed *Godzilla* purely as an entertainment work, and I do not feel it was his intention to advocate the abolition of the atomic bomb. The scene where a group of students sing the 'Prayer for Peace' . . . is Honda-san's theme."

## The film is made from the viewpoint that *Godzilla* itself is the victim

The film was screened privately for Honda, and his crew for the first time on October 23, 1954. It was also viewed and approved by the eirin ratings board on that date. Two days later, the cast and crew were joined by other Toho stars and staff, including Toshiro Mifune, for a traditional well-wishing Shinto ceremony and the first screening before an audience. Lead actor Akira Takarada wept when *Godzilla* died; writer Shigeru Kayama was also moved to tears. Everyone seemed pleased and confident, but Honda was worried. The publicity campaign had built tremendous anticipation, and the press appeared eager to tear the film down. Already some journalists were casting doubt. Kimi recalled, "After the company screening, everyone wondered, 'Now, how will the public react?' This was a very scary feeling for *Honda*, a sense of not knowing . . . Toho was worried too."

*Godzilla* was released in Nagoya on October 27, 1954, a Wednesday; its official release date in the history books is one week later, November 3, when it premiered in Tokyo and at theaters nationwide. It sold out the Nichigeki Theater, Toho's cake-shaped, high-end flagship venue in the Ginza District, where huge "*Godzilla*" banners hung over theater facades and people waited in line for hours to buy tickets. The film set a new opening-day record for a Toho feature, selling about 33,000 tickets at the company's Tokyo cinemas. "The line went around the Nichigeki three times," Kimi said. "The CEO of Toho personally called Honda, thanking and congratulating him on a superb job. That sort of thing didn't usually happen."

Storyboard art of *Godzilla* Image Credit WikiZilla

In later years, Honda tended to recall only the sting of negative press. He would repeatedly tell interviewers that critics had savaged the film. "Critics said the special effects were very good,

Actors Akibiko Hirata and Momoko Kochi bugging Haruo Nakajima inside the *Godzilla* Suit Image Credit WikiZilla

but overall the film was just weird," he said. "I felt really defeated, because we worked so hard . . . I didn't even want to go to work anymore. If it was that bad, why even bother to write so harshly? But it was a huge hit and made a lot of money. The people who went to see it, they all told me it was really good."

**Weeks before *Godzilla* opened, a critic for the Shin Kyushu newspaper predicted it was the type of film whose "only purpose is to shock us with weird things. It's just a stupid trick for little kids"**

However, a survey of notices published in November and December 1954 shows that opinions varied widely. Interestingly, many critics compared *Godzilla* favorably to *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, which opened in Japan just a few weeks later. The following excerpts are taken from published reviews:

"They tried to make it realistic . . . but it just doesn't work. The dark imagery is just plain unenjoyable. I understand that they are trying to make a statement against the atomic bomb, but this is just asking too much."

Kinema Junpo

"It looks like it was the wrong subject for [Honda]. The drama had too strong of a social commentary and not enough imagination . . . It is too serious, too heavy, there's no enjoyment. They should realize that when one swing of *Godzilla*'s tail destroys the Nichigeki theater, that's humorous . . . They should have [made a] comedy . . . instead of a mediocre psychology story."

Chugoku Shimbun

"It's a lot more complicated than *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, and a lot more interesting . . . As the first of this type of movie in Japan, it's very successful. Toho's effects group should get credit for that. As for the drama, Takashi Shimura was the only one who stood out. All the rest, their immature acting skill was very noticeable . . . But after all, the main character was *Godzilla*, so it should be good enough to draw the kids, as a spectacle movie."

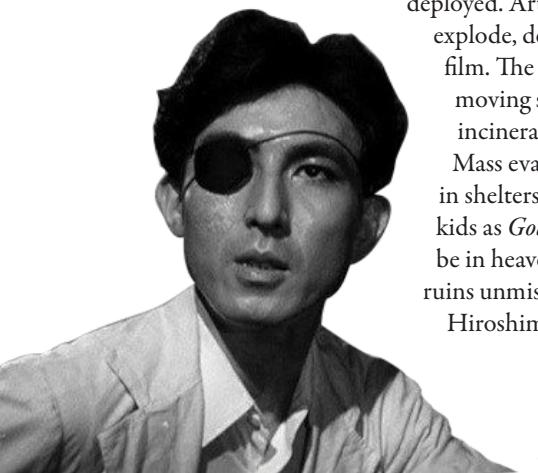
Osaka Daily Shimbun

"The Beast is simply a monster that comes ashore in New York and destroys things, whereas *Godzilla* is actually described as a nuclear bomb. Its message is against the bomb, and for peace in the world . . . When *Godzilla* lands in Tokyo . . . think of what would happen if it were a real nuclear weapon. Nothing would help. That's what makes it particularly effective and scary."

Mainichi Shimbun

"Ishiro Honda says he wants a lot of people to watch and enjoy it, but to also get his message against nuclear weapons. His effort was successful. However, when *Godzilla* shows up from the sea, it's . . . obviously a water tank in the studio. That was a disappointment."

Tokai Evening Issue

Image Credit *Godzilla* 1954 Toho Co., Ltd

*Godzilla* earned ¥183 million (just under \$510,000) during its theatrical run. According to Kinema Junpo, it was the eighth-highest grossing Japanese film of 1954. Of the sixty-eight features released by Toho that year, it was the studio's third-biggest hit behind *Seven Samurai* and Hiroshi Inagaki's *Samurai I: Musashi Miyamoto*. All three had been big financial risks for Toho, and their success affirmed the studio's resurgence as an industry leader. *Seven Samurai* had the highest budget (¥210 million, about \$580,000) of any domestic film to date; *Musashi Miyamoto* (about \$500,000) and *Godzilla* were second and third highest. All three films would become internationally renowned, but only *Godzilla* would quickly net substantial foreign money. It would also be the first Japanese film to achieve a wide US theatrical release, though under unusual and somewhat unfortunate circumstances.

Honda recalled learning that *Godzilla* had been sold to America. "When Mr. Ichizo Kobayashi founder of PCL was still alive, they would hold these artists' meetings every year at the Tokyo assembly hall, composed of directors, screenwriters, and producers. They would go over the previous year's works and discuss how to make better films next year. At this meeting, the president of the company at the time, Fusao Kobayashi first son of Ichizo announced that *Godzilla* had been sold.

"Ichizo's facial expression suddenly changed. He turned around in awe and said, 'What? Is that true? Don't you lie to me now, you hear?' But it was true. We told him, 'I think we got more than \$20,000, may have even gone up to \$25,000 for it.' He then said to me, 'Kid, this is a huge deal!' It was during a time where everyone wanted to obtain US dollars. Some people were seeking just a buck or two, and here we got over 20 grand... This was a wonderful thing for all of us on the staff." Though Japan's economy began to revive in the early 1950s, the poverty and devastation of the postwar years were still recent memories. Personal incomes remained very low, and the country suffered massive trade deficits; therefore, \$25,000 in highly coveted American currency was indeed a huge deal. But while the money was a boon to Toho, the amount was an absolute steal for the film's American distributors, a tiny fraction of the bargain price that Warners had paid for *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*.



Actor Haruo Nakajima Image Credit WikiZilla

Following the success of *Rashomon* at Venice, several acclaimed Japanese films had played in American art-house cinemas in the early 1950s, including Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu monogatari*, 1953 and Téinosuke Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell Jigoku-mon*, 1953, which won the Oscar for best foreign film. In response, Toho and other studios began actively marketing films for overseas distribution. *Godzilla*, however, was not acquired by art-house types, but by a group of exploitation-film producers led by Joseph E. Levine, founder of Embassy Pictures Corp. and a master of massive advertising campaigns. What happened next is something of a minor Hollywood legend. *Godzilla* was extensively recut, with new scenes featuring actor Raymond Burr, playing a journalist, spliced into Honda's footage. Waylaid in Tokyo during *Godzilla's* attack, Burr is conveniently acquainted with Dr. Yamane, daughter Emiko, and Dr. Serizawa, and so he steps right into the action and covers the story with the aid of an interpreter. The new footage was shot by journeyman director and editor Terry Morse, who chopped everything down to about eighty minutes, retaining Tsuburaya's effects while gutting Honda's work. A moody flashback motif was added that, coupled with Burr's Western point of view, effectively disguised this as

a monster B movie from second-tier Hollywood. Burr's scenes were filmed on cheaply made sets, with body doubles, over-the-shoulder shots, and clever editing to create the illusion that he was interacting with Honda's Japanese cast. The American distributors misleadingly claimed the film was entirely shot on location in Japan. Much of Honda's footage was trimmed or deleted, including a darkly humorous discussion between subway passengers directly referencing both the Lucky Dragon incident and the bombing of Nagasaki. These changes, and the elimination of a native Japanese context, had the effect—intentional or not—of depoliticizing the film and muting any perceived anti-Americanisms.

## Advertisements said this version was "100 times more interesting" than the original

From a commercial standpoint, the revamped *Godzilla* provided a path for the many kaiju eiga that would eventually follow it across the ocean. *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* opened in Times Square in April 1956 and subsequently played across the country. According to *Variety*, it earned about \$2 million in its US theatrical run, a sizeable sum for a low-budget, black-and-white horror programmer (and nearly four times what the Japanese release had netted). Though this was for all intents and purposes an American product, the release appeared to far surpass previous foreign-made films in terms of theatrical bookings and box-office receipts. Most Western film critics and scholars had no access to or knowledge of Honda's original cut until 2004, when it received a fiftieth anniversary release in American art-house cinemas. As a result, Honda's achievement was obscured, and the film was thought to be a typical exploitation movie. Honda was unaware that *Godzilla* had been reedited overseas until Toho, adding insult to injury, brought *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* to Japan in May 1957 and released it in cinemas as *Monster King Godzilla*. To capitalize on emerging interest in widescreen movies, Toho converted the entire film from its original format to 2.35:1 anamorphic scope, causing some scenes to appear severely and awkwardly cropped. Japanese subtitles appeared for Honda's actors, now speaking entirely different English dialogue.

The success of *Godzilla* had an immediate impact for Eiji Tsuburaya. He and his staff would receive several awards for their work, and special effects would begin to earn the legitimacy Tsuburaya had long sought. Producer Tanaka rushed a sequel into production, *Godzilla Raids Again*, released on April 24, 1955. Whereas Tsuburaya held no formal title in the *Godzilla* credits, he was now officially the special effects director and would wield increasing power on the lot.

Honda had proven the doubters wrong; nobody laughed at his monster. But the film's success did not immediately change his career, and he would not direct the sequel. Iwao Mori felt Honda's sensitive nature was well suited to stories about the plight of women, and so Honda's next two pictures would feature female-centered dramas. *Godzilla Raids Again* was instead made by the prolific Motoyoshi Oda, who brought a more action-oriented approach. The sequel featured a new *Godzilla* fighting the four-legged monster Anguirus in Osaka, and also a King Kong-style battle between *Godzilla* and fighter pilots.

According to Honda's recollection, the reviews for Oda's sequel were more positive. "Back then, the media thought that it was stupid for a director to put his ideas or themes into a movie. They may have treated auteur types differently, but for something like a science fiction movie, putting thoughts or ideas into your movie was considered plain stupid. That's why I think that the first *Godzilla* was only considered a 'weird' movie. That's probably why they liked the second movie much better."

# TITANS FROM OTHER WORLDS

## EUGÈNE LOURIÉ THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS 1953

**A**n American science fiction monster film directed by Eugène Lourié, with special effects by Ray Harryhausen. The film stars Paul Christian, Paula Raymond, Cecil Kellaway, and Kenneth Tobey. The screenplay is based on Ray Bradbury's 1951 short story "The Fog Horn", specifically the scene where a lighthouse is destroyed by the title character. The film is about the Rhedosaurus, a dinosaur that is released from its frozen hibernating state by an atomic bomb test in the Arctic Circle and begins to wreak a path of destruction as it travels southward, eventually arriving at its ancient spawning grounds, which includes New York City. *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* was one of the early atomic monster films; it inspired a generation of creature features such as *Godzilla*.

## RAY KELLOGG THE GIANT GILA MONSTER 1959

**F**ive years after the first *Godzilla* was released, *The Giant Gila Monster* was directed and written by Ray Kellogg. As viewers can see, the Gila Monster isn't so scary after all, but it was a good attempt in the 1960s. When this scaly fella invades a rural town in Texas, a mere teenager decides to step up and try and destroy the creature, once and for all. Overall, the movie has a charm to it, and there are some iconic moments that epitomize the 1950s and 1960s, but it falls short in any realm of *Godzilla*-like features.

## EUGÈNE LOURIÉ GORGO 1961

**G**oile the central monster of *Gorgo* might look a great deal like *Godzilla*, the plot of *Gorgo* owes far more to the original *King Kong*. Its core premise is near-identical, as it centers on a group of opportunistic people who capture a giant creature, and then plan to sell it off so that they can profit. Things do take a turn away from *King Kong* by the time the final act comes around, though. *Gorgo*'s mother doesn't take kindly to this, however, and destroys much of London in her attempts to get her son back. It's decently entertaining stuff, even if neither its monster design nor its core premise is particularly original.

## KIM KI-DUK YONGARY MONSTER FROM THE DEEP 1967

**T**here were many movies released during the 1960s and 1970s that clearly took inspiration from *Godzilla*, and *Yongary, Monster from the Deep* is one of them. It's not fair to be too harsh on *Yongary*, though, because those early *Godzilla* films were iconic and seemed to make decent money, meaning other filmmakers understandably wanted in on the kaiju movie train. This is a South Korean film with a fairly standard misunderstood monster on a rampage story, and can be compared pretty easily to *Godzilla* because of the design of the titular character. However, it does prove entertaining thanks to its wild and often quite silly tone, where some scenes are shockingly violent, and others involve things like *Yongary* himself dancing with a kid to 60s rock music.

# HOLLYWOOD'S FAVORITE GIANT APE

THE ORIGINAL BLOCKBUSTER CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

## THE RUNDOWN



1933

**K**ing Kong opened in New York City on March 2, 1933, to rave reviews, and has since been ranked by Rotten Tomatoes as the greatest horror film of all time and the fifty-sixth greatest film of all time. In 1991, it was deemed "culturally, historically and aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and selected for preservation in the National Film Registry. A sequel, titled Son of Kong, was fast-tracked and released the same year, with several more films made in the following decades, including two remakes that were made in 1976 and 2005 respectively, and a reboot in 2017. King Kong is a fictional giant monster resembling a gorilla, who has appeared in various media since 1933. He has been dubbed The Eighth Wonder of the World, a phrase commonly used within the franchise.



1962

His first appearance was in the novelization of the 1933 film King Kong from RKO Pictures, with the film premiering a little over two months later. The film is a 1933 American pre-Code adventure horror monster epic directed and produced by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, with special effects by Willis H. O'Brien. Produced and distributed by RKO Radio Pictures, it is the first film in the King Kong franchise. In the film, a giant ape dubbed Kong captured from Skull Island attempts to possess a beautiful young woman.

A sequel quickly followed that same year with The Son of Kong, featuring Little Kong. Toho produced King Kong vs. Godzilla (1962) featuring a giant Kong battling Toho's Godzilla and King Kong Escapes (1967), a film loosely based on Rankin/Bass' The King Kong Show (1966–1969). In 1976, Dino De Laurentiis produced a modern remake of the original film directed by John Guillermin. A sequel, King Kong Lives, followed a decade later featuring a Lady Kong. Another remake of the original, this time set in 1933, was released in 2005 by filmmaker Peter Jackson.

1976 saw the American monster adventure film produced by Dino De Laurentiis and directed by John Guillermin. It stars Jeff Bridges, Charles Grodin, and Jessica Lange in her first film role, and features mechanical effects by Carlo Rambaldi and makeup effects by Rick Baker who also played the title character. It is the 5th entry in the King Kong franchise. The idea to remake King Kong was conceived by Michael Eisner, who was then an ABC executive, in 1974. He separately proposed the idea to Universal Pictures CEO Sidney Sheinberg and Paramount Pictures CEO Barry Diller. Italian producer Dino De Laurentiis quickly acquired the film rights from RKO-General and subsequently hired television writer Lorenzo Semple, Jr. to write the script. John Guillermin was hired as director and filming lasted from January to August 1976. Before the film's release, Universal Pictures sued De Laurentiis and RKO-General alleging breach of contract, and attempted to develop their own remake of King Kong. In response, De Laurentiis and RKO-General filed separate countersuits against Universal Pictures, all of which were withdrawn by January 1976.

The epic adventure monster film co-written, produced, and directed by Peter Jackson. It is the eighth entry in the King Kong franchise and the second remake of the 1933 film of the same title, following the 1976 film. The film stars Andy Serkis, Naomi Watts, Jack Black, and Adrien Brody. Set in 1933, it follows the story of an ambitious filmmaker who coerces his cast and hired ship crew to travel to mysterious Skull Island. There they encounter prehistoric creatures and a legendary giant gorilla known as Kong, whom they capture and take to New York City.

Development began in early 1995, when Universal Pictures approached Jackson to direct the remake of the original 1933 film. The project stalled in early 1997, as several ape and giant monster-related films were under production at the time and Jackson planned to direct The Lord of the Rings film series. As the first two films in the Rings trilogy became commercially successful, Universal went back to Jackson in early 2003, expressing interest in restarting development on the project, to which Jackson eventually agreed. Filming for King Kong took place in New Zealand from September 2004 to March 2005.



2005

Kong: Skull Island was theatrically released on March 10, 2017, to generally positive reviews from critics, with praise for its visual effects, action sequences, and performances, particularly Jackson and Reilly. It was also a box office success, grossing \$568 million worldwide, becoming the highest grossing installment in the MonsterVerse and the King Kong franchise to date. The film received a Best Visual Effects nomination at the 90th Academy Awards. A sequel, Godzilla vs. Kong, was released on March 24, 2021.

**It is currently one of the most expensive films ever produced**

Its budget climbed from \$150 million to a then-record-breaking \$207 million.

Kong: Skull Island (2017), set in 1973, is part of Warner Bros. Pictures and Legendary Entertainment's MonsterVerse, which began with a reboot of Godzilla in 2014. A sequel, Godzilla vs. Kong, once again pitting the characters against one another, was released in 2021. The film was announced in July 2014 at San Diego Comic-Con, and Vogt-Roberts was announced as the director in September 2014. The project initially began at Universal Pictures as an origin story but was later moved to Warner Bros. to develop a shared cinematic universe featuring Godzilla and Kong. Principal photography began in October 2015 in Hawaii and various locations around Vietnam and ended in March 2016.



2017

10 OF THE MOST

# OBSCURE MONSTER MOVIES

MUST SEE FILMS FOR ANY FAN OF A CREATURE FEATURE

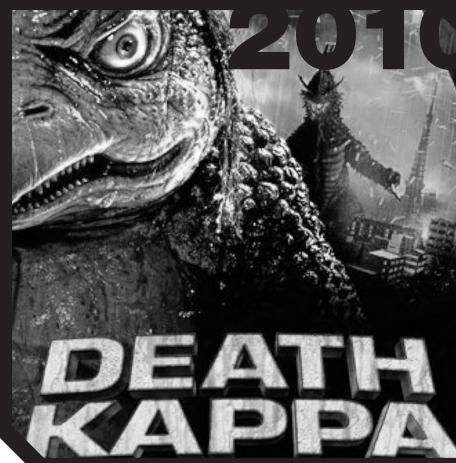


## COLOSSAL

NACHO VIGALONDO

Anne Hathaway stars as a burned out alcoholic who might also be flattening buildings halfway around the world. Colossal tells the story of a young woman who has to move back home and the people who never left.

Also... monsters?



## DEATH KAPPA

TOMOO HARAGUCHI

One day, Kanako catches her brothers listening to her song only to hear a noise coming from outside their house. The three of them find a kappa dancing to Kanako's song. The siblings befriend Kappa and he soon becomes part of the family. One night while Kappa is dancing to Kanako's song, he is attacked and netted by a group of men in black suits.

## PULGASARI

SHIN SANG-OK / CHONG GON JO

In feudal Korea, during the Goryeo dynasty, a king controls the land with an iron fist, subjecting the peasantry to misery and starvation. An old blacksmith who was sent to prison creates a tiny figurine of a monster by making a doll of rice. When it comes into contact with the blood of the blacksmith's daughter, the creature springs to life, becoming a giant metal-eating monster named Pulgasari.

## 1985 発



## BIG MAN JAPAN

HITOSHI MATSUMOTO

Big Man Japan takes the form of a mockumentary that follows Masaru Daisatou. Daisatou is an otherwise normal Japanese citizen except for an inherited ability to grow to a height of approximately 30 meters in response to the application of high voltage electricity.



## DAIGORO VS. GOLIATH

TOSHIHIRO IIJIMA

The main monster of Daigoro vs. Goliath, Daigoro, has to be among the most ridiculous-looking giant monsters of all time. The plot of his movie is equally crazy, with it centering on the giant anthropomorphic hippo Daigoro and his peaceful existence on an island, which becomes threatened when the humans who take care of him start running out of money to sufficiently feed Daigoro's giant appetite.



## THE GIANT CLAW

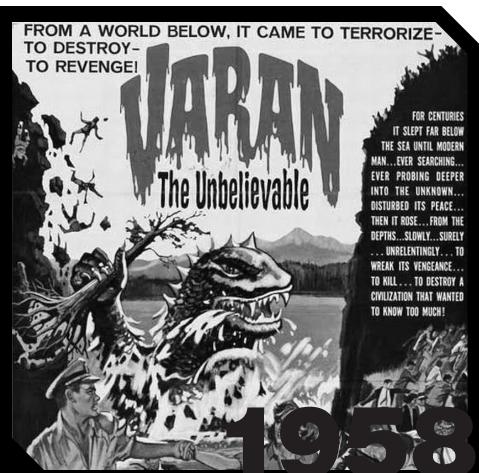
FRED F. SEARS

Mitch MacAfee, a civil aeronautical engineer, while engaged in a radar test flight near the North Pole, spots an unidentified flying object. Three jet fighter aircraft are scrambled to pursue and identify the object but one aircraft goes missing. Officials are initially angry at MacAfee over the loss of a pilot and jet over what they believe to be a hoax.

## VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE

ISHIRO HONDA ■ EIJI TSUBURAYA

Professor Sugimoto sends two scholars to Iwaya Village in the Tohoku region of Japan to investigate the appearance of a butterfly normally native to Siberia. The expedition ends in tragedy when the two men are killed under unexplained circumstances. The superstitious natives blame the mountain god Baradagi, an angle played up in the press.



## HALF HUMAN

ISHIRO HONDA

It is a dark and stormy night. A mountaineering club from Towa University has returned from a trip to the Japanese Alps, traumatized and wounded by an encounter with a so-called "monster" responsible for the death of their friend Takeno and several others. A news reporter arrives to interview them about the experience, and Takeshi Iijima begins to recall the events.



## EQUINOX

JACK WOODS

Before he took you to a galaxy far, far away, before he brought you face-to-face with living, breathing prehistoric beasts, Dennis Muren, the future nine-time Oscar-winning visual-effects artist for *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park*, joined forces with a group of talented young filmmakers to create an homage to the creature features of yore in the eerie monster mash Equinox.



## FRANKENSTEIN VS. BARAGON

ISHIRO HONDA

World War II. c. 1945. The Allied Force advance on Germany. Nazis break into a laboratory and confiscate the living heart of Frankenstein's monster. The Allied Forces then bomb their submarine, but not before the Nazis pass the heart to the Imperial Japanese Navy, but just as they are about to begin, Hiroshima is bombed by the Allied Forces and the heart is lost.

# CLOVERFIELD

JANUARY 16, 2023 STEPHEN SILVER

Cloverfield is a 2008 American found footage giant monster film directed by Matt Reeves and produced by J.J. Abrams. The film's existence was first revealed in the form of a teaser trailer attached to *Transformers*; however, the trailers never listed the title and only provided its release date, "01.18.08". Paramount Pictures carried out an elaborate alternate reality game in order to promote the film prior to its theatrical release.

JJ Abrams was at Comic Con talking *Cloverfield* and he was quite excited! Although he didn't have a lot to reveal about the film he did have enough to share that it's worth telling you readers about. Here is what he had to say with some minor edits since like I said he was SUPER excited and was somewhat all over the map!

This is gonna be really really quick. I just want to say I want a monster movie! I want a great monster movie! I wanted a monster movie for so long! And I was in Japan over a year ago with my son who is 8 and all he wanted to do was go to toy stores. We went to a store and saw *Godzilla*'s everywhere and I thought what better. We need our own monster.

We need a monster movie. I love King Kong! King Kong is just adorable and *Godzilla* is a charming monster. I love *Godzilla*, but I wanted something that was just insane and intense. So we started making this movie and are working it now. I watch dailies and I am more excited about the movie itself than the trailer which has gotten an amazing response.

I can't thank you enough for that. I would say it will be nearly 6 months before this movie comes out. It's a long time so in the coming months you're going to get the real trailer, the real poster, and the title. But you won't get the title today. Do you think I should call it *Monstrous*?

He then unveiled the new poster. I should probably add when he did not announce the title of the film there was a bit of a negative reaction from the crowd which brought his comment of. Should we call it *Monstrous*? Stay tuned! More Comic Con Coverage coming your way all week!



It's tempting to describe this terror tale as "*v* meets *The Blair Witch Project*," as it relies exclusively on the camcorder wielded by one of its characters to capture the rampage of a frightening behemoth as it destroys Manhattan with single-minded determination. Over the years, other films that employed this "found footage" angle often seemed silly — what sane person wouldn't drop the camera in the face of real danger? — yet in our modern-day, technocrazed world, the need to capture everything on film (as if to validate its authenticity, not to mention provide the shooter with a fleeting 15 minutes of fame) is such a built-in instinct for many people that the actions of the protagonists in this movie rarely come into question. Director Matt Reeves and writer Drew Goddard also effectively tap into that decade's post-9/11 anxieties: It's impossible to witness collapsing skyscrapers and the resultant deadly debris hurtling down New York City streets and not be reminded of that fateful day. Like many fantasy flicks, this one also contains a defining "money shot" (a la the exploding White House in *Independence Day*); in this case, it's the decapitated head of the Statue of Liberty, forlornly resting on a city street. Heads roll in *Cloverfield*, and none more startlingly than this one.

*Cloverfield*, which arrived in theaters in January of 2008 - 15 years ago - was the start of a franchise that spawned two interrelated films (not quite sequels) in the ensuing years. But it also took inspiration from numerous

films before it, from the *Godzilla* and King Kong franchises to *Escape From New York*. And just seven years after the 9/11 attacks, there are unmistakable echoes in the large-scale emergency in Lower Manhattan.

The film came from the Bad Robot factory, with J.J. Abrams producing, Drew Goddard writing, and Matt Reeves directing. For its first 20 minutes or so, it appears to be a navel-gazing, mumblecore-style drama about the love troubles of a group of attractive 20-something Manhattanites. I can say from experience that early scenes are a close approximation of what apartment parties among young people looked like in New York in the early 2000s.

## And Then, A Giant Monster Attacks the City.

*Cloverfield*'s conceit is that it's found footage from a videotape that's been taped over at different times. We start by viewing a romantic interlude between Rob and Beth (Michael Stahl-David and Odette Yustman) as they wake up in the morning and walk around the city. A month or so later, the tape has been taped over with the events of a going-away party for Rob, who has taken a job in Japan (with the film's *Godzilla* lineage, the choice of Japan is likely not a coincidence.)

The film, told almost in real time, follows the characters through Manhattan as they try to rescue Beth from being trapped about 80 blocks North in her father's apartment. Throughout, we hear Hud (T.J. Miller) filming behind the camera; his style of pestering people, and not giving up when they tell him they don't want to be interviewed, has a new resonance, knowing what we do about T.J. Miller. Even then, the film hinted at the possibility that this story was part of a larger world, especially in the film's final scene, which hints subtly at how the monster might have arrived on earth. But the sequels that followed, *10 Cloverfield Lane* and *The Cloverfield Paradox*, were not direct sequels but rather included thematic similarities, although both came from scripts that originally had nothing to do with the franchise.



Some New York residents at the time questioned how the characters got from the Brooklyn Bridge to 59th Street underground as quickly as they did or how the 2008 vintage camcorder lasted that long. Even by the standards of the found footage genre, it's pretty incredible that the footage survived both a monster attack and a nuclear blast. While the cast hasn't quite broken through in the years since, with the exception of Lizzy Caplan and Miller — who has since done whatever the opposite is of breaking through — the behind-the-scenes crew has had much more success. Reeves went on to direct *The Batman*, while Goddard directed *The Cabin in the Woods* and *Bad Times at the El Royale* while writing *World War Z* and *The Martian*. Abrams remains a prolific director and producer who directed one decent *Star Wars* movie and one not-so-decent one.



# GODZILLA MINUS ONE

## THE KAIJU SUPERSTAR DELIVERS EVERYTHING YOU COULD WANT FROM A MONSTER MOVIE

WITH AN EMOTIONALLY ENGAGING STORYLINE AND PLENTY OF CITY-STOMPING, HEAT-RAY-BREATHING ACTION, THE FIRST LIVE-ACTION GODZILLA FROM JAPAN SINCE 'SHIN GODZILLA' MARKS A HIGH POINT IN THE LONG-RUNNING SERIES

Richard Kuipers Nov 22, 2023

**L**ike a contracted movie star loaned out by a studio in Hollywood's heyday, Godzilla has returned to Japanese parent company Toho after doing a stint in the U.S. MonsterVerse to take center stage in *Godzilla Minus One*, a stellar entry in the world's longest continually running film franchise. Set in a devastated post-war Japan, Takashi Yamazaki's reboot gets back to basics in grand style, with engrossing human drama alongside spectacular mass destruction. Since opening in Japan on Nov. 3, "Minus One" has accumulated a whopping \$20 million. Its American and overseas theatrical assault commences Dec. 1, with solid prospects of further expanding the legendary monster's already massive fanbase.

### Defeating Godzilla is the only way to overcome trauma and turmoil

Hewing closer to the spirit of Ishiro Honda's 1954 original than other films in the 37-strong series, Toho's first live-action entry since "Shin Godzilla" (2016) is markedly different from the creature's recent outings. Produced at a fraction of the cost of MonsterVerse's "Godzilla: King of the Monsters" and "Godzilla vs. Kong," this \$15 million enterprise pays stronger emotional dividends than those films. It can't compete with the hyperreal MonsterVerse visual effects, nor does it want to.

While still creating many dazzling action sequences with more modest resources, writer-director and visual effects supervisor Yamazaki also slyly slots in some ever-so-slightly wobbly effects, such as screaming extras running in front of what resembles old-school rear projection. Here and in passages such as Godzilla plucking a commuter train from the tracks

with its teeth, this installment pays loving tribute to the film that started it all and the dozens of "guys in rubber suits destroying cardboard sets of Tokyo" Godzilla movies made prior to the digital age.

The first G-movie staged as a period piece, "Minus One" arrives during a time of much discussion about Japan's military future and is primarily concerned with the aftermath of World War II for those who served. Governments, bureaucracies and military institutions that have blundered their way through many a Godzilla adventure are barely seen here. The emphasis is squarely on civilians taking collective action in the face of seemingly certain obliteration.

Chief among the film's everyday heroes is Koichi Shikishima **Ryunosuke Kamiki**, whom we first meet as a kamikaze pilot in the war's final days. Pretending to have engine trouble, Koichi puts in for repairs on the fictional island of Odo. No sooner has his charade been uncovered than Godzilla emerges from the depths and wipes out everyone except Koichi and the garrison's chief mechanic, Tachibana **Munetaka Aoki**.

Having frozen at the moment he might have been able to save the men and destroy the creature, Koichi returns to civilian life with survivor guilt and PTSD that registers powerfully thanks to Kamiki's fully committed performance. It is interesting to compare Koichi with the central character of Yamazaki's 2013 smash hit "The Eternal Zero," about a kamikaze pilot torn between dying gloriously for the Emperor and wanting to survive for his family. The message here that kamikaze pilots who survived deserve to bear neither shame nor guilt will resonate strongly with modern audiences.

In the rubble and despair of Tokyo, which looks like Godzilla has already trampled it, Koichi meets Noriko (Minami Hamabe), a young woman who has taken an orphaned baby girl, Akiko, into her care.

Helped by kindly neighbor Sumiko **Sakura Ando**, the couple make a home together out of necessity, but romance is not part of the equation until deep into the proceedings.

The screenplay wisely decides that survival is all that initially matters in long and dark days that begin to look brighter when Koichi lands a job on a mine-sweeping boat. In the lull before Godzilla inevitably reappears, there's enjoyable, crowd-pleasing camaraderie between Koichi and an appealing crew of ex-servicemen, including gruff captain Akitsu (Kuranosuke Sasaki) and Noda (Hidetaka Yoshioka), a nerdy former navy tech genius.



Such slightly better times naturally don't last long. Courtesy of U.S. Bikini Atoll nuclear tests, a much larger and angrier Godzilla — replete with all-new, radiation charged retractable spiked scales — awakens and makes a beeline for Tokyo. With Japan's defense forces no longer standing and the U.S. too preoccupied by Soviet military maneuvers to offer any help, it's nothing more than a stroll in the park for Godzilla to destroy large parts of the city and become the monstrous embodiment Japanese post-war trauma. That theme plays out strongly in scenes of citizens hurriedly gathering to discuss plans to avert annihilation.

In a nod to modern sensibilities, there is no shame on anyone unwilling to participate in such a dangerous mission. But for Koichi and comrades, defeating Godzilla is the only way to overcome trauma and turmoil that have dogged them since the war ended. To that end, a scheme is hatched that's so marvelously fanciful and wildly optimistic (involving freon gas, giant balloons, rickety tug boats and a souped-up aircraft for Koichi to pilot) that in the Godzilla movie universe we know it's a good bet to succeed.

Despite a few lapses into lumpy melodrama, Yamazaki's thoughtful script holds firm and is dotted with delightful humor at just the right moments. Much of the personal drama is serious and heartfelt but Yamazaki always remembers we're in B-movie monster land, just not too campy this time around. Naoki Sato's subtle orchestral score is perfectly in tune with the film's emotional undercurrents and leaps wonderfully to life when Big G goes on the warpath. It's always a pleasure to hear Akira Ifukube's original *Godzilla Theme*, which is nicely incorporated into the soundscape.

As the dust settles on Godzilla's latest rampage we can marvel yet again at how a kaiju king who's flattened Tokyo umpteen times and threatened humankind's very

existence is also able to enjoy the status of beloved cultural icon and official tourism ambassador for Tokyo's Shinjuku ward. Though usually causing destruction and collateral damage on a gargantuan scale, this most malleable of monsters has also played the hero a few times and saved the world from dreaded foes, such as the smog monster in "Godzilla vs Hedorah" (1972). Whether viewed as simply a mighty marauding movie monster or a metaphor for fears and traumas of the times in which it awakens, Godzilla's enduring appeal as hero or villain is a true wonder of the movies.

It is completely unnecessary though amusing nonetheless for the film to conclude with a shot suggesting — shock, horror — that Godzilla might not be vanquished after all. If we want to entertain the thought of anything being certain in this world, surely it's the ability of this giant radioactive lizard to rise up and stomp another day.



PREVIEW FOR  
ISSUE #55

SPRING 2024

# SILVER SCREEN

## PLANET OF THE APES

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THE CHARM?

MORE THAN  
THE SUM  
OF ITS PARTS?

THE  
**FRENCH**  
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