



The Godzilla & Pals Pages

Giant Japanese Monsters!

Some of these things actually scared the snot out of me when I was a kid. And when I was a teen, it was hardly worth going to an all-nighter at the drive-in if there wasn't a Japanese monster in it somewhere. Everybody likes to rag on how bad they are, but everybody loves them. Japan's contribution to the world's bad cinema is everyone's guilty pleasure.



presented in chronological order

GODZILLA: King of the Monsters

(1954/56) dir: Inoshiro Honda, Terry Morse; w/ Raymond Burr, Takashi Shimura
Momoko Kochi, Akira Takarada.

The first and best, this was before the Big G became a pop culture icon. Okay, the fx are cheap -- this first costume gives Godzilla an almost cherubic look, and the American bits are spliced in none too gently, but it has a much more serious tone than the following flicks. You can enjoy it as a cheesy movie, but if you've got a strong disbelief suspender muscle, this can actually be a thrilling and sometimes scary flick. The ending is simplistic, almost anticlimactic -- I can remember seeing this as a child and feeling very disappointed that Godzilla was actually dead. Ah, well -- it's just as well he didn't live to see what was done to him in the sequels. Long live the King of the Monsters.

GODZILLA RAIDS AGAIN

(1955 - aka *Gigantis the Fire Monster*) dir: Motoyoshi Oda;
w/ Hiroshi Koizumi, Setsuko Wakayama, Minoru Chiaki.

A buck-toothed & geeky looking Godzilla (whom the English version calls Gigantis) battles with Anguirus in Osaka. Then, um, a couple of pilots have a few subplots. Then the brave fighter pilots bury Godzilla/Gigantis under a glacier. This was a very quick and very, erm, inexpensive follow-up to Godzilla. Unfortunately, the miniatures & suit-mation effects reflect both the lack of experience and the meager budget, plus the script is a barely passable plate of leftover hash. However, the English language narration, seeking to build a story around it all, is quite ridiculous and mildly amusing.



RODAN

(1956) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Kenji Sawara, Yumi Shirakawa.

A deep mining operation uncovers some really big bugs, and then two super-big pteranodons terrorize the world with supersonic super-booms. This one is a little refreshing, since it comes from the era before Toho dumbed-down its monster films. Although the monsters get very little screen time (which is probably okay, since they look pretty dorky), the movie fills in with a tight and exciting script. In the end, the

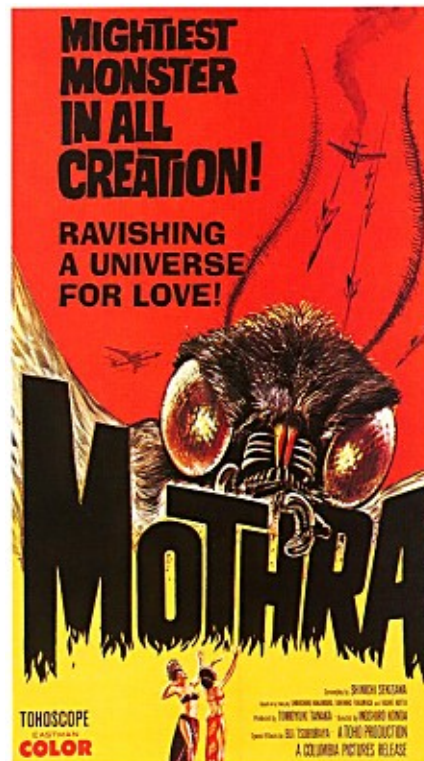


two Rodans fulfill the Japanese “nobility of failure” motif, and their final destruction is sad and we’re almost sorry they are gone.

MOTHTRA

(1961) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Ken Uehara, Yumi Ito, Emi Ito, Jelly Ito, Takashi Shimura, Seizaburo Kawazu.

A greedy promoter kidnaps the spooky fairy twins and Mothra trashes half the planet to rescue them. Although she’s better known in the States as Godzilla’s co-star, Mothra first appeared as the star of her own film. It’s pretty well done, if you forgive the battery-powered special fx. However, with a sympathetic monster and no bad monster to fight, and just one sneering businessman as an antagonist, there’s little action and no real excitement. I would say it’s strictly for the kids, but the first half (before Mothra shows up) might bore them.



KING KONG vs GODZILLA

(1963 - Americanized version) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Tadao Takashima, Kenji Sahara (American cast = Michael Keith, Harry Holcombe, James Yagi).

A pharmaceutical company tries to bring King Kong to Japan to star in commercials, but he ends up in a wrasslin' match with Godzilla for stomping rights to the Pacific Rim. Of course, this Kong is a special Japanese mountain-sized version who gets more powerful when he's zapped by electricity. Godzilla gets a new suit this time -- it looks good but is very unconvincing in motion. Kong, on the other hand, just looks like a doofus. And their fight scenes are mostly just tongue-in-cheek Sumo spoofing -- but there are plenty of elaborate miniatures to crush. It's not one of the best in the series, but it's important because it was a boxoffice smash and launched Godzilla's popularity in the States. Oh, and when the Japanese come up with a giant octopus, they don't mess around. We're talking a really *fig bucking* octopus! (Actually, I thought he was cute -- I'm glad Kong didn't kill him....)



GODZILLA vs MOTHRA (1964)

(1964 - released to US theaters as *Godzilla vs The Thing*) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Akira Takarada, Yuriko Hoshi, Hiroshi Koizumi.

A good-hearted moth and a couple of really ugly grubs defend Nagoya from Godzilla's rampage. This is one of the better made early Godzilla flicks -- there's even some spectacular effects in among the cheesy ones. It's one of the few that's enjoyable for its merits as well as its badness. This may also be the most-broadcast & influential of the series -- I think because of those spooky little fairy twins. I don't know about anybody else, but they scared me worse than Godzilla ever did. Also, can anyone tell me what "plan C" is? When the all the army's weapons prove useless and the general calls for "Plan C" -- from that point on the military is never seen again. Hmm....



GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER

(1964) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Yasuke Natsuki, Yuriko Hoshi.

The monsters begin their transformation from forces of nature into regular Joes. Godzilla & Rodan trash half of Japan during a really stupid-looking grudge match, but the Mothra-grub breaks them up & talks them into teaming up to defend Earth from the new bully on the block, the three-headed space monster. And mixed in with all this is a sloppy goulash of a subplot involving wacky UFO watchers, a Himalayan princess who may actually be a Martian, an assassination plot, and the twin fairies. This one is strange even by Japanese monster movie standards.

Our hero upon observing the monsters' conversation: "Aw, these monsters are as stupid as human beings."

GODZILLA vs MONSTER ZERO

(1965 - aka *Invasion of Astro-Monster, Monster Zero*) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Nick Adams, Akira Takarada, Kumi Mizuno.

Planet X is being ravaged by Ghidrah, so they borrow Godzilla & Rodan to defend their planet. However, this is all just an elaborate scheme (stupid, but elaborate) to take over the Earth. The monsters actually have only a small role in this one and get surprisingly little camera time. The plot (what of it there is) centers around our heroic astronauts, Nick & Akira. The photography is better than in previous films, and the miniatures effects are greatly improved, but the movie itself is strictly in MST3K territory.



GAMERA

(1965 - aka *Gamera the Invincible; Monster Gamera*) dir: Noriaki Yuasa; w/ Eiji Funakoshi, Harumi Kiritachi, Junichiro Yamashita.

Unh -- Gamera's first -- *erg* -- movie. Halfway through this flick, I suspected that I had grown a brain tumor and couldn't think straight anymore. This is what happens when a rival studio comes up with their own competitor to the Godzilla series, but has only a fraction of the budget & talent that was behind Godzilla. You thought *Godzilla's Revenge* was bad? Compared to this, *Godzilla's Revenge* was *Gone With the friggin' Wind*. Let's see, a mysterious bomber is shot down over the arctic, resulting in a nuclear explosion that wakes up a prehistoric giant turtle that shoots flames & flies. Gamera stomps all over Japan and roasts tens of thousands of people to death. Meanwhile, some psycho kid who lost his pet turtle is trying to convince everyone that Gamera is really good and gentle and loves all children. Woo -- they really needed to hit that kid with a tranquilizer dart. The production & acting quality is dismal, and a few scenes feature some Anglo "actors" who are stupefyingly incompetent. The script bounces all over the place like it was written by a six-year-old. If the scenes were all shuffled and respliced in random order, this thing wouldn't make any less sense. It's the sort of movie that *has* to be heckled in order to be survived.



When first imported to the States, some American-filmed scenes with Brian Donlevy were spliced in. Many current video versions do not include these scenes.

DOGORA

(1965 - Japan) dir: Ishiro Honda; w/ Yosuke Natsuki, Yoko Fujiyama, Hiroshi Koizumi.

Diamonds are vanishing all over the world. Things float through the air for no reason. Two rival gangs of jewel thieves make monkeys of the cops. Meanwhile, stern authority figures walk around with furrowed brows. Eventually, a giant jellyfish from space tries to eat a bridge but burps it back up. There is far more of furrowed brow than of monster in this flick, but it does try to deliver with cops & robber action and some elaborate miniature buildings to smash. But the plot ambles about at random and the dubbed dialogue seems to be random phrases for the most part. It is vaguely amusing, but it doesn't actually amount to entertainment.



FRANKENSTEIN CONQUERS THE WORLD

(1965 - Japan) dir: Inoshiro Honda; w/ Nick Adams, Takao Takashima, Kumi Mizuno.

Woo. Apparently, the undying heart of the original Frankenstein monster was a state treasure in Nazi Germany. Near the end of the war, they smuggled it into Japan for safekeeping. Too bad they sent it to a research lab in Hiroshima. After the war, in the atomic ruins, the heart regenerates a new body for itself (a really scrawny & goofy-looking body), and because he's in Japan now, he grows 60 feet tall. And no "lumbering" for this monster, he hops around the Japanese hillsides like some hyperactive jackrabbit. Fortunately, there's another monster (equally goofy-looking) for him to have a long, boring fight with. After poor, misunderstood "Frankenstein" saves Japan, he sinks into the Earth. Yup -- I've seen long-distance phone commercials that made more sense than this sucker. For a movie with such a high silliness content, I found it remarkably boring. There are serious slow spots in the script -- in fact, the plot comes to a dead standstill for a half hour in the middle. Nonetheless, it's not to be missed; a true classic of unexplainable filmmaking.



GAMERA vs BARUGON

(1966) dir: Shigeo Tanaka; w/ Kojiro Hongo, Kyoko Enami, Akira Natsuki.

Greedy treasure hunters accidentally unleash a chameleony lizard-monster -- its tongue is a battering ram and spews



freezy-mist, it's back-spines emit an explosive rainbow! Gamera returns just in time to be freeze-dried by Barugon. So the humans do a whole bunch of silly things involving diamonds, mirrors, and death-ray projectors, all of which amounts to nothing. But of course, Gamera revives and saves Japan from the menace of Barugon. It's immensely silly with wonderfully nonsensical science involving "light molecules" and "infrared radioactivity". This has a bigger budget & more action than the first Gamera flick, and is a right fun movie to heckle with friends. And that island princess is a major babe -- hubba, hubba.

GODZILLA vs the SEA MONSTER

(1966 - aka *Ebirah, Horror of the Deep*) dir: Jun Fukuda; w/ Akira Takarada, Toru Watanabe, Kumi Mizuno.

Godzilla continues his transformation into a nice guy -- castaways must awaken Godzilla to defend them from a bunch of high tech mercenaries and their pet giant lobster. Godzilla's costume this time is highly detailed but kind of dorky looking. The film is just as silly as you would expect, but it's action-packed, rather fun, and there's no chubby little kids running around.



GAMERA vs GAOS

(1967) dir: Noriaki Yuasa; w/ Eiko Yanami, Isamu Saeki, Mikiko Tsubouchi.

Mount Fuji erupts and Gamera drops by for a sauna -- however, the eruption also releases Gaos (so named by the chubby kid), who is a foul-tempered foxbat-thingy who spits hypersonic vibrating laser-beam-thingies. Gaos almost eats the chubby kid, but Gamera saves him -- and it's a good thing, too. The grown-ups would have been helpless without the chubby kid -- he's the only one who knows anything about fighting monsters. So with the help of the chubby kid, a giant merry-go-round and a fountain of blood, Gamera is triumphant. Moderately amusing, if you forgive the fact that it insults the intelligence of toddlers. *urp*.



KING KONG ESCAPES

(1967 - Japan/US - aka *King Kong Strikes Again; Revenge of King Kong*) dir: Ishiro Honda (Arthur Rankin, Jr. credited in the American version); w/ Rhodes Reason, Mie Hama, Linda Miller, Akira Takarada.

Kong is such a spaz. A super-sub in the South Pacific does a weak reprise of the original Kong



story as our goofy ape goes googly-eyed for the American nurse. Meanwhile, at the North Pole, a mad scientist with bad teeth and a bitchy client creates a robo-Kong to dig up the awesome Element X. It doesn't work. So he kidnaps the real Kong. The plot is even more spastic than Kong, but it twitches around long enough to get the two monkeys into a showdown match in Tokyo. Although they seemed to have put quite an effort into this one, the miniatures, sets, and monster-suits are among the dumbest you'll find in Kaiju flicks; and the action scenes are short and rather dull. But there's more than enough melodramatic silliness to make it worth while.



SON OF GODZILLA

(1967) dir: Jun Fukuda; w/ Tadao Takashima, Akira Kubo, Beverly Maeda.

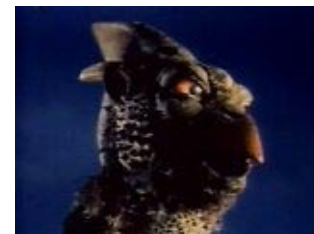
A Scientific research station on a remote island finds itself in the middle of Godzilla hatching season. Well, we've got a googly-eyed Godzilla and goofy music to start with. And baby "G" (Minilla) tries desperately to be cute, but ends up looking like lumpy fungus. However, their enemies, a giant spider & giant mantis, were pretty cool looking. The script is rambling and pointless, and both human characters & monsters just tumble around in random events until the movie's time is up.



GAPPA, THE TRIPHIBIAN MONSTER

(1967 - aka *Monster From a Prehistoric Planet*) dir: Haruyasu Noguchi; w/ Tamio Kawaji, Yoko Yamamoto.

An expedition to the South Seas discovers baby Gappa and takes him back to Japan to be the centerpiece of a new theme park. Ma & Pa Gappa don't like that. Stomp! Stomp! They swim, they fly, they spit heat rays! Well, it fulfills the usual formula, and there's even the requisite cute kid (a Japanese boy in blackface, if you can swallow that) who's always shouting the monster's name. The



effects are silly and the script is slow, scattered and, if possible, even more nonsensical than the usual Kaiju hash. It might compare favorably with the hastily-made Godzilla films of the same era, except this thing moves so achingly slowly. Even the monsters' stomping scenes go on for so long you just might forget that you're watching a movie and wander off to do housework.

the X FROM OUTER SPACE

(1967 - Japan - aka *Big Space Monster Guilala; Gilala*) dir: Kazui Nihonmatsu; w/ Toshiya Wazaki, Peggy Neal.

We start with an annoying little soap opera about Japan's latest attempt to reach Mars, which is accompanied by godawful night club music. After being attacked by a giant meat pie, the ship returns to Earth with a little glowing glob. Fortunately for the audience, the glob grows overnight into Gilala, one of Japan's goofiest looking giant monsters. Now it's up to the lady astronaut to invent monster-retarding foam! It's stupid enough to be actually painful in spots, but they had something like a budget and someone worked hard on the miniatures. The monster scenes in the second half of the flick are joyfully silly, but first you'll have to heckle your way through the stunningly idiotic space explorer scenes.



DESTROY ALL MONSTERS

(1968 - Japan) dir: Ishiro Honda; w/ Akira Kubo, Yukiko Kobayashi, Kyoko Ai, Jun Tazaki.

In the near future (1999), all the world's monsters are confined to Monster-Land, sort of a theme park for giant critters. However, this just makes it easier for evil space ladies to round them up and use them (Godzilla, Rodan, & a slew of monsters I never heard of before) against the Earth. This one is really kind of fun, but it's best to switch off your brain and just stare rapidly at the elaborate fireworks. Attempting to actually follow the story could leave you cross-eyed & dizzy. At best, you'll get three-word explanations as to why the heroes are whizzing here and flying there; going to the moon to find that it isn't so, and going somewhere else to find that it is so, after all; and flying their spaceship into caverns and getting shot with something that's going to kill them but, no, it's okay now. Huh? Wha? Never mind, just watch the cute monsters stomp on everything.



GODZILLA'S REVENGE

(1969 - aka *All Monsters Attack*) dir: Ishiro Honda; w/ Kenji Sahara, Machiko Naka.

A dweeby little kid gets picked on by the school bully, but Baby Godzilla teaches him to stand up & fight for himself. Of course, it's all a dream, except for the part where the kid captures the bank robbers. Oog. What's monster-language for "stinks on ice"? This counts as one of Godzilla's most embarrassing roles. The soundtrack is canned jazz, the characters are insipid, and the bulk of the monster footage was snipped from previous films. However, a little humor is provided by an atrociously bad English language dubbing job.



GAMERA vs GUIRON

(1969) dir: Noriaki Yuasa; w/ Nobuhiro Kazima, Miyuki Akiyama, Christopher Murphy.

Two little kids are whisked off to an alien planet where they meet evil Space Babes who eat brains and control the evil monster Guiron (who, in my youth, was always referred to as The Kitchen-Knife-Creature). But Gamera, the Children's Friend (complete with sappy theme song), stomps on the bad guys, does gymnastics, and rescues the kids. It's got a lot of action, some very elaborate sets, and it's dang silly even by Gamera standards. There's plenty to enjoy & laugh at, but my vote for the most hilarious thing about the movie is the dubbing. This is among the most incompetent English dubbing jobs I've ever heard. Not only is the voice acting wretched, but the dialogue is sprinkled with random words and pauses in a vain attempt to match the lip movement. This is a true icon of giant monster silliness.



SPACE AMOeba

(1970 - Japan - aka *Yog*, *Monster from Space*; *Gezora*, *Ganime*, *Kameba*) dir: Ishiro Honda; w/ Akira Kubo, Atsuko Takahashi, Yokiko Kabayashi, Kenji Sahara.

A space probe gets hijacked by sparkly-crap. The cuddliest ever giant squiddie-poo stomps on some stupid remote island. The mean humans hurt it. (Bad humans! I hate you!) A giant lobster-thingy and a turtle-thingy duke it out. Of course, it's all a sparkly-crap scheme to conquer Earth. Yah, let's forget the plot, shall we? This one has some nice effects and locations but even by the standards of other Kaiju flicks, the script is hackneyed and the acting isn't just wooden, it's cast iron. But at least there's lots of big adorable monsters clomping around -- and that's about all you'll get out of this one.



BAD CINEMA DIARY

GAMERA vs ZIGRA

(1971) dir: Noriaki Yuasa; w/ Eiko Yanami, Reiko Kasahara, Mikiko Tsubouchi.

An evil UFO tries to enslave the Earth, but two annoying munchkins outwit the invaders. But then the UFO turns into a gigantic shark who has musical dorsal fins and sleeps very soundly. Gamera defeats him with a combination of rock-chucking and fire-breathing. And the whole thing is a thinly disguised ad for a Japanese aquatic park. Not as much fun as other Gamera flicks, this one is flakier than average and abandons all pretense at catering to any audience member over the age of 18 months.



GODZILLA vs THE SMOG MONSTER

(1971 - aka *Godzilla vs Hedorah*) dir: Yoshimitsu Banno; w/ Akira Yamauchi, Toshie Kimura, Hiroyuki Kawase.

A monster arises from the sludge of water pollution. It suckles on industrial smokestacks and spews acid mist that dissolves people! So a cutesy-looking Godzilla and a brave scientist team up to trash the bugger -- all to Japanese disco music. And that's not mentioning the cartoon interludes, the tyke who has prophetic visions of Godzilla, the fact that Godzilla's breath can power electrical generators, and that Godzilla learns how to fly! Woo. The scripts for Godzilla movies tend to be scattered & hiccupy, I know, but this went way beyond the pale. As a viewing experience, this flick is about as coherent as channel surfing. It's so bad, I honestly suspected the filmmakers of having indulged in recreational drugs. Despite that, there's so much silliness & nonsense that I couldn't help but have a gas. A *very* guilty pleasure.



GODZILLA vs GIGAN

(1972 - aka *Godzilla on Monster Island*) dir: Jun Fukuda; w/ Hiroshi Ishikawa, Tomoko Umeda, Yuriko Hishimi, Minoru Takashima.

A monster theme park for kids turns out to be a cover for an invasion by evil space roaches. What it really boils down to is a tag-team match pitting Godzilla & Anguirus versus Ghidrah & Gigan (this is Gigan's first flick -- he's got a buzz-saw in his belly!). And Godzilla is almost killed by big blue laser beams fired from a statue of himself ...that's operated by evil space roaches. (It's best not to think too deeply about the plot in these flicks.) Godzilla's suit looks pretty good this time,

even though you can see the zipper flap. This entry in the series seems to have a bigger budget; there are tons of exploding miniatures and the fight is pretty brutal, including a little spurting blood. But I really could have done without the dubbed-in translations of the monster language. Although this falls squarely into Godzilla's "stupid" period, it's kind of fun nonetheless.

GODZILLA vs MEGALON

(1973) dir: Jun Fukuda; w/ Katshuiko Sasaki, Yutaka Hayashi, Hiroyuki Kawase.

Underground nuclear testing endangers the hidden kingdom of Seatopia, so they send Megalon out to destroy the surface dwellers. The final bout features Godzilla & his pal, the inflatable robot Jet Jaguar, versus Megalon and Gigan. I rate this as the most irritating Godzilla flick. The plot is an annoying attempt at an action/adventure story that has little to do with the monsters, Godzilla gets a big-eyed cartoony costume, the kid's dubbed-in voice is a nerve-wracking whine, the fights look like a gang of schoolyard dorks picking on each other, and the music is some gawdawful jazz that sounds like it was performed by the director's nephew. The budget for this one must have been left-over cash from some other project, because the sets were minimal, they re-used city destruction footage originally used for *Ghidrah*, and some of the fight footage was recycled from *Godzilla vs Gigan*. Next to *Godzilla's Revenge*, this is the nadir of the series.

GODZILLA vs MECHAGODZILLA

(1974 aka *Godzilla vs the Bionic Monster*; *Godzilla vs the Cosmic Monster*) dir: Jun Fukuda; w/ Masaaki Daimon, Kazuya Aoyama.

This flick is like watching a badly edited highlight reel. Near as I can figure, an Okinawan prophecy brings Godzilla around to destroy the world. But wait -- it's really Mechagodzilla in disguise; he's made of space-titanium, is controlled by evil space-monkeys, and has really cool theme music. This guy has massive amounts of firepower, and to defeat him, Godzilla must team up with King Caesar, the shaggy protector of Okinawa. Even that's not quite enough, so Godzilla uses lightning to invent a new power for himself: super-magnetism! The plot makes about as much sense as a music video, but the climactic fight scene is spectacular. Godzilla is still stuck with the cherubic, googly-eyed looks, but the fights are exciting and feature less of the wrassling-parody nonsense of the previous movies. Pluses & minuses -- on the whole, it's kinda fun.



the TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA

(1975) dir: Ishiro Honda; w/ Katsuhiko Sasaki, Tomoko Ai.

An embittered scientist plans to use Titanosaurus to wreak vengeance on the Human race; he joins forces with the evil space-monkeys, who are rebuilding Mechagodzilla and now have really silly helmets. Interpol investigates! (I guess that monster attacks fall under their jurisdiction.) Godzilla finally pops up as an afterthought and dismantles Mechagodzilla again. Yeesh -- trying to summarize this plot is a bit like sticking one's head in a Mixmaster. The story proceeds with assumptions, great lurches, and odd flashbacks. In an attempt to regain falling audience numbers, they went for a more dramatic feel on this one, even recruiting veteran director Honda and replacing the jazz soundtrack with an orchestra. However, the 1970's were a depressed time for theaters in Japan as elsewhere, and the Japanese audiences were beginning to discover the glories of Hollywood special effects. After *Star Wars* hit the screens, Godzilla would hibernate for almost a decade . . .



Check out the scene when Mechagodzilla unleashes his awesome firepower and Godzilla actually bursts into flames! That was *not* on purpose. But they kept that quick shot in the film (just before the firehoses were turned on). Being inside a Godzilla-suit is not the easiest job in show biz.

GODZILLA 1985

(1984 / US: 1985) dir: Koji Hashimoto (US stuff: R. J. Kizer); w/ Raymond Burr, Keiju Kobayashi, Ken Tanaka, Yasuko Sawaguchi.

Godzilla is back! He's big, he's mean, he kills people, and he's got a way bigger budget. The original title of the American release was to be Return of Godzilla, and by this they meant the return of the *original* Godzilla. This flick was made as a direct sequel to the 1954 original, ignoring all the films that came in between. Although Godzilla is back to being mean & scary, he's not necessarily cast as the villain. In his new incarnation, he is portrayed as a terrible force of nature, but not truly evil. We can try to divert or even contain him, but cannot ever hope to destroy him. The final



scene when Godzilla is sealed inside a raging volcano is almost poignant -- and the survivors are left humbled rather than triumphant. To tell the truth, I was really starting to dig this flick; it was turning into a real *monster movie*. But then they spoiled it a bit for me by trotting out that sci-fi super-tank to battle Godzilla. That made it all cartoony again. Still, it's way better than having chubby kids sing Godzilla's praises. Long live the King of the Monsters.

Some might disagree, but I like the inclusion of Raymond Burr, reprising his role from the original. The American bits were spliced in more smoothly this time, but at the expense of not really becoming a part of the plot; they were just observers. The American translation also seemed to gloss over the spiritual angle in the Japanese original. The translation made it appear that this was just the same old Godzilla. But the Japanese cast kept saying that Godzilla was something like an immortal demigod, a direct consequence of humanity's misuse of nuclear science. They seemed to hint that this Godzilla was some sort of reincarnation, even bigger and stronger than the original.

GODZILLA vs BIOLLANTE

(1989) writ & dir: Kazuki Omori; w/ Kunihiro Mitamura, Yoshiko Tanaka.

Hrrm, let me see if I got this straight.... a grief-stricken scientist believes his dead daughter's spirit resides in a rose plant, so he splices in some Godzilla-DNA with the rose. (Seems perfectly reasonable.) Meanwhile, spies & terrorists are shooting each other over the secrets of Godzilla-gene research, which results in an explosion that frees Godzilla himself.

And the only thing that can stop his rampage is a gargantuan mutant rose. Godzilla appears to defeat the plant, but wait, weird metaphysical stuff happens and the rose appears later in the film (in another burst of New Age weirdness) to drive Godzilla into the sea. The script is scatterbrained and mostly focuses on the anti-Godzilla squad's high-tech attempts to halt Godzilla. On the plus side, the production quality is good, Godzilla looks tough, and the final battle between Biollante and Big 'G' is surprisingly gory (and the "Godzilla Memorial Lounge" was a cute touch). Weird even by giant-monster standards, it succeeds in being fun & exciting (if you don't get too disoriented).



GODZILLA vs KING GHIDORAH

(1991) writ & dir: Kazuki Omori; w/ Kosuke Toyohara, Anna Nakagawa, Megumi Odaka.

We get yet another brand new Godzilla in an elaborate script that just gets more confused as it goes along. People from the future want to save Japan by preventing the



creation of Godzilla. Of course, it's all a plot by evil caucasians to let King Ghidorah destroy Japan without interference. But wait, Godzilla is recreated, even bigger & meaner than before. After he makes mincemeat of Ghidorah, our heroes have to do more time traveling to get a cybernetic Ghidorah to save Japan (again) from this fearsome new incarnation. And that's not to mention the psychics, a "Terminator," the "Super Scientific Play-Room," and dozens of "homages" to popular action flicks. Yeesh. On the other hand, the special fx and fight scenes are spectacular as heck. Just don't try to make sense of this, and you'll have a lot of fun.

GODZILLA vs MOTHRA (1992)

(1992 - aka *Godzilla & Mothra: Battle for the Earth*)
dir: Takao Okawara; w/ Tetsuya Bessho, Satomi Kobayashi, Takehiro Murata.

Mixing bits from both *Mothra* and the original *Godzilla vs Mothra*, this gussied-up remake starts out with a blatant ripoff of the opening scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Then a meteorite not only awakens Godzilla but sets off a series of natural disasters -- which, it turns out, is just Mother Earth's way of giving humanity the finger. Then Godzilla and the bad-Mothra grub (Batra) have a brief fight & are swallowed by a volcano. Then it's up to the good-Mothra grub to rescue the Twin Fairies, who in this movie have become immortal spokespersons for Gaia theology and militant environmentalism. Finally, after the good & bad grubs transform into moths, all three assemble at a Yokohama amusement park for a wild, wooly, knock-down, drag-out battle royale. <whew> Kazuki Omori wrote the script on this one, and like his previous two films, he filled it with New Age philosophies & prophecies. Also, it seems to me that this flick goes back to some of the silliness that marked the older Godzilla films. However, it is at least packed with action & thrills, and never fails to entertain.



GODZILLA vs MECHAGODZILLA 2

(1993) dir: Takao Okawara; w/ Masahiro Takashima, Ryoko Sano, Megumi Odaka.

Godzilla has a new suit on this outing -- it gives him a beefy body but sort of a weasel-like face. Although this flick has a sizable budget and impressive sfx, it's really a throwback to the 70's. Scientists discover a giant pteranodon egg (being the 90's version of Rodan), but it



turns out to be a Godzillasaurus egg. And the wretchedly adorable baby becomes the focus of way too many awww-aint'-he-cute scenes. Meanwhile, the Counter-Godzilla force uses wreckage from MechaKingGidorah to build the ultimate anti-Godzilla robot. It almost works, too. But then the monster we thought was Godzilla's enemy ends up helping (because, apparently, baby Godzilla whined) and some unexplainable ESP-metaphysical-sparkly crap happens. Then Godzilla revives just in time to take part in a grotesquely maudlin ending. ick.

GODZILLA vs SPACE-GODZILLA

(1994) dir: Kensho Yamashita;
w/ Jun Hashizume, Megumi
Odaka, Akira Emoto.

A mineralized Godzilla from space arrives to kill Earth-Godzilla, thus leaving the planet open for invasion (from somebody or something, I suppose). The Counter-G force uses its latest anti-Godzilla



mecha to help Godzilla defeat the invader. And that's not mentioning Baby Godzilla (aww, such a cutey-pie), mini-Mothra, the telepathic lady with the vibrating earrings, and the Japanese mafia. Yow. Despite the usual scatter-brained script, this one is entertaining -- largely thanks to good music, good photography, and some of the best fx of the series. However, it also completes the transition of Godzilla, once again, into the good guy.

GODZILLA vs DESTROYAH

(1995) dir:Takao Okawari; w/ Yoko Ishino, Megumi
Odaka, Takuro Tatsumi.

The "second generation" of Godzilla films ends with the best flick since the original. Godzilla is raging mad and burning up from the inside thanks to a uranium overdose. Meanwhile, Godzilla Junior is growing up, and the terrible weapon used to kill the original Godzilla forty years ago has caused a new & really scary monster to evolve under Tokyo bay. The G-Force has to contend not only with the metamorphic Destroyer (son of the "Oxygen Destroyer"



weapon), but two Godzillas, one of whom is about to melt down & destroy the planet! The script is by Kazuki Omori, so it has plenty of scatterbrained silly bits, but it's also the first Godzilla script to attempt anything resembling continuity. They hearken back not only to events in the first film, but to characters & issues

from the recent films. In the finale, Godzilla, Junior, and Destroyer meet for a truly awesome battle that levels Tokyo and changes Godzilla forever. Long live the King of the Monsters.

GAMERA, GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE

(1995 - aka *Gamera: Giant Monster Midair Showdown*) dir: Shusuke Kaneko; w/ Tsuyoshi Ihara, Akira Onodera, Shinobu Nakayama, Ayako Fujitani.

After millennia in hibernation, a giant turtle that spits fireballs wakes up to fight the menace of the terrible Gaos birds, who have a nasty habit of eating people & growing bigger, eating more people & growing even bigger, etc. Since the original Gamera flick is in the running for worst kaiju movie of all time, it feels a bit awkward, but I have to admit that this remake is easily among the best kaiju films ever made. It is blessed with a fun script (it's even coherent!), good fx, good pacing, a dynamite music track, and it even has a decent English dubbing job! This is a "new start" movie and presents Gamera as a genetic construct made by the ancient Atlantians (too late for themselves) to defend the Earth from the menace of the Gaos-creatures. His link to humanity this time is thankfully not provided by a chubby tyke with a big mouth, but rather by a courageous teen girl who shares both Gamera's strength and his wounds. After years of gagging on the old Gamera flicks, I can now honestly say, "Hooray for Gamera!"

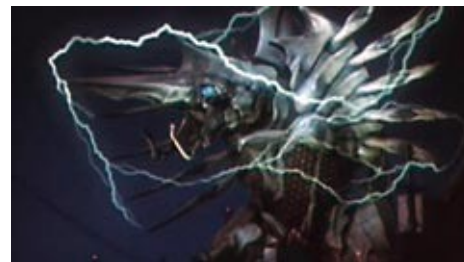
(I'd better be careful, I might start singing that insipid song from *Gamera vs Barugon* again...)



GAMERA 2: Attack of Legion

(1996 - Japan) dir: Shusuke Kaneko; w/ Toshiyuki Nagashima, Miki Mizuno.

Mysterious meteors bring a plague of spiky bugs from beyond space! They like to build spore pods that explode like nukes -- Gamera gets barbecued! But thanks to the usual unexplained metaphysical mumbo-jumbo, the turtle is back on the job and even has to invent a brand-new hyperatomic trick to best this baddie. Woo -- the second flick in Gamera's new incarnation pulls out all the stops -- a witty and fast-paced script, great effects, and gobs & gobs of monsters and explosions. But don't worry -- we're still smack in



the middle of old-fashioned Kaiju territory here, with the requisite stiff-necked army guys, long-suffering female know-it-alls, wussy scientists, and the occasional pouty brat. This thing is a gas. (Damn... I'm singing that freakin' Gamera song again...)

REBIRTH OF MOTHRA

(1996 - aka *Mothra*) dir: Okihiro Yoneda; w/ Megumi Kobayashi, Sayaka Yamaguchi, Aki Hano.

Well, it turns out that the little fairy-twins have a nemesis. She's a leather-clad fairy chick riding a darling little micro-dragon, and she sets loose Desghidorah, a prehistoric menace from space (he was the one that really caused the extinction of the dinosaurs, ya know). Micro-Mothra and the micro-dragon dogfight in somebody's kitchen! Two little munchkins save Mothra! Mothra & her baby-grub kick butt on Desghidorah! And at that point the movie hits a cinematic speed bump. I mean, I've seen movies with "slow spots", but this sucker brought Time to a halt -- the monsters went on vacation, the fairies sang some sleepy songs, and I lost track of what *day* it was. Eventually there's some more monster-fights and a really long, maudlin finale. The effects on this one seemed low-budget, but still quite spectacular. It's kind of fun, even if it was obviously aimed at the kiddies.



REBIRTH OF MOTHRA 2

(1997 - aka *Mothra 2*) dir: Kunio Miyoshi; w/ Megumi Kobayashi, Sayaka Yamaguchi, Aki Hano.

The new incarnation of Mothra needs a little help in battling Dagahra, the really cool-looking sea-garbage-monster. So three kids, a fuzzy little toy advertisement, and the twin fairies try to get to the treasure of ancient Mu before the Bad Biker Fairy snatches it. Filled with slapstick humor and moments of syrupy cuteness, this thing is targeted firmly at the four-year-old market. However, the miniatures & effects are much improved from the previous film, and the cinematography is simply gorgeous. Although frequently irritating, it still manages to be fun.



GAMERA 3: The Revenge of Iris

(1999) dir: Shusuke Kaneko; w/ Yukijiro Hotaru, Shinobu Nakayama, Ayako Fujitani, Ai Maeda.

All that collateral damage finally catches up to Gamera -- not only is the army shooting missiles at him, but a young girl whose family was inadvertently smooched during the turtle's first romp is still so ticked off she breeds a Gao-mutant powerful enough to kill Gamera. The script on this one squanders a lot of time & energy on peripheral characters and the usual unexplained metaphysical window dressing. However, they do deliver the goods with some great kaiju slugfests and really spectacular special effects. Not as good as the first two "revival" films, but still plenty of fun.



GODZILLA 2000

(1999 - aka *Godzilla Millennium*) dir: Takao Okawara; w/ Takehiro Murata, Naomi Nishida, Mayu Suzuki.

Godzilla is back and with more polish & budget than ever before (but the dubbing is still silly). Rumors had said that this would be another "fresh start" movie, but it looks a lot more like a continuation of the 1990's series to me. In fact, the movie reprises a lot of the elements of the previous half dozen films. Don't get me wrong, this is one terrific Godzilla movie, it's just a little unoriginal. Godzilla stomps on a few things, and then saves humanity from yet another alien takeover attempt. There is one bit of originality here -- Godzilla gets to fight a huge cybernetic UFO that uses Tokyo's buildings & structures as a weapon against him. But then the UFO uses Godzilla's DNA to create a giant mutant space-Godzilla monster so they can have a traditional roar & chomp fight. Assuming that this is, in fact, a continuation of the series, then we're looking at Godzilla Junior here. He has grown up to be a little more reptilian and quite a bit spikier than his forbears, but he looks tough -- and oh my word his breath weapon is a major ass-kicker. He's still portrayed as dangerous (rather than a total good guy), but he seems to know who his friends and enemies are. Perhaps having been raised for a while by humans had something to do with that. On the whole, this is a good looking and exciting flick with minimal stupid bits and a couple of terrific fight scenes; plus it ends with a simply delightful "The End?" cliché (American version). Well worth waiting five years for.



(Yah, yah, people -- I know this was meant to be a "starting over" picture and that's not really Godzilla, Jr. -- but that's what I was thinking when I first saw it -- and if Toho can

reinvent Godzilla with every flamin' flick, I don't think I'm out of line if I reinvent things a little for myself. <pout>

GODZILLA vs MEGAGUIRUS

(2000 - Japan) dir: Masaaki Tezuka; w/ Misato Tanaka, Shosuke Tanihara.

They think they've finally come up with a way to squash Godzilla for good -- a Black Hole Cannon! Any obnoxious 8-year-old could have told them all that would accomplish is to create a bigger, badder beastie that Godzilla would have to save Japan from. This time, it's a super-atomic ultra-sonic prehistoric dragonfly. Well, 'G' looks pretty good and this is certainly a glitzier production than back in the 60's -- but this is nonetheless a thoroughly old-school Kaiju wrasslin' match. The humans rattle around doing nothing much effective while the monsters get on with pounding the snot out of each other. It's an okay flick, but it's really just for G-fans.



GODZILLA, MOTHRA & KING GHIDORAH: Giant Monster All-Out Attack!

(2001 - Japan) dir: Shusuke Kaneko; w/ Chiharo Niiyama, Ryudo Uzaki.

Okay, we're starting over yet again this time... Godzilla returns for the first (ahem) time since 1954 -- he's mean, he's murderous, and he ain't no good guy. On top of that, Godzilla is recast into a far more politically charged role; no longer a vague nemesis of nuclear power, he is now explained as a demon of vengeance, animated by the restless souls of all those slain by Japan's aggression during World War 2. So an old mystic guy conjures up a tag-team of "guardian monsters" from ancient legend... and the rumble is on. The effects are nothing new, but they're certainly



spectacular; and the director conjures up some terrific visual moments, making this one of the best looking G-films ever. The music is great, the script has a harder edge and better characters than usual, there's tons of Kaiju fireworks, and hundreds of innocent people get squished & fried. What more could you want?

GODZILLA AGAINST MECHAGODZILLA

(2002) dir: Masaaki Tezuka; w/ Yumiko Shaku, Shin Takuma.

When Godzilla returns for the first time since 1954 -- um, yah, this is starting to feel like a bad Star Trek time loop -- anyhow... the government puts all their resources into creating a cyborg duplicate of Big G that will stop him once and for all. The first test didn't go so well, but they fix things up and go in for a final one-on-one. This goes beyond just being another remake of the Mecha-G tale; it's a throwback to the sixties' films, and not in a good way. The effects are less spectacular than in recent films, the action is minimized, and Godzilla is reduced to making a few mindless cameo appearances. The movie is almost entirely a talky soap opera involving the usual: dorky scientist, annoying brat kid, and a pouty female Anti-G soldier with a tragedy in her past. Rather dull and distinctly disappointing.



GODZILLA: TOKYO S.O.S.

(2003) dir: Masaaki Tezuka; w/ Noboru Kaneko, Miho Yoshioka, Mitsuki Koga.

Mech-G and Mothra double-team Godzilla and... um, yah, that's about it. A rarity in the Godzilla universe, this is a direct sequel to *Godzilla Against MechaGodzilla*. The cast changes, but they continue with the soapy bits, this time involving the lowly mechanic and the cocky pilot. They also toss in some lightweight spirituality, but they also crank up the action a bit and the showcase fight scene features a little bone-crunching brutality. Like the previous flick however, this one has a retro feel to it. They avoid innocent casualties wherever possible and much of the action is copied from the original *Godzilla vs. Mothra* -- and the freakin' fairies get to sing a bit of that old song again. And although Godzilla's part is larger, it's still basically mindless (except maybe for that brilliant sucker-punch that fried Mecha-G's face). It's more fun than the first part, but still ranks (deliberately, it seems) as a mediocre G-flick.



GODZILLA FINAL WARS

(2004 - Japan) dir: Ryuhei Kitamura; w/ Masahiro Matsuoka, Rei Kikukawa, Don Frye, Maki Mizuno.

For their “final” episode this time around, Toho goes old-school and proudly trots out every last cliché in the Kaiju universe. For director, they tapped the creator of *Versus*, and he introduces real human action scenes

(with the usual evil aliens battling mutant superhumans) and gives us monster action that is both humorous and brutal -- and then tops it off with a scoop of syrupy schmaltz. The first half of the flick is the same old alien conspiracy angle they’ve used so many times before; and this sets up the ultimate Kaiju grudge match that pits the Big G against darn near every monster in the history of the series (plus a little extra time to turn the American ‘zilla into a soufflé). But G himself is almost upstaged by one of the funnest evil alien overlords you’d ever want to see. It’s corny, action-packed, and a tad tongue-in-cheek. Some fans were disappointed that this wasn’t more serious in tone; it is, however, perfectly in tune with the majority of G-flicks. Although I, too, would love to see another “serious” G-flick, I did think this one was a terrific lot of fun and a worthy caper to the current series. Long live the King of the Monsters.



The Godzilla Cycle

Just for the record, here’s a chronological list of all the Godzilla films (not including that weird American iguana-thing). The initial American release titles are listed, but the release dates are for the original Japanese premier.

Godzilla (1954)

Gigantis, the Fire Monster (aka Godzilla Raids Again) (1955)

King Kong vs Godzilla (1962)

Godzilla vs the Thing (aka Godzilla vs Mothra) (1964)

Ghidrah, the Three-Headed Monster (1964)

Monster Zero (1965)

Godzilla vs the Sea Monster (1966)

Son of Godzilla (1967)

Destroy All Monsters (1968)

Godzilla's Revenge (1969)

Godzilla vs the Smog Monster (1971)

Godzilla on Monster Island (1972)

Godzilla vs Megalon (1973)

Godzilla vs the Bionic Monster (aka Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla) (1974)

Terror of Godzilla (aka Terror of Mechagodzilla) (1975)

Godzilla 1985 (1984)

Godzilla vs Biollante (1989)

Godzilla vs King Ghidrah (1991)

Godzilla vs Mothra: Battle for the Earth (1992)

Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla 2 (1993)

Godzilla vs Spacegodzilla (1994)

Godzilla vs Destroyer (1995)

Godzilla 2000 (1999)

Godzilla vs Megaguirus (2000)

Godzilla, Mothra & King Ghidorah: Giant Monster All-Out Attack! (2001)

Godzilla Against MechaGodzilla (2002)

Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S. (2003)

Godzilla Final Wars (2004)

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Icon Glossary:



Good Stinker -- These are the films where a good deal of the entertainment comes from filmmaking incompetence; fun to watch in spite of themselves.



Goopy Gore -- These films exhibit distinctly above-normal quantities of unpleasantly abused body parts.



Naughty Nudie -- Films with this flag feature frequent and/or explicit nudity (almost always female) beyond that normally found in your average T&A flick.



Butt Stompin' -- These films feature at least one superior violent fight or shootout scene that will get the testosterone pumping.



Gold Star -- These are the flicks that I felt reached above their expectations or at least pleasantly surprised me; they may not always be actually good flicks, but I did find something in them worthwhile.



Blue Max Medal of Really Goodness -- These are flicks that I not only enjoyed, but I think are actually quite good films (not always the same thing).



Lethal Cinema -- These wretched viewing experiences go beyond being merely bad to become genuine sources of pain and regret; they should be avoided by all but the most masochistic trash cinema veterans. Don't say I didn't warn you.