

DVD Review: Criterion Brings Legendary ‘Godzilla’ Back From the Deep

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 3, 2012 - 6:58pm

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CHICAGO – In his excellent commentary for “Godzilla, King of the Monsters,” the 1956 reworking of Ishiro Honda’s “Godzilla,” both of which are included in one DVD or Blu-ray set recently released from Criterion, film historian David Kalat claims that these films are looked at skeptically when it comes to critics assessing the art of the form. He’s half right. Any critic worth a damn understands the influence and importance of Honda’s film (and Morse’s reworking of it) but generations of movie goers may consider these movies a joke (in no small part due to the films that would follow, including Roland Emmerich’s awful reboot attempt). This stellar edition, arguably the most interesting release of Criterion’s first quarter of 2012, will hopefully correct that.



DVD Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Watching Honda’s “Godzilla” again with the perfect high-definition digital restoration from Criterion one is struck by how much the film differs from what would come of this franchise. There is no Mothra. No silly dubbing. No Matthew Broderick. “Godzilla” would go on to spawn thirty sequels and really create an entire genre of monster movies, but the first film is probably not what you remember it to be. It’s closer to noir with a long, drawn-out, melancholy set-up and it’s undeniably an allegory for nuclear proliferation and the impact of the nuclear attack on Japan. In other words, this is no mere man in a monster suit movie. It has larger goals and it nails those goals. It is a great film.



Godzilla was released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on January 24th, 2012

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

“Godzilla, King of Monsters” is not a great film. It is, however, a fascinating one. Terry Morse, a studio doctor who was used to editing films to meet audience feedback, took “Godzilla” and completely dismantled it, adding 40 minutes of footage featuring Raymond Burr, dubbing the original, and presenting what I think is a very different film. Since that was the one released stateside (to game-changing box office), I think that’s why the “Godzilla” franchise may have been deemed critically non-essential for years. People thought of bad dubbing and Raymond Burr instead of nuclear allegory. Although it is fascinating now to watch “King of Monsters” as a companion to the original. Imagine if someone today took “Oldboy,” cut out half the footage, dubbed the other half, and added David Caruso as a character. It’s mind-boggling but Kalat makes the case that what Morse did was a sign of respect for the original and not blasphemy. Listen to his commentary. It’s stellar.



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Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

The entire package is a beauty. New interviews with some of the key players are included, but it's the commentaries (Kalat is on both films) and the restorations that truly stand out. Criterion and Kalat give each film context, taking back a character who has become larger than life and perfectly teaching viewers of his origin and importance along with some fascinating anecdotes and bits of trivia (i.e., the word "Gojira" comes from a combination of the Japanese words for gorilla and whale). Godzilla is king again.

Synopsis:

Godzilla (a.k.a. Gojira) is the roaring granddaddy of all monster movies. It's also a remarkably humane and melancholy drama, made in Japan at a time when the country was reeling from nuclear attack and H-bomb testing in the Pacific. Its rampaging radioactive beast, the poignant embodiment of an entire population's fears, became a beloved international icon of destruction, spawning almost thirty sequels. A thrilling, tactile spectacle that continues to be a cult phenomenon, the original, 1954 Japanese version is presented here, along with Godzilla, King of the Monsters, the 1956 "Americanized" version.

Special Features:

- Disc 1
 - o Audio Commentary By Film Historian David Kalat
 - o Trailers
- Disc 2
 - o Audio Commentary for Godzilla, King Of The Monsters by Kalat
 - o Trailer for Godzilla, King Of The Monsters
 - o New Interviews with Actors Akira Takarada and Haruo Nakajima and Special Effects Technicians Yoshio Irie and Eizo Kaimai
 - o Interview with Legendary Godzilla Score Composer Akira Ifukube
 - o Featurette Detailing Godzilla's Photographic Effects, Introduced by Special Effects Director Koichi Kawakita and Special Effects Photographer Motoyoshi Tomioka
 - o New Interview with Japanese-Film Critic Tadao Sato
 - o The Unluckiest Dragon, an Illustrated Audio Essay Featuring Historian Greg Pflugfelder Describing The Tragic Fate of the Fishing Vessel Daigo Fukuryu Maru, a Real-Life Event That Inspired Godzilla
 - o A Booklet Featuring An Essay By Critic J. Hoberman

"Godzilla" was released by The Criterion Collection on January 24th, 2012 and stars Takashi Shimura, Akihiko Hirata, Raymond Burr, and Akira Takarada.



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