

'Godzilla' Just Goes Where He Has Gone Before

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 15, 2014 - 3:43pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – I did not like “Godzilla.” That sentence alone might make my review interesting enough to attract some initial attention. But despite that, and despite the fact that I’m a sucker for pretty much giant anything if it stomps a city, I’m holding fast to this judgment.

I love the redesign of Godzilla himself. In fact the special effects and creature design in the film are impeccable, and is available in 3D. Ironically, I’m writing this on the day that I find out noted surrealist artist and designer of the xenomorph in “Alien” (1979) – H.R. Giger – has died. It’s ironic to think that the man who nailed the aesthetic of Cthulean dread for modern cinema should die just as Godzilla, an ultimate force of cinematic apocalypse, should be successfully redesigned and let loose on the cinematic landscape once again.



Joe (Bryan Cranston) Senses Something Coming in 'Godzilla'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

But this brings up my main point. All the marketing for “Godzilla,” ALL of it, told viewers to expect something next level, and darker. Of course the original 1954 Japanese version was just that, before American distributors gutted it and inserted footage of Raymond Burr to make it more palatable for American audience. But it’s that original version – and its constant shots of radiated victims, death in the rubble and theme of self sacrifice – that explains why “Godzilla” took on an iconic life. This was a film that was embraced by Japan, which only a few years earlier had

seen the devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It is precisely because it took that devastation so seriously, that it served up an apt symbol of why man will lose the fight it has picked with nature. To invoke the idea "Godzilla" (2014) might be a serious film, and not deliver, is a slap in the face to all of the above.

This new film, which reintroduces the character in a mostly American context, offers an almost completely inverse presentation. We see nothing of the American way of life here. We encounter no real suffering after the first half-hour or so which features two characters dying on an absolute cliched cue. In fact, the film goes to great lengths to offer a thoroughly sanitized version of Godzilla's destructive power. It has all been seen before. A long shot of a rib cage buried in the earth, buildings brought to the ground, train cars derailed and destroyed. It all passes without barely a hint of true trauma or cost to the human beings who form the main part of the story.

And the characters – Bryan Cranston as Joe, Aaron Taylor-Johnson as Ford, Elizabeth Olsen as Elle and Sally Hawkins as Vivienne, among others – are utterly uninteresting. The movie takes absolutely no risks with them at all. There is never a sense of danger, or any doubt about what will happen to them. They walk through a plot that has been stomped to dust by "Godzilla" films long past. It isn't that the cast is bad. But there's nothing for any of them to latch onto here in a screenplay that is as bland as they come. A plot description here would be pointless. Any viewer will know exactly what is coming and when.

Make no mistake, there is an indirect reference to Fukushima. A tidal wave washes through a city street, and climate change is hinted at. The filmmakers even import noted Japanese character actor Ken Watanabe to invoke lines about man's arrogance, and Godzilla being nature's way of restoring balance to the imbalance man has wrought. But it all has the emotional weight of a Transformers movie.



The Title Character Wreaks Some Havoc in 'Godzilla'
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

At the very least of Godzilla should be entertaining or kitschy. A list of my favorite Godzilla films (the Japanese original aside) includes "King Kong vs. Godzilla" (1962), "Mothra vs. Godzilla" (1964), "Destroy All Monsters" (1968) and "Godzilla vs. Hedorah" (1971). They all have in common a certain kitschy flair for turning me back into a twelve-year-old. They have the goofiest looking versions of Godzilla in them but that's part of their charm. They invite you to play. Director Gareth Edwards interpretation has relatively little Godzilla in it in comparison to any of the other films – yet it doesn't invite you to think much either. What the hell is a film like this good for? "Cloverfield" (2008) is a far better film than "Godzilla." "Pacific Rim" (2013) is twice as fun and genuinely jaw dropping at times. This movie succeeds only in being a decidedly lesser entry in a film series that already has enough clunkers in it.

"Godzilla" does achieve one thing. I've already briefly mentioned it by inverting the power of the original film – it reboots Godzilla as an action figure. He'll make a cool looking collectible and there will likely be a mildly successful franchise as far as U.S. box office is concerned. But that was made possible by neglecting all the other things that have made him a towering figure, in the cultural iconography we all share.

"Godzilla" opens everywhere on May 16th, in 3D, IMAX 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for screen options and show times. Featuring Bryan Cranston, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Elizabeth Olsen, Sally Hawkins, Juliette Binoche, David Strathairn and Ken Watanabe. Screenplay by Max Borenstein. Directed by Gareth Edwards. Rated "PG-13"



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