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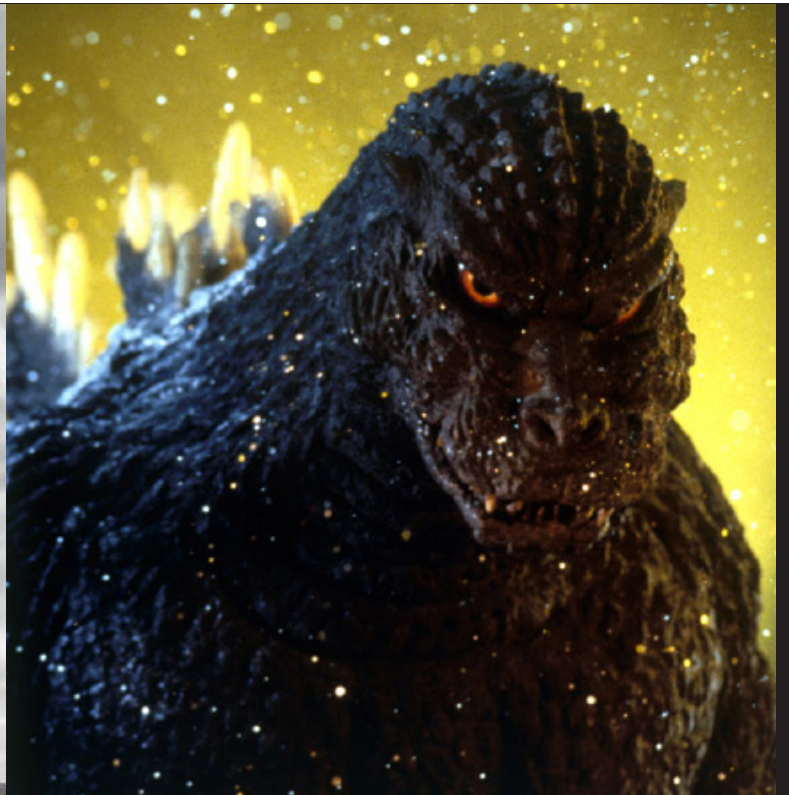
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GARETH EDWARDS REIMAGINES
THE WORLD'S FAVORITE NUCLEAR
NIGHTMARE

THE SCI-FI ISSUE:
DAWN OF THE PLANET OF
THE APES, GUARDIANS OF
THE GALAXY, AND MORE

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MAYBE THE BEST SCI-FI MIND-BENDER
SINCE BLADE RUNNER?



KING OF THE MONSTERS

HOW GARETH EDWARDS HAS REBOOTED
GODZILLA FROM JAPANESE POST-HIROSHIMA
METAPHOR TO A FORCE OF TERROR FOR
AUDIENCES EVERYWHERE

BY PHILLIP SITTER

COVER ART: MOVIEWEB.COM
OPPOSITE PAGE: GODZILLA.
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GODZILLA

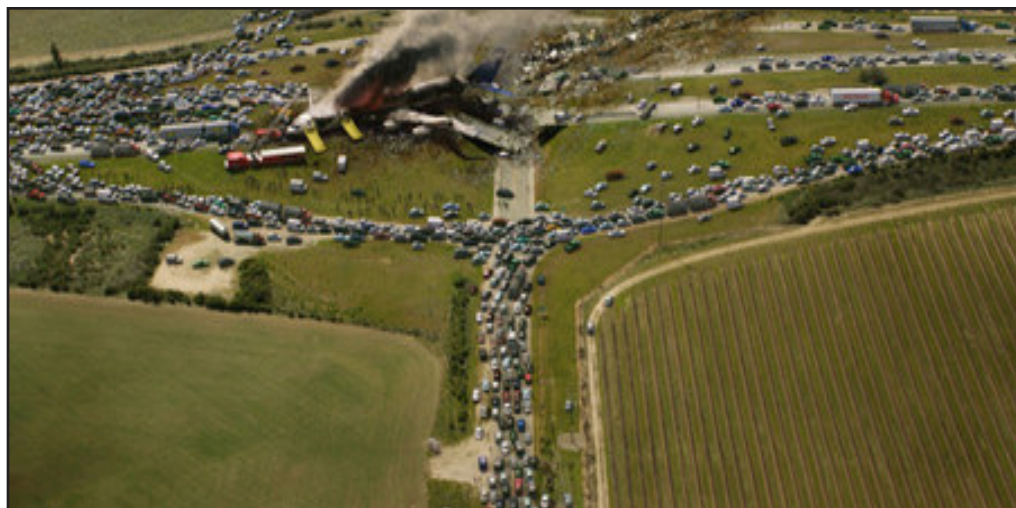
Just a little over a decade after his genesis as a walking nuclear holocaust in 1954's "Gojira," Godzilla had evolved into a kid-friendly guardian of Japan and the earth as a whole. He defended humanity against invading intelligent alien species, nuclear-weapons seeking terrorist groups and undiscovered hostile earthly civilizations, all of whom employed the city-crushing services of kaijus (giant monsters) like King Ghidorah, Ebirah, Gigan, Megalon, Mecha-Godzilla and Titanosaurus against us. Godzilla won these battles with a little human ingenuity and bravery, and help from former enemies-turn-allies Anguirus, Rodan and Mothra.

However, those matinee themes have never been at the core of the Godzilla mythos. Important and exciting as giant monster battles are, Godzilla's spirit is much darker.

Godzilla and his kaiju cronies embody the fear of the horrors and uncertainties of our times, nuclear warfare, pollution, capitalism amok and genetic engineering. But why visit these horrors at all, even if we can downplay them a bit with the ridiculousness of their embodiment in a radioactive dinosaur roaming the earth, historically played by a man in a rubber suit?

Why is Godzilla so successful, and how has director Gareth Edwards tapped into this serious kaiju legacy with his reboot of the franchise?

Las Vegas's luck finally runs out. Image courtesy MovieWeb.com.



Monster brawls tend to cause traffic snarls. Image courtesy MovieWeb.com.

"I think man versus nature is the predominant theme in the movie, and there's obviously a nuclear theme within that, an idea being that probably the most powerful thing that we've discovered in terms of nature is the nuclear age, the power of splitting the atom," Edwards said in an interview with The Verge.

"That was always at the heart of the original . . . we've spent the last few decades going with this amazing abuse of nature really, this Pandora's box that we've opened with nuclear power. And it's like, 'yeah, we can have weapons and you can't have weapons, you're not allowed to do that, and these countries can have nuclear power and these countries can't.' And then what naturally comes from Godzilla is what if there were giant creatures that were attracted to radiation? Suddenly, like, everything would be flipped and you'd want to

be getting rid of this stuff. For me, that was really interesting, and a good basis for our film," Edwards explained.

Godzilla is a check against our arrogance in the face of harnessing nature's power, which for Japan especially has taken upon new symbolic relevance in the post-Fukushima age.

"The arrogance of man is thinking that nature is in our control, and not the other way around," echoes Ken Watanabe's character, Dr. Serizawa, from Edwards's film.

As with any humbling natural disaster, Godzilla certainly racks up a high property damage count. However, most Godzilla films had little or no on-screen human consequences.

Lots of villages and cities get trampled upon and scorched, cultural sites are decimated, tanks are melted and planes swatted down, ships sunk, landscapes violently transformed. But all of these objects are hollow models that burn, crumple or shatter without spilling any literal or metaphorical guts.

The massive exception to this is the genesis of the Godzilla franchise, 1954's "Gojira." There are extended scanning shots of radiation and burn victims. A little girl cries as her mother's lifeless body is taken away.

A children's choir prays for healing and peace, set against images of an incinerated Tokyo that could have been ripped from World War II news reels, if they actually were not.

This tone of the beginning of the franchise is the basis for Edwards's take on the Godzilla legend.

"I personally love them, but a lot of people haven't seen or know the very first movie, which is the 1954 one which is really black and white, probably the most serious monster movie ever made, which is really one big metaphor for Hiroshima and Nagasaki," Edwards informed IGN of the original Godzilla film's tone versus its campy descendants.

"If Japan could've made a film about Hiroshima, they would have, but the [American] censorship wouldn't allow it then, so they did this 'monster movie,' and they had this thing smash up a city and leave radiation everywhere and it was a very cathartic thing to them," Edwards said.

This year's Godzilla reboot definitely follows in a similarly monster-sized body count vein. Honolulu, Las Vegas, and San Francisco are utterly devastated, along with some Japanese and South Pacific locales. Trailers have shown trampled commuter trains with bodies scattered about, downed airliners on interstate highways and hapless tourists being washed away by a presumably kaiju-induced tsunami.

Edwards, whose only other film is the indie-kaiju flick "Monsters," does not want "Godzilla" to fall into the trap of disaster porn, however.

"Monsters" was a character-driven journey through a Central America and southern United States where battles over immigration, narco- and anti-narco terrorism and media



When it comes to terror, size does matter. The new Godzilla stands at over 100 meters tall, making other classic movie monsters seem puny. Images courtesy MovieWeb.com.

portrayals are metaphorically waged against giant squid-like alien organisms (brought to Earth by a fallen U.S. satellite).

"My biggest complaint of big blockbuster movies was that yeah it's a great spectacle, it's amazing to look at, but I didn't care about the characters and the story's really over the top. So I felt like that if I got to make a film with a visual effects background, if people came out of the cinema and the first thing they said was 'Oh, the effects were really good,' then I feel like I failed," Edwards said of "Monsters" in an interview with videoezy.com.

"I wanted it to be really about the

Bryan Cranston's character in "Godzilla" is overwhelmed. Image courtesy MovieWeb.com.



characters and I wanted it to be about emotionally investing in these people and their journeys," Edwards continued, sharing this attitude with making "Godzilla."

"When we pitched ['Godzilla'] to Warner Brothers, there's a big presentation, at the end I said, 'If you don't get close to tearing up in this film, then I've failed,'" Edwards assured IGN.

Gareth Edwards's goal is to not only honor Godzilla's legacy. Edwards wants to emotionally move and intellectually stir audiences. It's an ambitious objective. Watching giant monsters fight is worth the price of admission alone, however.