

## Godzilla (*Gojira*)

JoAnn Parochetti

A mutant green reptile of gigantic proportions, Godzilla is an icon of not only Japanese cinema but also global pop culture. Indeed, Godzilla even has a star on Hollywood's "Walk of Fame," a tribute to the world's fascination with the mythical monster.

*Gojira* first debuted on movie screens in Japan in 1954, produced by Toho Co., Ltd., one of Japan's foremost film companies. It became the biggest international hit in Toho's corporate history. The movie soon reached audiences throughout Europe and North America, where the dinosaur-like beast became known as "Godzilla."

Over the years, Toho continued to release additional films in the series. The 1962 movie *King Kong vs. Godzilla* set a box office record with ticket sales of 12 million yen, surpassing the original film, which had sales of 9.6 million yen.

Later films differ from the original in several ways. The original, which was aimed at an adult audience, featured the monster in conflict with human opponents. Subsequent movies, aimed more at the family market of children and their parents, usually featured the monster in conflict with other creatures, like Mothra, for example. After 1975, however, interest in the series gradually dwindled as critics and moviegoers alike panned the films.

In 1984, there was a brief revival caused by the opening of a special 30th anniversary tribute in which Godzilla appeared by himself. The film, *Godzilla 1985*, enjoyed some success at the box office, bringing in 1.7 billion yen for Toho.

To celebrate Godzilla's 50th anniversary, the final episode in the series was released in 2004. Entitled *Godzilla's Final Wars*, the film featured 14 monsters, along with Godzilla. Many of the monsters were old acquaintances, having been introduced in earlier movies.

The original film was a true horror film, reflecting Japanese anti-nuclear sentiments, concern about environmental destruction, and worries about the decay of civilization. The opening scene of the original movie shows Godzilla rising from the sea, having been awakened by hydrogen

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bomb tests in the South Pacific Ocean.

This scene is a direct reference to an actual event when such a test was conducted by the United States on the Bikini Atoll on July 1, 1954. The radiation fallout from the test sickened 23 Japanese fishermen on a boat called the Lucky Dragon. The news, which was widely reported in Japan, where memories of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still fresh, caused shock and outrage. Godzilla was, in effect, a reflection of these feelings, a cinematic protest against nuclear war. In the words of one film critic, “Godzilla is pop culture’s grandest symbol of nuclear apocalypse.”