

GODZILLA

PROFILE



For science fiction fans, the significance of the arrival of the "atomic age" was not the energy that might someday power our homes, our businesses and our armies. Of far greater significance were the horrors that would leap from the imagination of '50s film-makers and onto our movie screens. The 1950s saw an explosion (no pun intended) of cinematic monsters riled up or created or made gargantuan by an atomic bomb detonation or some other exposure to radiation. Frequently, the giant monster woke up, got pissed, attacked and then wreaked havoc on mankind.

After *King Kong* (1931), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) was the first such live action film to feature a giant monster attacking a big city (New York) after having been thusly awakened or created. That film's financial success helped spawn the genre of '50s giant monster films, many of which followed the "giant monster versus big city" formula. In *Godzilla* (1954), the monster (alleged by some to be a cross between a whale and an ape) grows gigantic and terrorizes Japan's largest city, Tokyo, after American atomic bomb detonations. In *Them!* (1954), giant ants, initially discovered in the desert, attack folks in the sewer system in Los Angeles. In *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1955), an irradiated octopus attacks San Francisco. In *The Beginning of the End* (1957), locusts eat radioactive crops, grow to the size of a school bus and then attack Chicago. In *The Black Scorpion* (1957), a volcano wakes up giant scorpions which attack Mexico City. And, in *The Giant Behemoth* (1959), a radioactive dinosaur attacks London.

Not all of the films in this cinematic subgenre featured killer gargantuans attacking major cities. And some of these films don't specifically attribute the beast's gigantism to radiation. For example, *Tarantula* (1955) featured a giant spider on growth hormones. *Rodan* (1956) is a giant pterosaur whose size is not explained. And, in *The Spider* (1957) and *The Deadly Mantis* (1958), we aren't told how the giant bugs got so big. But who really cared? We loved these films.

The 1950s and its "radiation theater" was not limited to giant bugs and dinosaurs. *The Giant Claw* (1957) was a large extra-terrestrial bird. And in *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), seafood lovers delighted in the thought of devouring giant crab legs while monster fans enjoyed the idea of giant crab claws getting a little payback. *The Giant Gila Monster* (1959) also showed the monstrous effects of atomic energy on lesser creatures. However, it wasn't until *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957) and *War of the Colossal Beast* (1958) that the direct victim of radioactive gigantism was man himself.

Films in the 60's were no match for the success of subgenre's '50s films. *Mysterious Island* (1961) successfully presented a potpourri of killer giants (a bird, bees, a crab, a squid) but with the exception of *Gorgo* (1961) and the *Godzilla* films (e.g., *Mothra* (1961), *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), *Ghidrah The Three-headed Monster* (1964), few other giant monster films in that decade are noteworthy. And with its continued popularity into the 21st century, *Godzilla* has proved to truly be the "King of the Monsters".

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