

He may be 60 years' old but Godzilla is still mean, green and on the big screen. As the latest incarnation hits cinemas, Scott Snowden looks back at the history of the world's favourite massive, mutated, radioactive reptile.

ATTACK OF THE

50 FT LIZARD!

Thanks to director Roland Emmerich, most cinemagoers would think it sacrilege to mention Godzilla and Hollywood in the same breath. Yet in a celebration of one of the greatest fictional characters in the history of film – and to celebrate the premiere of his 50th anniversary film, *Godzilla: Final Wars* – Godzilla was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2004.

It's perhaps the least Hollywood could do to try and make amends to Gojira (as he's known in his native Japan), following Emmerich's disastrous 1998 would-be blockbuster. When the best thing about your movie is its signature rap song, you know you failed. If only that 1998 *Godzilla* film had the energy and drive of Puff Daddy's Led Zeppelin-sampling roof raiser.



Hollywood & Bust

Still, if that's your only exposure to Japan's favourite fire-breathing beast, then you're in for a treat. Not only does this Kaiju (English translation: "strange beast") have a new film out this year, he also has a healthy back catalogue of movies to dig into. Godzilla first appeared in the 1954 movie of the same name and since then has gone on to become a worldwide pop culture icon, starring in 28 films produced by Toho Co. Ltd. Adding in the 1998 feature film, the 2014 movie (see page 23) makes 30 in total, although the creature has also appeared in numerous other incarnations such as videogames, novels, comic books and an animated TV series.

This terrifying two-legged titan was originally conceived as a nuclear allegory made flesh. He was supposed to represent the effects of the hydrogen bomb, following the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the radioactive contamination resulting from the Bikini Atoll atomic testing – both of which were still very much in the minds of the Japanese.

Design classic

Inspired by the fictional Rhedosaurus created by animator Ray Harryhausen for the 1953 film *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, Godzilla's iconic character design was a mash up of multiple monsters. Conceived as an amphibious reptilian based around the loose concept of a dinosaur with an upright posture, Godzilla has scaly skin, an anthropomorphic torso with muscular arms, spikes on its back and tail, and a furrowed brow.

Art director Akira Watanabe combined attributes of a tyrannosaurus rex, an iguanodon, a stegosaurus and an alligator, to form a sort of combined chimera, allegedly inspired by illustrations from an issue of *Life Magazine*. To emphasize the monster's relationship with the atomic bomb, its skin texture was inspired by the keloid scars seen on Hiroshima's survivors. The creature's distinctive roar, which was created by composer Akira Ifukube, was apparently first produced by rubbing a resin-coated glove along the string of a contrabass and then slowing down the playback.

The monster's vaguely humanoid appearance and strained, lumbering movements endeared it to Japanese audiences, who could relate to it as a sympathetic character despite its wrathful nature. They responded positively because Godzilla acts out of self-preservation and shows where science and technology can go wrong.

GODZILLA MOVIES



6 Godzilla Vs. Monster Zero (1965)
Also released as *Invasion Of Astro-Monster* and *The Great Monster War*, this space-based tale was the first film to be co-produced by the American studio UPA in Technicolor.

7 Godzilla, Ebirah, Mothra: Big Duel In The South Seas (1966)
The first film not directed by Inoshiro Honda took things in a lighter direction. Also known as *Ebirah, Horror Of The Deep*, it hit US TV as *Godzilla Vs. The Sea Monster* in 1967.

8 Son Of Godzilla (1967)
Scientists experimenting with changes in weather on a tropical island get more than they bargained for when Godzilla shows up to protect his newborn child.

9 Destroy All Monsters (1968)
Sending all the world's Kaiju to live on Monster Island seems like a sound idea, until female aliens take control of them to attack major cities and destroy the human race.

10 Godzilla's Revenge (1969)
Aka *All Monsters Attack*, a bullied schoolboy dreams of travelling to Monster Island, where he befriends Godzilla's son, who is also having bully troubles.

11 Godzilla Vs. Hedorah (1971)
Director Yoshimitsu Banno's film had a strong anti-pollution message, as Earth's toxic waste spawns a new monster: Hedorah, the smog monster.

12 Godzilla Vs. Gigan (1972)
Producer Tomoyuki Tanaka returned the series to its more traditional route of well-known monsters and an alien invasion plot, including the return of King Ghidorah.

13 Godzilla Vs. Megalon (1973)
Heavily influenced by tokusatsu superhero TV shows, Godzilla plays co-star to a huge robot called Jet Jaguar when Seatopia unleashes the gigantic Megalon on the world.

1 Godzilla (1954)

US nuclear testing creates a seemingly unstoppable, dinosaur-like beast that rampages through Tokyo. Thanks to the film's black-and-white artistry, even the rubbery effects can't diminish its power.

2 Godzilla Raids Again (1955)

This superb sequel was the first in the series to feature a 'monster versus monster' scenario, as Godzilla battles an irradiated Ankylosaur and destroys Osaka in the process.

3 King Kong Vs. Godzilla (1962)

King Kong and Godzilla's first scrap is the most commercially successful of all the *Godzilla* films to date, meeting when Kong is captured and brought to Japan.

4 Mothra Vs. Godzilla (1964)

A greedy developer unwittingly hatches a gigantic baby moth upon Tokyo, in the first film to avoid heavy editing and be shown nearly intact in the US.

5 Ghidorah, The Three-Headed Monster (1964)

Ranking as one of the best creature features ever made, Godzilla turns from villain to hero to tackle his greatest foe – three-headed beast, King Ghidorah.



14 Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla (1974)

Apelike aliens build a robotic Godzilla to destroy Japan, in a film with slightly higher production values than the previous few in the series.

15 Terror Of Mechagodzilla (1975)

The least commercially successful movie was the final film in the original series, before Godzilla was put on hiatus. He battles the rebuilt Mechagodzilla and Titanosaurus.

16 Godzilla (1984)

Aka *Godzilla 1985*, this 30th anniversary reboot acted as a direct sequel to the original 1954 film and took Godzilla back to his destructive antagonistic roots.

17 Godzilla Vs. Biollante (1989)

The first 'monster versus monster' film of the rebooted series featured Biollante, as producer Tomoyuki Tanaka demanded new monster opponents for Godzilla.

18 Godzilla Vs. King Ghidorah (1991)

Tanaka opted to bring back classic foes following the disappointment of *Godzilla Vs. Biollante*, showcasing the return of the three-headed King Ghidorah.

19 Godzilla & Mothra (1992)

Following the success of the previous year's movie, it was decided to bring back Mothra – the franchise's second most famous creation – who battles Battria.

20 Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla II (1993)

Despite the title, this is neither a remake nor a re-imagining of *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*, although it notably introduces the infant BabyGodzilla.

21 Godzilla Vs. Spacegodzilla (1994)

Godzilla is threatened by two new forces: Mogera – another UN built machine; and Space Godzilla – a beast spawned from Godzilla's particles in space. Oh yes.

22 Godzilla Vs. Destoroyah (1995)

The 22nd instalment was the final film in the Heisei, or second, series of films and featured a cameo by Momoko Kōchi, reprising her role from the original 1954 movie.

23 Godzilla (1998)

Arguably, the film that brought Godzilla to a new generation, this Hollywood reimagining was lambasted by fans who hated the creature design and terrible plot.

24 Godzilla 2000: Millennium (1999)

Godzilla saves Tokyo from a flying saucer that transforms into the beast Orga, in a film that ignores all continuity established by previous films.

25 Godzilla Vs. Megaguirus (2000)

When Godzilla returns to terrorize Japan, the country unleashes two new weapons to defend itself: the high-tech Gryphon ship; and a device that creates black holes.

26 Godzilla, Mothra, King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack (2001)

Set nearly 50 years after the original *Godzilla*, a revived, undead version of the giant lizard is possessed by Japanese WWII soldiers and returns to destroy Japan.

27 Godzilla Against Mechagodzilla (2002)

After the appearance of a new Gojira, the Japanese government builds a robotic Godzilla from the bones of the original monster that attacked Tokyo in 1954.

28 Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S. (2003)

The story continues one year after the previous film, as Godzilla and Mechagodzilla face off in a conclusive battle royale with flying menace Mothra.

29 Godzilla: Final Wars (2004)

When a Xilien invasion unleashes a legion of giant monsters across the world, the few surviving humans travel to the South Pole to free Godzilla from his frozen prison.



Monster mash

Ever since the 1962 film *King Kong Vs. Godzilla*, the franchise has added a variety of bigger and brasher beasts – most of which have done battle with the sea-dwelling star of the series. Favourites include Mothra (as the name suggests, a giant moth), Rodan (a pterodactyl-like creature) and Gamera (a flying turtle, see page 26 for more on him). To this day, most of these monsters continue to headline their own outings in Japan – although few of the films make it to the West.

In comparison to today's digital wonders – see the Kaiju in über-fan Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim* – these metropolis-munching monsters look like the blokes in rubber costumes they actually are (although they have also been rendered in animatronic, stop-motion and computer-generated form). However, where production company Toho really excelled was with its use of intricately created miniature cities, stunning cinemascope photography and a palpable sense of political panic surrounding the post-war Japanese identity.

Kids' stuff

By the early 1970s, Godzilla had more or less outstayed his welcome. In an attempt to get more families into cinemas, Toho geared its films towards children and turned the character into a national hero. Even worse, Godzilla gained a cutesy offspring called Minilla, who blows smoke rings and was the clear inspiration for Godzooky in the animated television series. Since then, the character has fallen somewhere in the middle, sometimes portrayed as a protector of the world from external threats and other times as a bringer of destruction.

Thankfully, when the series rebooted in 1984 with *The Return Of Godzilla* (known as *Godzilla 1985: The Legend Is Reborn* in the UK and US), the rampaging brute was once again permitted to stomp a king-sized footprint across Japan. In the process, Mothra, Gamera and other old favourites were brought out of cinematic hibernation for another stint striding across the Tokyo skyline. Whether they'll get an airing in Gareth Edwards' update is still to be seen.

