**English Title:** Godzilla  
**Country of origin:** America  
**Year:** 2014  
**Language:** English  
**Studio/s:** Legendary Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures  
**Director:** Gareth Edwards  
**Producers:** Yoshimitsu Banno, Alex Garcia, Kenji Okuhira and Patricia Whitcher  
**Screenplay:** Max Borenstein  
**Cinematographer:** Seamus McGarvey  
**Art Director:** Grant Van Der Slagt  
**Editor:** Bob Ducsay  
**Composer:** Alexandre Desplat  
**Duration:** 123 minutes  
**Genre:** Science Fiction  
**Cast:** Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Ken Watanabe, Bryan Cranston, Elizabeth Olsen and Sally Hawkins  
**Distributor:** Warner Bros. Pictures and Toho Co. Ltd.  
**Box Office:** $507 000 000  
**Awards:** 15th Golden Trailer Awards - Best Summer 2014 Blockbuster Trailer  
15th Golden Trailer Awards - Best International Poster  
Japan Cool Content Contribution Award  
*An initiative devised by current Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe aimed at promoting Japanese culture abroad.  

**Other information:** Staff from Toho Co. Ltd, the owners of the Gorjira (Godzilla) trademark, were recruited for the project including executive producer Yoshimitsu Banno, Kenji Okuhira and Brian Rogers. Banno directed *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* in 1971, and Toho have been noted for their cooperation and active participation in creature design, sound design and plot.  

**Synopsis**  
The Godzilla franchise is so much more than monster fan fiction. The 1954 release of *Gojira* was a Japanese exercise in catharsis after the affliction of the Hydrogen bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The original was further provoked by the Bikini Atoll incident, whereby American atomic experiments accidentally exposed Japanese fishermen to radioactive fallout during peacetime. Gareth Edwards treats this content with respect and anchors his film within this historical framework in the opening sequence. The montage reveals the Jurassic origins of Godzilla, making the film faithful to the original narrative, and then intercuts newspaper clippings denoting nuclear testing on Bikini Atoll Island. The synthesis of fiction and reality engages audiences in a bigger conversation, as Godzilla is traditionally allegorical for man’s lack of control over the weapons we create. The montage closes with an explosion followed by silence and a blank white frame, which then becomes polluted by fallout and the title *Godzilla* fades in as the silence gives way to distant screams followed by dramatic non-diegetic music. Edwards plot incorporates the developments of the 1960’s and 1970’s, whereby Godzilla became a protector against other monsters. Here, the adversaries are two MUTO’s; Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Objects. Aesthetically they resemble a combination of Mothra and Gyaos (see *Mothra vs Godzilla*, 1964 and *Son of Godzilla*, 1967), but their power lies in their ability to feed off radiation and emit an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) through their claws. This disables all nearby electricity, and highlights the
false sense of security we gain from advanced technology.

**Critique**

Edwards uses his narrative to draw attention to the thematic heritage of Godzilla, and extends this metaphor by including the MUTO who emphasize our vulnerability in relying on technology. This is supported by subtle visual cues; such as showing the destruction of the Janjira Nuclear Power Plant through a school window with paper planes in the foreground. According to the story the MUTO is responsible for the damage, however the mis-en-scene suggests that the paper plans are. This could symbolize a trans-generational myopia in our approach to “progress”.

The monsters presence in the narrative is triggered entirely by human affaires. The MUTO are unearthed in the Philippines by a company ironically called “Universal Western Mining”. One MUTO is drawn to Japan to feed off its nuclear power plants; the other is confiscated by Americans and kept in Area 51. This paternalistic plot manoeuvre results in the final battle, and ensuing devastation, taking place on American soil. Thereby rejecting the notion that America is victim to circumstances outside of their control.

It’s interesting to note that in Edwards’s films, *Monsters* (2010) and *Godzilla* (2014), the “monsters” do not tend to attack unless provoked. Granted in this film the antagonists wreak havoc on human infrastructure; but the MUTO’s primary target is always their food source, which is radioactive materials. Humans only become targets after beginning the offensive. When Godzilla follows the MUTO’s to San Francisco Bay he is there to hunt them and restore balance, therefore operating in humanities best interests. In a chaotic scene, the military panic, orders are ignored and an armed assault begins against Godzilla with a school bus full of children caught in the crossfire. Edwards explicitly shows that man is not the alpha predator we imagine ourselves to be, as fighter jets fall from the sky like confetti when an EMP disables their electronics.

Audiences are given time to reflect on how this story is relevant to the modern world, as the film is quite slow paced with a dramatic build up. A common criticism is that inefficient screen time is allocated to the titular character; however, the films were never about the monsters. They’re about us. These creatures serve a karmic narrative function, as man becomes overwhelmed and unable to reap what we sow.

The films success lay in its appeal to audiences who are not fans of the Godzilla franchise, and cultural credibility for those who are. There is an abundance of inter-textual references for keen eyed observers. The name of Dr Ishiro Serizawa (Ken Wantanabe) is drawn from Ishiro Honda, who directed various Godzilla films from 1954 to 1975, and Dr Daisuke Serizawa who killed Godzilla in the 1954 film. Edwards’s characterization of Godzilla reimages the classic, as opposed to replicating or distorting it. This may be attributed to the active participation of Toho Co. Ltd in the production process,
however getting Godzilla right is of pivotal importance to a worldwide audience.

The first American studio release of Godzilla (Emmerich, 1998) won multiple Golden Raspberry awards, including Worst Remake or Sequel. Toho bought the rights to Emmerich’s iguana-like creature and renamed it Zilla, then pitted it against a more authentic Godzilla in Godzilla: Final Wars (2004). In this scene Godzilla annihilates “Zilla” within about 30 seconds. Edwards’s rendition, by contrast, was distributed by Toho in Japan and received formal accolades from the Japanese government. Godzilla (2014) became the second highest grossing foreign film in Japan this year, which speaks volumes for this film’s integrity.

My one criticism is the idealistic ending. The protagonist Ford Brody is, appropriately, an Explosive Ordinance Disposal technician (EOD). To bypass the unpredictability of electrical engineering in the presence of MUTO’s, Brody retrofitted a nuke to detonate via clockwork instead of using remote control. Towards the films conclusion Brody finds himself in the same boat (literally) as the nuke, the frame is damaged so he can’t turn off the clock, and since he disabled remote control the only way to avoid an unintentional nuclear holocaust in San Francisco is to take the nuke as far out to sea as possible before the bomb explodes. Brody set the boats route with automatic GPS; which is promptly disabled by the MUTO. The bomb, the boat, and Brody are left floating idly. Godzilla confronts the MUTO and tears off its head by howling his infamous toxic fire breathe down its throat, then Brody gets airlifted to safety! The bomb explodes in the distance implying no civilian casualties. Seriously, this scene would have been the perfect finale if man were shown to actually endure the consequences of what we aim for in the arms industry. In reality there is no easy way out, no spontaneous rescue service from the conditions which we create for ourselves. The original Godzilla has a very somber ending, as Dr Serizawa has invented a weapon powerful enough to kill Godzilla but burns his research and commits suicide after detonation to ensure humanity is never menaced by such technology. It would seem appropriate if Edwards’s conclusion had the same tone.

Notwithstanding this one criticism, it is an excellent movie for film lovers and Godzilla fans alike. Edwards has produced a movie which calls attention to our reliance on technology for security and essentially survival, which is at best short sighted and at worst self destructive.

Works Cited
