

Godzilla Minus One



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Godzilla Minus One is a monster movie of singular power, using horror-infused kaiju spectacle to deliver an emotionally compelling story of grief, wartime trauma, and hope. Most importantly, its genre-leading visual effects scenes are complemented by richly soulful performances and humane themes of reconciliation and redemption.

Godzilla has experienced a major resurgence in the past decade. The crowd-pleasing pugilism of the American MonsterVerse franchise continues to expand under the leadership of Legendary Pictures, while Godzilla's Japanese owner-originators Toho have steadily released an array of more cerebral, mostly animated projects that explore Godzilla's weirder, more eldritch dimension. *Godzilla Minus One* straddles the sensibilities of both, delivering world-class scenes of monster rampage, a story of considerable depth and pathos, and one of the strangest, most terrifying incarnations of Godzilla in the franchise's seventy-year history.

The film has a straightforward premise. In a Japan ravaged by World War Two, Godzilla's attacks take the country "from zero to minus one". In many respects the film, too, is direct and uncomplicated, as it hits every major story beat that any audience would expect from a Godzilla story. Urban destruction, fleeing crowds, the monster's horrifying emergence from the ocean: all executed with percussive bombast and luminous visual flair. It features several extraordinarily satisfying action scenes which deliver thrilling moments of monster mayhem and display to jaw-dropping effect the mastery of visual effects for which the film is already beginning to reap major awards.

But the film also has plenty of surprises up its sleeve. Several characters are forthright in their criticism of Japan's government and the 1945-52 US occupation in ways that resonate with contemporary matters, undergirding the film with an intriguing (if coded) political critique. The score is operatic, grandiose, and spine-tingling. Perhaps most welcome, however, is the emotional sophistication of the movie, as it tackles substantial themes of historical responsibility, grief, and redemption, all channelled through the survivor's guilt of protagonist Kōichi Shikishima (Kamiki Ryunosuke), a kamikaze pilot haunted by his inability to die his state-mandated wartime death.

Everybody knows that Godzilla was originally a symbol or metaphor for the atomic bomb. Over the years, Godzilla's meaning has grown and shifted, appearing sometimes as tragic, often heroic, sometimes cute and child-friendly. *Godzilla Minus One* brings out unexpected aspects of the creature's original wartime resonance, focusing in depth on the abject struggles of ordinary Japanese people scratching a living in the ruins of a firebombed Tokyo. Their confrontation with Godzilla is rendered in ways that foreground their resilience, comradeship, compassion, and hope, imbuing what could have been a maudlin and grimdark affair with the warmth and humanity for which the screenwriting of Takashi Yamazaki, who directs, writes, and handles the film's exquisite VFX, is rightly celebrated.

And Godzilla itself has never looked better. Characterised as a radioactive island god saturated with vicious, bloodthirsty hate and rendered in extraordinarily lucid and gnarly detail, it delivers serious thrills and some unforgettable images. *Godzilla Minus One* is a superlative monster movie. See it!

Alex Adams | @GDemonology | @AlexAdams5