

COMMUNITY ARTICLE | KAIJU UNITED

God-Killing and the Gag Order: Revision, Rearmament, and Yamazaki's *Minus One* Novelization



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URL <https://kaijuunited.com/2025/10/03/god-killing-and-the-gag-order-revision-rearmament-and-takashi-yamazakis-minus-one-novelization/>

2024 and 2025 have been major years for Godzilla novelizations. As well as Greg Keyes' tie-in novel of *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*, 2024 brought us the first official English-language publication of Shigeru Kayama's original novellas of *Godzilla (1954)* and *Godzilla Raids Again (1955)*, both translated by Jeffrey Angles. So far, 2025 has seen the republication of Greg Cox's novelization of *Godzilla* (2014), long out of print, in *an omnibus edition* with Keyes' adaptation of *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019), as well as two especially hotly anticipated translations: Angles' edition of *The Luminous Fairies and Mothra*, the very first story to feature Mothra, and Takashi Yamazaki's adaptation of his widely-lauded *Godzilla Minus One*. As well as movies and merchandise, the twenty-first century golden age of Godzilla has its share of treats for novel readers, too.

Novelizations are a strange literary sub-form, very often dismissed as a poor relation of both the film and the novel. Delivering neither the kinetic full-body experience of a movie nor the highbrow satisfactions of "real" literature, they're sometimes sneered at as the literary equivalent of a Happy Meal toy, a trivial piece of tie-in crap that exists only to pointlessly rehash already shallow stories as a cynical cash-in for an undiscerning audience. But just as genre fans know that elitism towards popular cultural forms is nothing new, we also know that a good novelization can be a real treasure. By strengthening characterisations, layering depth into world-building, and bolstering backstory, these full-length retellings of the movies' stories – when done right – fill out the movies with extra substance and sauce. Keyes' *Godzilla Vs Kong* (2021), for example, expands the wider world of the story, among other things by giving readers an insight into the first doomed expedition to Hollow Earth undertaken by Nathan Lind's brother (18-31), a plot point all-too-quickly glossed over in the final movie. Though Stephen Molstad's novelization of *Godzilla* (1998) adds little to the movie's narrative, it is written as a lighthearted first-person account from the perspective of Nick Tatopoulos, which adds a certain amount of quirky life to the storytelling and gives readers some added moments of comedy.

At their best, though, novelizations can develop the ideas and themes of their filmic counterparts in surprisingly powerful and effective ways. Kayama is, as one reviewer writes, "[much more explicit in the novellas about Godzilla's atomic heritage](#)".¹ What is more, his *Godzilla* features some extraordinary cultists – The Tokyo Godzilla Society – who welcome Godzilla's rampage as divine retribution against what they see as "the weak-kneed, cowardly people" of postwar Japan (79). Rich in period detail, political commentary, and intriguing allusions to its contemporary context, Kayama's novella explicitly lays out the conceptual commitments, such as the all-importance of peace and the existential

¹ Jeremy Brett, "In the Bomb's Long Shadow: Review of Shigeru Kayama's *Godzilla* and *Godzilla Raids Again*." *Ancillary Review of Books*, 2/2/2024. <https://ancillaryreviewofbooks.org/2024/02/02/in-the-bombs-long-shadow-review-of-shigeru-kayamas-godzilla-and-godzilla-raids-again/>

horrors of nuclear weapons testing, for which the movie is rightly remembered. The novelization of *Godzilla Minus One*, recently published in English almost two years after its original Japanese release, is especially interesting here, because its thematically rich story takes place against a historically fascinating and politically sensitive setting that is especially ripe for further exploration. Like *Godzilla*, of course, it is concerned with early Cold War nuclear proliferation and Japan's postwar national identity; in contrast, however, *Minus One* focuses much more closely on the period of the American Occupation and the questions of shame, survival, and rearmament that were so powerfully pressing for many Japanese people at this time. Where *Godzilla* is a *product* of the postwar period of national self-reflection, *Godzilla Minus One* is a movie *about* this period.

Though *Godzilla Minus One* sits comfortably among the most well-received Godzilla movies ever made, the acclaim for it – to which I contributed my own [fulsome five-star review](#) in 2023 – was accompanied by several biting critical responses. Two claims in particular stood out: first, that the movie's representation of postwar Japan focused on Japanese misery and suffering to the exclusion of any consideration of the bloodcurdling cruelty for which Imperial Japan was responsible; second, that Godzilla gave the movie's characters a legitimate opportunity to rearm Japan and work together in a crusade of justified violence, which in turn provides the audience with the taboo yet thrilling spectacle of Japanese military victory. In sum, these criticisms (examined in more depth below) make the accusation that *Godzilla Minus One* panders to contemporary Japanese nationalism both by providing a narrow, revisionist account of the meaning of World War Two and by showing coordinated violence by a Japanese civilian militia as heroic and triumphant. For this piece, I turned to the novelization to see how its representation of the historical setting and the characters' responses to Godzilla were thickened out by the novelization process, perhaps hoping to see something in it that could speak to these criticisms. This is what I found.

Killing a God: Godzilla as Firestorm

One of the major pleasures of Yamazaki's novelization is that it makes explicit a lot of the mythology and symbolism that gave such evocative substance to the movie, emphasizing lore and metaphorical significance that has long been implicit in *Godzilla* more broadly. For starters, Yamazaki's *Godzilla* is repeatedly described as having a terrifying, godlike majesty. During Shikishima's first maritime confrontation with *Godzilla*, he and his shipmates realise that "to oppose *Godzilla* was akin to defying a god" (93); when *Godzilla* vaporizes the heavy cruiser *Takao* with its atomic breath, "it was like they were witnessing the birth of a divine dragon" (101); during *Godzilla*'s Ginza rampage, Shikishima observes that "the silhouette of its giant head in profile against the setting May sun looked almost

divine” (119). Later, as Operation Wadatsumi draws to its dramatic conclusion and Godzilla nears its doom, many characters are struck with a common question: “*Was this what it felt like to kill a god?*” (186). Elsewhere, Godzilla’s body is compared to elements of the natural world. Its dorsal fins are “Hell’s own snowflakes” (65) and “volcanic crags” (93); its destruction of the *Takao* is “a single phreatic eruption” (101); Godzilla itself is “more like a moving island than a living organism” (110) and “a walking mountain” (113). In this novelization, then, Godzilla is vividly described as a god of the earth, a profane animal deity wreaking its rage-filled vengeance on Japan. [In a 2023 interview](#), Yamazaki said that he was inspired by the raging spirits from *Princess Mononoke* (1997), furious and gruesome embodiments of the anger and pain of the natural world who need to be confronted and soothed by the community.² This thematically juicy representation of a wrathful monstrosity is broadly in keeping with the sorts of descriptions of Godzilla – the sublime, unstoppable revenge of the world’s wronged soul against mankind’s destructive arrogance – that we find throughout the darker entries in the movie series, such as *The Return of Godzilla* (1984), *GMK* (2001), and *Shin Godzilla* (2016).



Image: *Princess Mononoke* (1997)

Most significant of all for *Godzilla Minus One*, however, is another staple theme of Godzilla movies: Godzilla’s resemblance to wartime bombardment. Nuclear symbolism is front and centre, for example, during Godzilla’s use of its atomic heat ray against the Diet building. As it unleashes its massive exhalation of lethal energy, its dorsal fins are described as

² Charles Pulliam-Moore, “The influences of *Godzilla Minus One* go beyond the atom bomb.” *The Verge*, 12/4/2023. <https://www.theverge.com/23984534/godzilla-minus-one-interview-takashi-yamazaki>

working “like the implosion mechanism of an atomic bomb” (123), representing Godzilla itself as a living nuclear weapon. The visual iconography in the filmed version of this scene is unmistakably reminiscent of nuclear detonations, and the novelization too emphasizes the scale of the explosion, its sinister rising mushroom cloud, the black rain, and the resultant radioactivity (124-126), all of which draw direct parallels between Godzilla’s rampage and a nuclear blast. The book also fleshes out the brief scenes in which Godzilla is washed in poison flame during the Operation Crossroads nuclear weapons testing (64-65, 79, 126), underscoring one of the central dualities of Godzilla’s tragic metamorphosis from mysterious animal to indestructible behemoth: “In truth, even the beast itself could be called a victim of that war, its body having been hideously mutated and scarred by a product of humanity’s greatest folly” (191).

Godzilla Minus One goes beyond nuclear imagery, however, to engage with the full scale of American aerial bombardment against Japan. One of the boldest decisions that Yamazaki made in his framing of *Godzilla Minus One* was to locate his characters among the ashes of Tokyo in late 1945. Long downplayed in official histories of the Second World War, saturation bombing of Japanese cities was one of the war crimes that enabled the Allied powers to finally claim victory over the Axis powers. On 9 March 1945, Tokyo was burned almost entirely to the ground in the most destructive air raid in history, with US planes precipitating a deadly firestorm by blanketing the city in incendiary bombs and napalm. Over the course of its wartime saturation bombardment, at least 100,000 people in Tokyo were killed and, as 65% of the residences in the city were destroyed, between 12 and 13 million people were made homeless.³ What is more, US air forces meted out similar treatment to the vast majority of Japanese cities, pulverizing city after city from the air. Describing the scale of the devastation, historian Mark Selden writes that “the air war in Japan reached an intensity that is perhaps unrivalled in the magnitude of human slaughter.”⁴

Yamazaki’s connection between Godzilla and firebombing is not a matter of ambiguous allusion. He explicitly underscores it several times in the novelization. Perhaps most strikingly, as Noriko desperately tries to flee Ginza, she is reminded of her horrific experience of the Tokyo Air Raid.

Surrounded by all of this chaos, she couldn’t help but be reminded
of that horrible night she lost her family in the firebombing. In her

³ Christopher Harding, *Japan Story: In Search of a Nation, 1850 to the Present*. Penguin, 2018: 218; John D. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. Norton, 1999: p. 45.

⁴ Mark Selden, “A Forgotten Holocaust: US Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities, and the American Way of War from the Pacific War to Iraq”. In *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History*, ed. by Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young. The New Press, 2009: 82, 87.

current state, she was too dazed and weak to even tell whether it was Godzilla or an air raid these people were fleeing from. (121)



Again, this makes explicit a meaning that has long been implicit in a great deal of Godzilla movies, but with an original and bold switch in emphasis. There is something valuable about making this a major feature (both of plot and theme) of a mainstream genre film marketed towards a global audience, as it confronts large numbers of viewers with undeniable and unpalatable historical facts, prompting compassion for people who were, no doubt, witnesses of the full horror of industrialized twentieth century warfare. In the interview cited above, Yamazaki underscores that he “wanted to tell a story about perseverance and bravery from the perspective of people who were at the bottom of the bottom in a society that was dealing with the devastation of feeling like it had lost everything during the war.” This comes across forcefully in the film, and the novelization gives this side of the story added pathos and power.

Japan at Zero: The Victim Empire

This emphasis, however, whilst laudable in some respects, has a darker side. Godzilla movies have long been critiqued for underplaying Japanese aggression during World War Two. [Fanglin Wang](#), for example, writes that the original *Godzilla* “reframes Japan’s role in WWII as that of a powerless victim and not an aggressor, and therefore denies its own responsibility while erasing its war crimes”,⁵ and [Morris Low](#) argues that postwar monster

⁵ Fanglin Wang, “Presenting an Innocent Nation: Critique of *Gojira* (1954)’s Reflections on Japan’s WWII Responsibility.” *Communication, Culture & Technology*, 2018: 5. <https://repository.digital.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1052866>

movies, of which *Godzilla* is his prime example, “provide evidence of the tendency for Japanese to think of themselves as victims, and to suppress the image of Japan as a perpetrator of the war”.⁶ This is tricky territory, because Japanese civilian suffering was indeed immense during the Second World War, especially as the US drowned the country in flame in its closing months. That said, Japan was also responsible for utterly indefensible violence against civilians. In addition to the brutality meted out in Japanese war prisons, including vivisection, sexual slavery, summary execution, massacre, torture, slave labour, and human experimentation, the Japanese slaughtered civilians with abandon, even using saturation bombing themselves against Chinese cities.⁷ Discussing this sensitive territory is not a matter of flippant whataboutism or competitive wrangling over who was treated worse by whom, as though there could be a ‘winner’ in the final accounting of human pain. The criticisms of Wang and Low are more interested in pointing out that Japan’s dominant culture of remembrance emphasizes Japanese suffering over and above the suffering of those that they harmed, often to the point of denying that Japanese atrocities took place at all.

Here I return to the criticisms of *Godzilla Minus One* mentioned earlier. Neither version of *Minus One* explains what, except defeat, was so bad about Japan’s participation in the Second World War. Critic [Esmé Holden](#) wrote in 2023 that viewers of *Minus One* are “left only to conclude that the real problem is that the Empire wasn’t effective enough; that it lost”.⁸ The novelization misses an opportunity to engage this critique, saying little on the topic other than concluding that the war was “unwinnable” (191). The film’s opening moments emphasize that the aircraft mechanics on Odo Island all know that the war was being prolonged well beyond the point at which Japan could prevail, and in the novelization they show solidarity with Shikishima’s refusal to carry out his mission. “Man, kamikaze desertion, though? That takes some *stones*,” says one of them, while another says that “only an idiot would obey a suicide order at this point” (18). Throughout, Shikishima’s survivor’s guilt is motivated by not being able to contribute to the war effort, either by sacrificing his life as a human missile or by firing upon Godzilla. The movie and its novelization both remain curiously silent on what Japanese victory in the war would have

⁶ Morris Low, “The birth of Godzilla: Nuclear fear and the ideology of Japan as victim.” *Japanese Studies*, 13: 2 (1993): 48, 55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10371399308521861>

⁷ Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. Harper Perennial, 2016 (2020): 360-365, 426, 546, 558. Edwin P. Hoyt, *Warlord: Tojo Against the World*. Cooper Square Press, 2001: 97-110. Tetsuo Maeda, “Strategic Bombing of Chongqing by Imperial Japanese Army and Naval Forces”. In *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History*, ed. by Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young. The New Press, 2009: 135-153.

⁸ Esmé Holden, “*Godzilla Minus One* —Takashi Yamazaki.” *In Review Online*, 12/4/2023. <https://inreviewonline.com/2023/12/04/godzilla-minus-one/>

meant, either for Japan, for its opponents, or for its Imperial territories. The closest either version gets is to say that such victory was impossible.

Later, of course, Noda ('doc') is explicitly critical of the Imperial Japanese Army. The Japanese state treated life too cheaply during the war, he says, using as examples the Army's neglect for supply line issues, disregard for troop safety, and policy of using kamikaze pilots as living projectiles (156-7). But it is *Japanese* life that is being treated cheaply here: Japanese people were victims of their own government, he says, at the same time as they were victims of the Allied powers. The official policy of Japanese forces towards their enemies, prisoners, and conquered subjects – which was so much more calculatedly, deliberately brutal – is ignored, glossed over. Given that the novel expands dramatically and repeatedly on Japanese civilian suffering as the result of aerial bombardment, its reticence on Japan's responsibility for meting out violence against civilians themselves is telling.

“Downright giddy to have the chance to serve their country again”

Whilst the movie's showdown with Godzilla – Operation Wadatsumi – is one of the most dramatically satisfying climaxes of any monster movie, it too has its issues. Specifically, it explicitly raises one of the most consistently invoked political themes of twenty-first century Godzilla movies: Japanese rearmament. The question of remilitarization – part constitutional debate, part moral crisis – has remained a source of major tension in Japan since the birth of the Self Defense Forces in 1954. In the wake of the Second World War, Japan's new constitution expressly prohibited military belligerence. Despite continuous debate in Japanese civil society and broad public support for the renunciation of military force, however, by 1990 Japan ranked sixth in the world for defence spending – indeed, by some measures, Japan had the third largest defence budget in the world by this time.⁹ Today, Japan is actively working to expand its military spending to ensure that it can “take ‘primary responsibility’ for national defence against overseas invasions”.¹⁰ The history of Japan's Self-Defense Forces has primarily been that of a supporting partner for the USA, but today, Japan is working to become an independent military state once again. This major shift provides important context for *Godzilla Minus One*.

⁹ Sheila A. Smith, *Japan Rearmed: The Politics of Military Power*. Harvard University Press, 2019: 11. James E. Auer, “Article Nine of Japan's Constitution: From Renunciation of Armed Force ‘Forever’ to the Third Largest Defense Budget in the World”. *Law and Contemporary Problems* 53: 2 (1990): 179.

¹⁰ Richard Thomas, “Japan reemerges as an Asia-Pacific military power.” *Army Technology*, 15/7/2024. <https://www.army-technology.com/news/japan-reemerges-as-an-asia-pacific-military-power/>

Japan reemerges as an Asia-Pacific military power

By 2027 Japan plans to take “primary responsibility” for national defence against overseas invasions and is seeking to expand its stand-off strike capabilities.

Richard Thomas | July 15, 2024

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Japan's military build-up has been accelerating in recent years. Credit: Josiah_S via Shutterstock

<https://www.army-technology.com/news/japan-reemerges-as-an-asia-pacific-military-power/>

Rearmament, in *Minus One*, is not simply a matter of rebuilding a Japanese Army, though of course Operation Wadatsumi begins in response to General Douglas MacArthur, head of the US Occupation of Japan from 1945-1952, calling for exactly that: as soon as Godzilla emerges in its more monstrous form, MacArthur issues a statement to the effect that he “could offer no U.S. military support at this time, calling instead upon the Japanese government to begin strengthening its own security forces” (79). Instead of an Army, however, Godzilla is defeated by what Hotta, a uniformed Navy Captain, calls “a private citizens’ militia” (130) formed of ordinary people rushing to fill the void left by an ineffective and indecisive government.

The private status of the paramilitary organisation who execute Operation Wadatsumi is never fully cemented, however. They use state resources (four destroyers and Shikishima's aircraft), and many of the rank-and-file sailors agree to participate because it means "they could be Navy men again, if only for one last mission" (137). Later, Akitsu (the 'captain') reassures Noda that his plan is worthwhile because so many of the men involved are "beaming with pride" and "downright giddy to have the chance to serve their country again. To make a difference this time around" (154). Not only is the plan a necessary response to an imminent threat: it is a chance at national redemption, a chance for the nation's population if not (or not quite) its state to correct the mistake of military failure in the Second World War.

The central emotional charge of the movie is inextricably bound up in this almost spiritual redemption that is afforded by rearmament. Shikishima, of course, the film's protagonist, is tormented by complex regrets, regrets which are part survivor's guilt, part horror at having militarily failed. His self-disgust and shame are made to dovetail with the emergence of Godzilla, to the point that Godzilla stands as a monstrous embodiment of Shikishima's all-consuming self-loathing (I think this is a fairly straightforward interpretation of the film's symbolism). His refusal to die as a kamikaze leads him to Odo Island, where he also fails to fire upon Godzilla; the guilt that Shikishima feels for the deaths of the Odo engineers – deaths that he fears he could have prevented by firing his weapon into Godzilla's face at short range – stands in for Shikishima's intuition that he should have died at war and, perhaps, helped to defend his family, his city, and the Japanese Empire. If Godzilla is a physical embodiment of Shikishima's personal failures, then killing Godzilla at the film's climax is also symbolically killing Shikishima's (perhaps Japan's) shame at having failed to do enough in the war.

We could also consider the role of Mizushima (the 'kid') and his vital contribution to Godzilla's death. Akitsu powerfully tells him that having never gone to war is a privilege rather than a reason for shame (158), and Shikishima himself glares at the kid with barely restrained rage when he unwisely remarks that he wishes the war had lasted longer (55). The bloodless triumph at the film's climax, however, would be impossible if the kid and his fleet of tugboats didn't turn up, Dunkirk-style, to lend a hand in dragging Godzilla up from the depths. The character arcs of both Shikishima and the kid, then, rely upon participation in coordinated military activity for the fulfilment of their most meaningful personal missions: Shikishima exorcizes the ghosts of his past, both avenging the Odo engineers and proving to everyone around him that he does in fact have the courage to complete a military mission, whereas the kid proves to himself that he is not useless, that he can contribute to a national project of coordinated violence. Whatever the characters might tell each other

about the horror and undesirability of war, when push comes to shove martial force is justified, cathartic, glorious.

This aspect of the movie has been the object of perhaps the most scathing criticism. Holden remarks that in *Minus One* “Godzilla becomes the perfect excuse for remilitarization”.

[Kaisa Saarinen](#) is even more forthright:

By inserting an ‘apolitical’ monster into his war movie, Yamazaki can indulge in a fantasy of pure-hearted soldiers, of bare-faced allies of justice against an undisguised, essential evil. However, this requires a total transference of war responsibility to the government, which comes across as infantile at best and insulting – not least to audiences in countries terrorised by Japan during WWII – at worst. If *Minus One* does make any coherent political point, it seems to be that demilitarisation was a mistake.¹¹

By excluding the Japanese government from Operation Wadatsumi, *Godzilla Minus One* lays responsibility for national renewal in the hands of the Japanese people, and gives them an opportunity to show that with the right leadership, the Japanese can prevail against overwhelming odds. This is a critique of sorts: it argues that failure in the Second World War was due to catastrophic mismanagement. And whilst this is not technically wrong – the Japanese wartime leadership being in point of fact characterized by arrogance, overconfidence, and cruelty – Saarinen is right that there is something unsavoury in the wish fulfilment it represents. *If we had better leaders*, the movie can be read as saying, *we might have won that war*.

What is more, at several points the novelization underscores that the weaponry being used to defend Japan against Godzilla is unused technology that was built for a ground invasion of Japan that did not take place. The Diet is unsuccessfully defended by tanks “which had been kept secretly in reserve” (122), and Koichi uses the Shinden in his almost-kamikaze attack on Godzilla, a nimble interceptor aircraft that was mothballed while “waiting for a mainland battle that never came” (144). These two evocative references to world-class weaponry that never got a chance to see action suggest an even more damning interpretation of Operation Wadatsumi. The Japanese defence of Tokyo against Godzilla represents, perhaps, a displaced opportunity to win the ground invasion.

¹¹ Kaisa Saarinen, “Tokyo Correspondence One: The Anti-Godzilla.” *Feral Dove Film Notebook*, 11/30/2023. <https://feraldove.com/antigodzilla>

The Gag Order

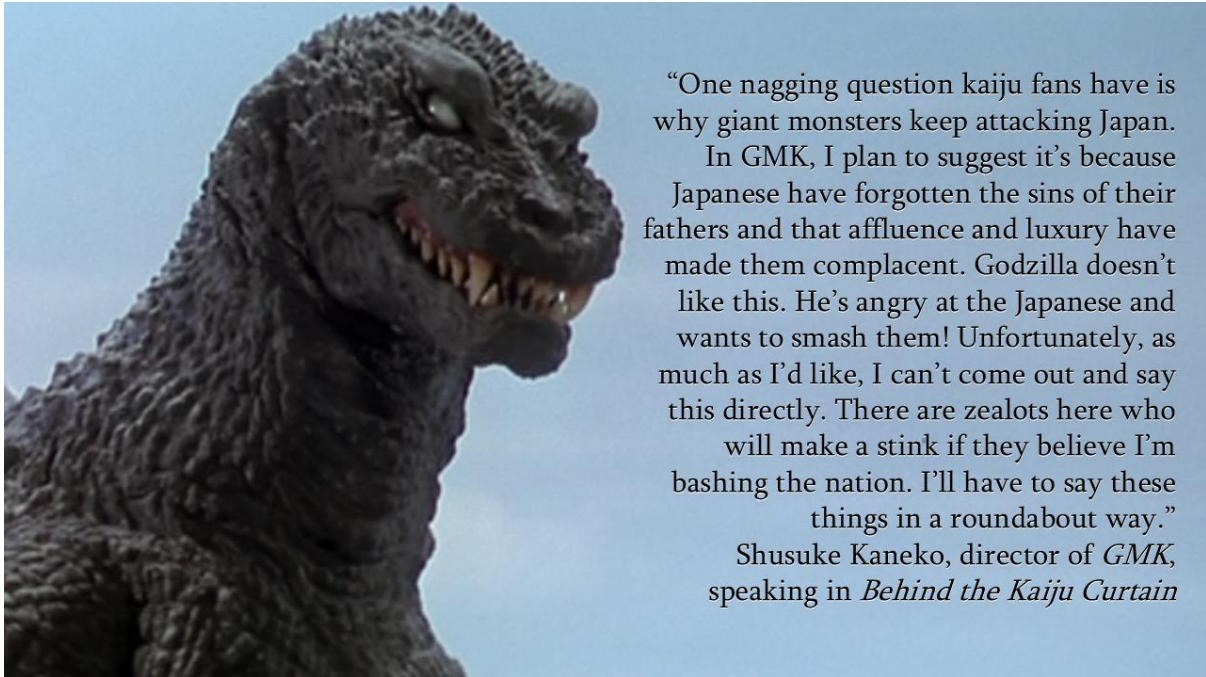
In fairness to *Godzilla Minus One*, both the film and the novelization remark upon the difficulty of speaking openly about Japanese history. Twice Akitsu makes caustic remarks about the cowardice and dishonesty which, he says, characterise Japanese political culture. “Ah yes! Their favourite move – just cover it up with a gag order! This country never changes, I tell ya”, he sneers; later he bitterly says that “information control’s the one thing our government’s good at, after all” (88, 103). These comments may well represent attempts by Yamazaki to acknowledge the fact that Japanese memory of its long Imperial war of conquest in Asia and the Pacific remains extraordinarily sensitive and polarised, and is as a result paralyzingly difficult to talk about without provoking – sometimes violent – outrage and backlash. Some vocal and influential elements of the political spectrum outright deny that any of the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial forces even took place. (In my home country, England, too, a frank discussion of the horrors and cruelty of our Empire often seems impossible due to the concerted reluctance, if not refusal, of mainstream political figures and media outlets to approach the topic with serious honesty.)

This may explain, if not necessarily justify, Yamazaki’s decisions about how he framed *Godzilla Minus One*. Knowing that he would not be able to satisfy *anybody* with relation to so prickly an issue, and that a blockbuster monster movie may not be the ideal vehicle through which to stoke long-ingrained national controversies, he may have tried to steer some kind of middle path that keeps majority audiences happy with its broad-strokes condemnation of war and human suffering.

The issues of rearmament and growing Japanese nationalism have, however, been successfully allegorically approached throughout other twenty-first century Godzilla movies. As I argue in a forthcoming piece, the Kiryu movies use Mechagodzilla to provide a commentary on the perils of rearmament: Kiryu’s rampage in *Godzilla X Mechagodzilla* (2002), for instance, demonstrates powerfully that fighting a monster with a monster of one’s own only creates opportunities for further disaster. *GMK*, too, can be read as a critique of rearmament and a cautionary tale about the loss of historical memory. Speaking to Norman England in [*Behind the Kaiju Curtain*](#) (2021), director Shusuke Kaneko remarks:

One nagging question kaiju fans have is why giant monsters keep attacking Japan. In *GMK*, I plan to suggest it’s because Japanese have forgotten the sins of their fathers and that affluence and luxury have made them complacent. Godzilla doesn’t like this. He’s angry at the Japanese and wants to smash them! Unfortunately, as much as I’d like, I can’t come out and say this directly. There are zealots here

who will make a stink if they believe I'm bashing the nation. I'll have to say these things in a roundabout way.¹²



There are a few things to unpack here that are relevant for a reading of *Minus One*. The first is that Japan's right-wing political culture (again matched by the deeply ingrained conservatism of my own home country) makes direct confrontation of matters of historical memory risky. Kaneko explicitly calls out “zealots” who place restrictions on open discussion – perhaps referring to the many groups who fall under the loose banner of “[Uyoku Dantai](#)”, extreme yet very popular right wing activist organisations who are known for, among many other things, the denial of Japanese war crimes and the often violent intimidation of their political opponents.¹³ Whilst such groups are experiencing an efflorescence today, they have been vocally and visibly active in Japan for decades. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this limitation should not, however, be read as exonerating Yamazaki of the responsibility to attempt the task, because one of the best things about *GMK* is that it gets much closer than almost any other Godzilla movie to criticising the resurgence of nationalism that was contemporaneous with its production.

While *GMK* was being written and planned, North Korean nuclear proliferation, in particular, was seen by a wide spectrum of Japanese nationalists as an unacceptable provocation that provided an ideal pretext for an increase in military activity; in late 2001, [a North Korean spy vessel was sunk by the Japanese navy \(the first such sinking since 1945\)](#)

¹² Norman England, *Behind the Kaiju Curtain: A Journey onto Japan's Biggest Film Sets*. Awai Books, 2021: p. 73.

¹³ Luke Mahoney, “What ‘uyoku dantai’ and Japanese alt-right groups want.” *Japan Today*, 8/3/2020. <https://japantoday.com/category/features/opinions/what-'uyoku-dantai'-and-japanese-alt-right-groups-want>

[after it entered Japanese waters](#).¹⁴ In *GMK*, the failure of Japanese people to remember the lessons of Japanese Imperial defeat – lessons such as the importance of pacifism, the toxicity of nationalism, and the moral as well as political value of the constitutional restriction on remilitarization – leads to Godzilla’s return. The sage old man in *GMK* who understands the folklore behind the reemergence of Kaiju in the story tells us that “the souls of countless people who fell victim to the Pacific War congregated in Godzilla’s body” and became reanimated because “people have forgotten the agony of those killed in the war.” Importantly, the return of Godzilla here is provoked by a failure to remember *all* the dead of the Second World War, and not only a failure to commemorate the defeat of the Japanese Imperial forces. For Kaneko, then, it was possible to acknowledge the limits on historical honesty at the same time as it was to criticise, even if obliquely, Japanese nationalism. It is a shame that Yamazaki has not, so far, found a way to do the same with Godzilla.

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¹⁴ Jonathan Watts, “Japan defiant over boat sinking.” *The Guardian*, 24/12/2001. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/dec/24/japan.jonathanwatts>