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最後の希望ガメラ 時の揺籠^{ゆりかご}に託す
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A HISTORY OF GAMERA

by Patrick Macias

It's not easy to take Gamera seriously. After all, this is a series of films about the trials and tribulations of a giant jet-propelled flying turtle.

Long considered something of an 'also-ran' in the realm of *kaiju* films – a field all but dominated by Godzilla, the “King of the Monsters” – the twelve *Gamera* titles in this collection should not be underrated. Taken as a whole, they make up an alternate history of Japanese film, full of highs and lows, spanning over 50 years of imagination, hard work, and head-spinning weirdness.

To wit: Gamera first debuted in widescreen black-and-white, came of age in living color, descended into low budget schlock, and came back stronger than ever in the 90s. It's a long strange trip courtesy of Daiei Studios, home to such lofty cinematic classics as *Rashomon* (1950), *Gate of Hell* (*Jigokumon*, 1953), the *Zatoichi* series (1962-1973), and, uh... *Gamera Super Monster* (1980).

At the center of it all, spinning around like a top on fire, is a character that can simultaneously be awe-inspiring and laugh-inducing... a miracle of sorts, like cinema itself. Who needs a King of the Monsters when you have the Guardian of the Universe and the Friend of All Children at your disposal?

Japan B.G. (Before Gamera)

In the beginning, Daiei was founded in 1942, making it the youngest of Japan's pre-war film studios. Alas, the company's output was not very distinguished, or profitable, until Daiei studio chief and producer Masaichi Nagata (1906-1985) travelled abroad and saw opportunities for Japanese film on the international festival circuit. Prestigious titles like Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and Teinosuke Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* were among Daiei's first major triumphs, racking up awards and critical plaudits for the burgeoning studio.

Daiei had dabbled in science fiction and fantasy films as early as 1949, beginning with the H.G. Wells-inspired *The Invisible Man Appears* (*Tōmei ningen arawaru*), which featured special effects supervised by Eiji Tsuburaya. There were noir-ish horror and suspense films such as *Claws of Steel* (*Tetsu no Tsume*, 1951) along with the wondrous *Warning from Space* (*Uchūjin Tōkyō ni arawaru*, 1956), a disaster film featuring starfish-shaped aliens designed by avant-garde artist Taro Okamoto. Daiei had steadily been increasing its special effects and genre output and delivered big technical landmarks with the 70mm film spectacular *Buddha* (*Shaka*, 1961) and the creature effects in the *Moby Dick*-inspired *Whale God* a.k.a. *Killer Whale* (*Kujira gami*, 1962).

Finally, after the runaway global success of Toho Studios' *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (*Kingu Kongu tai Gojira*) in 1962, Daiei sought to move ahead with a *kaiju*-on-the-loose picture of their own, but the path to Gamera's debut would not be easy.

Nezura!

It must have seemed like a good idea at the time: a movie about a swarm of giant rats attacking Tokyo. That was the idea behind *Giant Horde Beast Nezura*, which was set to be Daiei's official entry in the *kaiju* film sweepstakes.

Although the script called for a man in a mouse suit for the climax, real life rodents were also roped in to crawl over miniature buildings for effects scenes. Alas, the best laid plans of mice and men went awry when a breakout of lice and ticks ground production on *Nezura* to a halt. (Over half a century later, *Nezura* is now being produced by Daiei's successor Kadokawa Pictures for a late-2020 release.)



大怪獣ガメラ

ジェット機をたたき落とし、東京タワーをわし掴み、火を吐いて空を飛ぶ世紀の大怪獣!



大映映画
 築地米三郎
 特殊撮影
 宗川信夫
 撮影
 湯浅憲明
 監督
 高橋二三
 脚本
 村田実子
 大森健二
 中山勉
 小田内二
 大田内二
 藤山浩二
 北城寿太郎
 左田義全
 吉田ト全
 浜村喜純
 内田喜純
 北原義郎
 山下一郎
 霧立はるみ
 姿美千英
 船越英二

GAMERA THE GIANT MONSTER

大怪獣ガメラ / Daikaijū Gamera
 Original release date: 27th November 1965 (Japan)
 Running time: 79 mins

CAST

Eiji Funakoshi Dr. Hidaka
 Junichiro Yamashita Aoyagi
 Michiko Sugata Nobuyo Sakurai
 Harumi Kiritachi Kyoko Yamamoto
 Yoshiro Kitahara Mr. Sakurai
 Bokuzen Hidari Old Farmer
 Fumiko Murata Old Farmer's Wife
 Jun Hamamura Professor Murase
 Jutarō Hojo Self-Defense Force Commander
 Yoshio Yoshida Eskimo Chief
 Kenji Oyama Minister of Defense
 Jun Osanai Chidori Maru Captain
 Koji Fujiyama U.S. Arctic Base Commander
 Ichigen Ohashi Mr. Ueda
 Munehiko Takada Soviet Representative
 Kenichi Tani Officer
 Tsutomu Nakata Toshio's Uncle
 Yuji Moriya News Announcer
 Osamu Maruyama Atomic Energy Research Institute Chief
 Yoshiro Uchida Toshio Sakurai
 Toshio Maki Atomic Energy Research Institute Staff A
 Kazuo Sumida Atomic Energy Research Institute Staff B
 Rin Sugimori Police Station Chief
 Tetsuro Takeuchi Japan Broadcasting Station Announcer

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
 Written by Nisan Takahashi
 Produced by Masaichi Nagata
 Music by Tadashi Yamauchi
 Director of Photography Nobuo Munekawa
 Edited by Tatsuji Nakashizu
 Production Design by Akira Inoue
 Special Effects by Yonesaburo Tsukiji

The initial entry in the Gamera series was Daiei Studios' first successful attempt at making a massive scale kaiju movie. Hibernating under the Arctic, the turtle monster Gamera is awakened by an atomic bomb test. The behemoth creates chaos when it arrives in Japan and an ambitious plan must be hatched to try and stop the rampage.

Despite the many setbacks, Daiei head exec Masaichi Nagata was confident that his studio now had the special effects firepower to deliver a film that could rival *Godzilla*. He demanded that all the producers at Daiei – over forty employees in all – submit suitable ideas for a new monster picture to replace the now-cancelled *Nezura*.

The proposal that got the green light came from the team of producer Yonejiro Saito and scriptwriter Nisan Takahashi. It was called "Attack on Tokyo by Fire Breathing Turtle."

Why a turtle? The most-often told story is that Masaichi Nagata saw a huge turtle shaped object out of the window of an airplane. Maybe it was a cloud, or an island, or something like that. Either way, he announced at a Daiei production meeting: "Make a turtle monster fly!" Nagata's word was law, so Saito and Takahashi followed his lead.

Yet there are several other theories for Gamera's original inspiration, including a turtle that propelled itself using fire that appeared in a pilot for a 1962 TV series, and a "perverted turtle" that would appear when women came to pray at a shrine located near Daiei studios... or maybe it would harass female bathers in Nagasaki? Accounts differ wildly among those who were there. Either way, I can't make this stuff up, folks.

The name 'Gamera' is believed to have come from Masaichi Nagata himself, who wasn't happy that the monster in the "Attack on Tokyo by Fire Breathing Turtle" pitch didn't have a memorable name. Nagata reportedly said, invoking rival studio Toho's famed creation: "If they are Godzilla, then we are Gamera!" Other Daiei executives felt the two names were too similar, but Nagata stubbornly held his ground.

Now the proposed film needed a director. But most of Daiei's staff, concerned about the rigors of special effects filmmaking and fearing the inevitable comparisons to *Godzilla*, decided to pass on the project.

Enter Noriaki Yuasa (1933–2004), born in Tokyo to a showbiz family, and the son of a film actor. After graduating law school in Kyoto, Yuasa joined Daiei and made his directorial debut with the 1964 music comedy *If You're Happy Clap Your Hands* (*Shiawase nara te o tatakō*). Yuasa was originally to have directed the ill-fated *Nezura*, but when that ill-fated project was cancelled, he inherited the reins for the turtle monster film-to-be.

A rotund, jolly figure described by other staff members as "cuddly," Yuasa was in a tough spot. His debut film had not been a hit, and there was not much confidence among the Daiei staff that *Gamera* could ever hope to compete with *Godzilla*. Yet Yuasa, still a novice with much to prove (he was often accused of using his father's fame to further his career), could not refuse the assignment.

Yuasa took a crash course in special effects filmmaking and wound up directing a good portion of *Gamera's* effects himself in collaboration with Yonesaburo Tsukiji, a veteran special effects director who was another refugee from the aborted *Nezura* film. The cancellation of that ill-fated lice-ridden film had left Tsukiji's privately owned studio in debt. The script for *Gamera* had not even been completed when Tsukiji got the order to make a giant turtle monster come to life. A handful of Tsukiji's concept drawings were turned over for Daiei art director Akira Inoue and independent consultant Masao Yagi to finalize with more sketches and clay models. The task of building the actual Gamera suit fell to Yagi, who enlisted the help of his father and some associates from Toho's famed art department.

GAMMERA THE INVINCIBLE

Original release date: 15th December 1966 (USA)

Running time: 86 min

ADDITIONAL SEQUENCES CAST

Albert Dekker Secretary of Defense
Brian Donlevy Gen. Terry Arnold
Diane Findlay Sgt. Susan Embers
John Baragrey Capt. Lovell
Dick O'Neill Gen. O'Neill
Mort Marshall Jules Manning
Alan Oppenheimer Dr. Contrare
Steffen Zacharias Senator Billings
Thomas Stubblefield J.T. Standish
Gene Bua Lt. Clark
Bob Carraway Lt. Simpson
John McCurry Airman First Class Hopkins
Walter Arnold American Ambassador
Louis Zorich Russian Ambassador
Robin Craven British Ambassador

ADDITIONAL SEQUENCES CREW

Directed by **Sandy Howard**
Executive Producer **Ken Barnett**
Additional dialogue **Richard Kraft**
Director of Photography **Julian Townsend**
Editing **Ross-Gaffney**
Sound **Murray Rosenblum**
Art Director **Hank Aldrich**
Assistant Director **Sid Cooperschmidt**

Yet when *Gamera the Giant Monster* was released to theaters on November 27, 1965, it wound up being a much bigger hit than Daiei was prepared for. Despite the obvious comparisons with *Godzilla*, audiences embraced Gamera on his own terms, and the series became a stalwart player in the 'kaiju boom' of the 1960s, when monster movies, TV shows, and merchandise became a massive business in Japan.

Meanwhile, the film found fans overseas when it was released in 1966 dubbed in English, and with newly shot scenes featuring American actors, as *Gamera the Invincible*.

The age of Gamera had begun!

Patrick Macias

The final costume, made largely of plaster reinforced with latex, weighed over 60 kilograms, and a pair of tough guys from Daiei's prop department took turns wearing it while the cameras rolled. The decision was made to try and make the creature walk on all fours, because it made filming easier, and to help distinguish the creature from other upright silver screen giants.

Partially because of the failure of *Nezura* to get off the ground, *Gamera the Giant Monster* was a low budget film on a tight schedule. It was a tough shoot. Daiei's Tokyo facilities were understaffed and under-equipped. Director Yuasa and his crew wrestled with the limitations of outdated equipment, temperamental miniatures (the flying Gamera prop had a habit of burning through whatever wire it was attached to, causing it to crash to the ground), and the lack of electrical power that could properly light up a sound stage for special effects photography. Shortcuts were taken such as photographs of the Tokyo skyline that were pasted onto plywood in lieu of making miniature buildings. Yet big mistakes continued to happen.

One day, the *Gamera* shooting stage was filled with ice for the monster's dramatic appearance in the Arctic snow. Unfortunately, the ice, which had been delivered *en masse* by three trucks, quickly melted and the shooting was delayed for three days while the flooded set dried out.

Events like this led to shooting delays, and Yuasa came under fire from his own staff. There was talk of bringing in Tsuburaya Productions, the effects studio founded by Eiji Tsuburaya of *Godzilla* fame, to help complete *Gamera*, but Yuasa refused and remained determined to complete the film using only Daiei's resources at hand. *Gamera* had gone over-budget and the forecast for recouping the rising costs did not look good.





GAMERA vs BARUGON

大怪獣決闘 ガメラ対バルゴン / Daikaijū Kettō:
 Gamera Tai Barugon / Great Monster Duel: Gamera vs. Barugon
 Original release date: 17th April 1966
 Running time: 100 mins

CAST

Kojiro Hongo Keisuke Hirata
 Kyoko Enami Karen
 Yuzo Hayakawa Kawajiri
 Takuya Fujioka Dr. Sato
 Koji Fujiyama Onodera
 Akira Natsuki Ichiro Hirata
 Yoshio Kitahara Professor Amano
 Ichiro Sugai Dr. Matsushita
 Bontaro Miake Self-Defense Force General
 Jutaro Hojo Self-Defense Force Commander
 Kazuko Wakamatsu Sadae Hirata
 Yuka Konno Onodera's Lover
 Eiichi Takamura Governor of Osaka
 Kenichi Tani Lee
 Koichi Ito Metropolitan Police Superintendent-General
 Hikaru Hoshi Awaji Maru Captain
 Osamu Abe Awaji Maru Crewman
 Yoshihiro Hamaguchi Awaji Maru Crewman
 Joe Ohara Karen's Father
 Tsutomu Nakata Hayashi
 Yuji Moriya News Announcer (voice)
 Gai Harada Kishimoto
 Kazuo Mori Awaji Maru Crewman
 Shin Minatsu Awaji Maru Crewman
 Toichiro Kagawa Man at Observatory
 Teruo Aragaki Gamera

CREW

Directed by Shigeo Tanaka
 Written by Nisan Takahashi
 Produced by Masaichi Nagata
 Director of Photography Michio Takahashi
 Edited by Tatsuji Nakashizu
 Music by Chuji Kinoshita
 Production Designer Atsuji Shibata
 Special Effects Director Noriaki Yuasa
 Special Effects by Kazufumi Fujii

Six months after Gamera's first appearance, a giant opal from New Guinea is brought back to Japan and the new monster Barugon is born. The creature attacks the city of Osaka by emitting a rainbow ray from its back, along with a freezing spray from its mouth, and only a fire-breathing turtle can save the day.

After the box office success of *Gamera the Giant Monster*, Daiei top executive Masaichi Nagata was ready to gamble big.

While the original *Gamera* had been a low budget black-and-white affair, the next film in the series would be promoted to an 'A-picture' with a larger budget and better production values, starting with a visual upgrade to glorious Technicolor.

Seeking to compete further with the winning formula of Toho's *kaiju* films, the sequel – titled *Great Monster Duel: Gamera vs. Barugon* – would put the emphasis on adult melodrama with no child protagonists to interrupt the suspenseful proceedings.

Even with all his success with directing the first *Gamera*, Noriaki Yuasa would not return to helm the new film. Instead, he was replaced with veteran Shigeo Tanaka, widely considered one of Daiei's top directors for his work on the Japan-Taiwan big-budget prestige picture, *The Great Wall (Shin no shikôtei, 1962)*. Yet Yuasa would still make major contributions to *Gamera vs. Barugon*.

After the completion of *Gamera* in 1965, special effects supervisor Tsukiji Yonesaburo left Daiei to work in television as an independent. With the crucial position of effects supervisor now vacant, Yuasa was assigned to take his place.

Noriaki Yuasa's knowledge of *kaiju* filmmaking had grown considerably since the original movie's trial-by-fire production. But he was still up against the wall with the sequel's fast production time and the comparatively small amount of money allotted to the effects scenes.

Yuasa and his staff hunkered down and delivered some of the best effects sequences of the classic *Gamera* series, including the opening attack on the Kurobe dam, the battle in front of a frozen Osaka castle, and the rainbow beam that beautifully erupts from new monster Barugon's scaly back.

Meanwhile, as Daiei's Tokyo facility was busy with production on *Gamera vs. Barugon*, Daiei's Kyoto studio was simultaneously toiling away on the period monster pic *Daimajin*. The two films were released together on the same bill during Japan's Golden Week holiday in 1966 and was regarded as a major event, both for Daiei's forays into fantasy filmmaking, and Japan's '*kaiju* boom' in general.

Alas, when attending screenings of *Gamera vs. Barugon*, Noriaki Yuasa couldn't help but notice that kids in the audience became bored and restless during the long sections of the film without any monsters. He felt the *Gamera* series had lost touch with its core audience and made up his mind to course-correct in the inevitable sequel films ahead.

Patrick Macias



GAMERA vs GYAOS

大怪獣空中戦 ガメラ対ギャオス
Daikaijū Kūchū-sen: Gamera tai Gyaosu / Giant Monster
Dogfight: Gamera vs. Gyaos

Original release date: 15th March 1967

Running time: 86 mins

CAST

Kojiro Hongo Foreman Shiro Tsutsumi
Kichijiro Ueda Tatsuemon Kanamura
Reiko Kasahara Sumiko Kanamura
Naoyuki Abe Eiichi Kanamura
Taro Marui Mite-no-Tetsu
Yukitaro Hotaru Hachiko
Yoshiro Kitahara Dr. Aoki
Akira Natsuki Self-Defense Force General
Kenji Oyama District Police Commissioner
Fujio Murakami Dr. Murakami
Koichi Ito Road Company Chairman
Tepei Endo Road Company Local Affairs Director
Shin Minatsu Okabe the Photographer
Teruo Aragaki Gamera

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisan Takahashi
Produced by Hidemasa Nagata
Music by Tadashi Yamauchi
Director of Photography Akira Uehara
Edited by Tatsuji Nakashizu
Special Effects by Kazufumi Fujii

Unusual volcanic activity in Japan awakens Gyaos, a bloodthirsty flying monster with the power to slice things in half with an ultrasonic ray. While scientists and the military scramble to devise a way to stop this new threat, a young boy forms an alliance with Gamera; a monster no one else seems to trust.

Gamera vs. Gyaos is considered by fans in Japan to be the best of the classic Sixties-era *Gamera* films. After the lessons learned in the first two films, everything here is in perfect proportion: the spectacle, the drama, and of course, the savage monster action. *Godzilla* director Ishiro Honda himself took notice and was so impressed by *Gamera vs. Gyaos* that he sent a New Year's card to screenwriter Nisan Takahashi congratulating him on a job well done.

After the lavish production of *Gamera vs. Barugon*, Daiei now began reducing the budgets afforded to the series. One cost-cutting measure was to hire Noriaki Yuasa for the job of both director and special effects supervisor – twin roles he would retain for much of the remaining *Gamera* films until the 1980s, and a move which gave him more creative freedom in the process.

Like the rivalries between other larger-than-life 60s acts like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, the ongoing success of *Godzilla* on the big screen (and now *Ultraman* on the small screen), inspired Yuasa and returning screenwriter Takahashi to try and move in new directions. Yuasa now wanted to emphasize the animal nature of the *kaiju* in his films. Enter the bat-like, blood-drinking, human-eating, limb-regenerating monster Gyaos, sharply designed by Akira Inoue.

Like Yuasa, Nisan Takahashi also felt that the previous film had failed as children's entertainment. *Gamera vs. Gyaos* puts a young person at center stage in the story while depicting Gyaos as a kind of vampire,

with Gamera in the Van Helsing role. Great visual gags abound, like the castles, cars, and helicopters split in half by Gyaos' ultrasonic beam.

But what makes this movie so uniquely Gamera-esque is the pivotal role it gives children and their dreams. The scene where our young hero Eiichi hops onboard Gamera's oversized shell for a fantastical flight across the sky is as close to a statement of purpose as this series gets. While the *Godzilla* films would be eager to court the kiddies too, you never saw the Big G giving anyone a free ride. Only Gamera had such a close relationship with his fans on screen, which is as the creative staff intended.

As director Noriaki Yuasa told author Stuart Galbraith IV: "When I was young, after Japan had lost the war, the adults I looked up to suddenly went from being very militaristic to anti-militaristic. Because of this hypocrisy, I felt like I couldn't trust adults anymore. I hoped that when I grew up I would, in my way, still be like a child. I think this sentiment can be seen in my movies."

Patrick Macias



GAMERA vs VIRAS

ガメラ対宇宙怪獣バイラス / *Gamera Tai Uchū Kaijū Bairasu* / *Gamera vs. Space Monster Viras*

Original release date: 20th March 1968

Running time: 72 mins (original theatrical version) / 81 mins (director's re-edit) / 90 min (US TV version)

CAST

Kojiro Hongo Scout Master Mr. Shimida
Toru Takatsuka Masao Nakaya
Carl Craig Jim Crane
Michiko Yaegaki Mariko
Mari Atsumi Junko Aoki
Junko Yashiro Masako Shibata
Peter Williams Dr. Dobie
Koji Fujiyama Self Defense Force Commander
Yoshiro Kitahara Masao's Father
Munehiko Takada Jim's Father
Mary Morris Mrs. Crane
Chikara Hashimoto Doctor 1
Kenji Go Doctor 2
Akira Natsuki Doctor 3
Ken Nakahara Doctor 4
Kenichiro Yamane Doctor 5
Genzō Wakayama Boss (Voice)

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisan Takahashi
Produced by Hidemasa Nagata
Music by Kenjiro Hirose
Director of Photography Akira Kitazaki
Edited by Shoji Sekiguchi
Production Designer Tomohisa Yano
Special Effects by Kazufumi Fujii

As alien invaders plot to conquer the Earth, two Boy Scouts steal a mini-submarine and discover Gamera in their midst. Transported to the alien's spaceship, the Scouts are menaced by the evil inhabitants, including Viras, a squid-like monster that grows to colossal size to battle Gamera.

If *Gamera vs. Gyaos* is the peak of the first phase of our terrapin hero's screen career, then *Gamera vs. Viras* represents a reshuffling of priorities and the beginning of a decline in quality.

Despite a steady stream of hit films, the late 60s saw Daiei Studios on the road to fiscal ruin and the *Gamera* series was hit hard by cutbacks. Returning director and effects supervisor Noriaki Yuasa was not happy when he found that the budget for the new *Gamera* film suddenly slashed to a third of what it had cost to make the previous title, *Gamera vs. Barugon*.

This led to production shortcuts that would become staples of the *Gamera* films to come, including a reliance on effects stock footage and redressed sets shot from different angles to give the illusion of a bigger production. Meanwhile, Daiei had entered a deal with American International Pictures to distribute the next batch of *Gamera* films on US TV. As part of the agreement, AIP-TV wanted non-Japanese actors on screen, too!

Yet even with so many compromises behind the camera, *Gamera vs. Viras* still manages to work as a solid children's film – a space age fairytale of sorts, with a pair of Boy Scouts (played by Carl Craig and Toru Takatsuka) in the Hansel and Gretel roles. (What's with all the Boy Scouts? Well, Daiei studio chief Masaichi Nagata was an advisor to the Boy Scouts of Japan.)

This is also the point at which the *Gamera* films begin to deal in dream-like strangeness, a move heralded by the squid-like Viras, the first of a run of extraterrestrial threats pitted against Gamera, who is wonderfully weird, as are the painter smock-clad sinister humanoid aliens that surround him.

Handling both director and special effects supervision duties on a grueling 25-day shoot, Yuasa felt as though this was going to be the last-ever *Gamera* film. Surely, with such a low budget, the series had run its course... Instead, *Gamera vs. Viras* was a box office success. Daiei demanded more *Gamera* films, but could not offer bigger budgets. Yuasa recalled: "This was the first time I felt troubled by having a hit movie."

Patrick Macias



GAMERA vs GUIRON

ガメラ対大悪獣ギロン / *Gamera tai Dai Aki-jū Giron / Gamera vs. Giant Evil Beast Guiron*
 Original release date: 21st March 1969
 Running time: 82 mins

CAST

Nobuhiro Kashima Akio
 Christopher Murphy Tom
 Miyuki Akiyama Tomoko
 Eiji Funakoshi Dr. Shiga
 Kon Omura Officer Kon Kondo
 Yuko Hamada Kuniko
 Edith Hansen Elza
 Reiko Kasahara Florbella
 Hiroko Kai Barbella
 Umenosuke Izumi Gamera

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
 Written by Nisan Takahashi
 Produced by Hidemasa Nagata
 Music by Shunsuke Kikuchi
 Director of Photography Akira Kitazaki
 Edited by Zenko Miyazaki
 Special Effects by Kazufumi Fujii

Two young boys sneak aboard a spaceship and find themselves whisked away to the mysterious planet Terra. There, they encounter Gamera's old foe Gyaos and two female aliens with a taste for human brains. Gamera must save the children and battle the new monster Guiron, whose entire body is a deadly living weapon.

The next batch of *Gamera* titles saw Noriaki Yuasa and screenwriter Nisan Takahashi on treadmills, racing to deliver one new *kaiju* film a year with increasingly limited resources.

Production followed a set pattern: live action photography was completed within four weeks, special effects sequences wrapped in two months. Yuasa continued to do double duty as director and special effects supervisor throughout.

Under these conditions, *Gamera vs. Guiron*, *Gamera vs. Jiger*, and *Gamera vs. Zigra* were forged in the likeness of the previous hit film, *Gamera vs. Viras*. Indeed, this quartet of films play like variations on a lo-fi theme, leaning heavily on stock footage, recycled monster props (*Gamera vs. Guiron* welcomes back Gyaos, now painted silver and rechristened 'Space Gyaos'), and wayward foreigners thrust in front of cameras to appease the overseas market.

On the plus side, the monsters became increasingly crazed and outlandish, starting with knife-head Guiron (art director Akira Inoue's personal favorite creation) who, in this outing, dismembers and duels with foes in homage to Daiei's popular *Zatoichi* series. *Gamera vs. Guiron* doesn't skimp on insanity either, as Gamera shows off his newfound gymnastic skills on a gigantic collar chin-up bar, in a move inspired by the '68 Mexico Olympics.

Call it genius, or call it puerile, there's no denying that like the eating of children's brains that the female alien invaders in the film want so badly, *Gamera vs. Guiron* is something of an acquired taste.

Patrick Macias



GAMERA vs JIGER

ガメラ対大魔獣ジャイガ / *Gamera tai Daimajū Jaiga* / *Gamera vs. Giant Demon Beast Jiger*
 Original release date: 21st March 1970
 Running time: 82 mins

CAST

Tsutomu Takakuwa Hiroshi Kitayama
 Kelly Varis Tommy Williams
 Katherine Murphy Susan Williams
 Sanshiro Honoo Keisuke Sawada
 Sho Natsuki Dr. Suzuki,
 National Institute of Science Director
 Junko Yashiro Miko Kitayama
 Kon Omura Ryosaku Kitayama
 Umenosuke Izumi Gamera

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
 Written by Nisan Takahashi
 Produced by Hidemasa Nagata
 Music by Shunsuke Kikuchi
 Director of Photography Akira Kitazaki
 Edited by Zenko Miyazaki
 Production Designer Akira Inoue
 Special Effects by Yuzo Kaneko

When a giant stone statue on Wester Island is disturbed, the legendary monster Jiger appears and heads for Japan. Gamera tries to stop this new rival, only to be injured when Jiger lays eggs inside of him. As two boys in a submarine go on a dangerous quest inside of Gamera's body to save him, Jiger threatens the Expo '70 world's fair in Osaka.

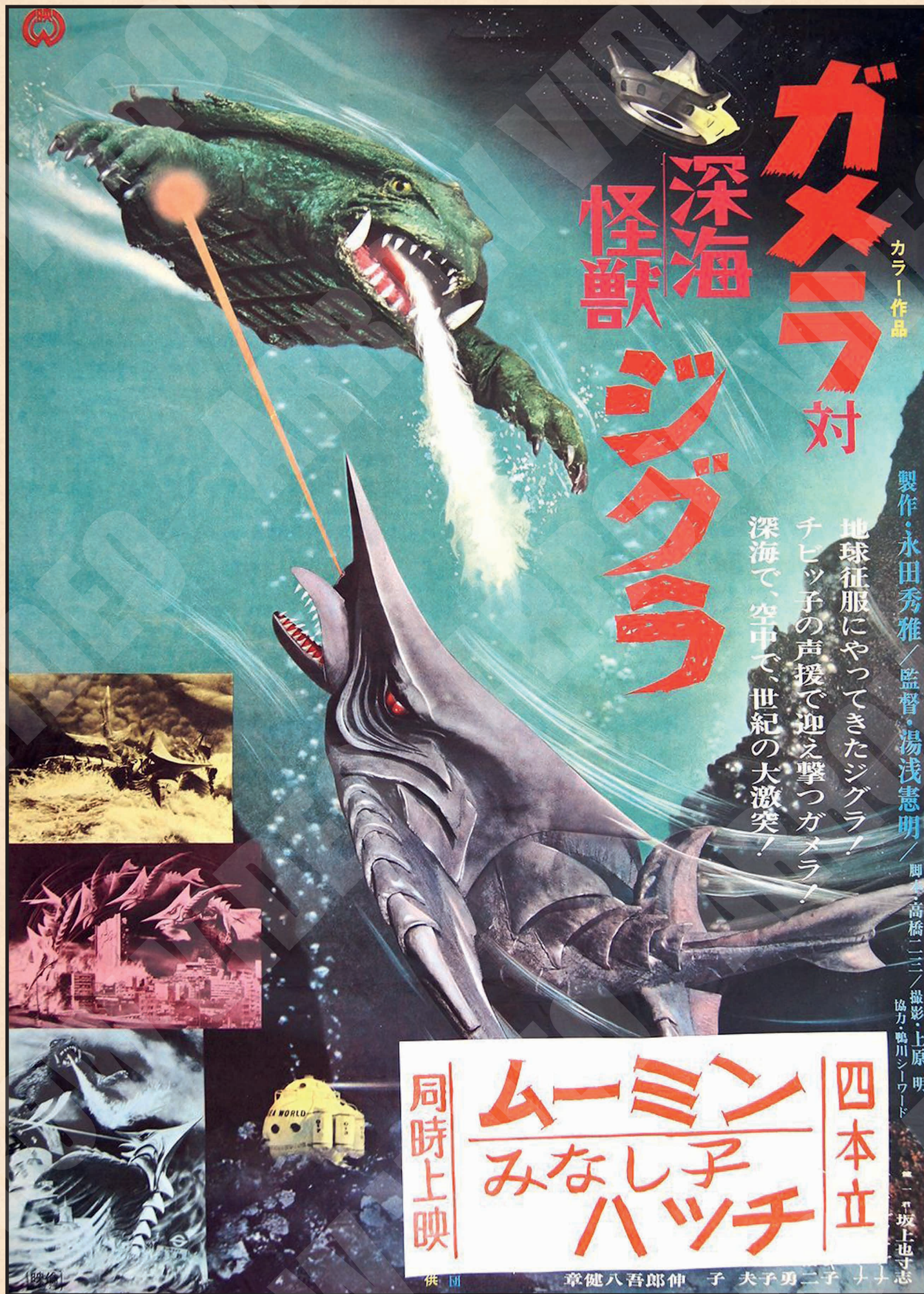
The sixth film in the *Gamera* series took a break from outer space settings to focus on some very spectacular happenings back on Earth. Thanks to photo features in manga magazines, ancient ruins and lost civilizations of the Easter Island ilk had suddenly caught the imagination of Japanese kids. Meanwhile, over in Osaka, Japan was about to host the spectacular Expo '70 world's fair, whose cultural pavilions and ultra-modern architecture (including Taro Okamoto's iconic Tower of the Sun building) looked like a sci-fi movie unfolding in real life.

These elements were woven together in *Gamera vs. Jiger*, along with a few echoes of the earlier *Gamera vs. Barugon* – which also featured tropical islands, Osaka scenery, and a quadruped foe – thrown into the mix.

The big gimmick here is a submarine journey into the very bowels of Gamera himself, inspired by the creative staff's sheer desperation. Director and special effects supervisor Noriaki Yuasa remembered: "I thought about what I could do that was different, because I felt like I had done almost everything I could with Gamera before."

In addition to shooting on location during the construction of Expo '70 in Osaka, Yuasa begged for an increase in his effects budget to construct more miniature sets for his monsters to demolish. Daiei obliged, and *Gamera vs. Jiger* contains the last large-scale urban destruction scenes in the classic *Gamera* series.

Patrick Macias



GAMERA vs ZIGRA

ガメラ対深海怪獣ジグラ / Gamera tai Shinkai Kaijū
 Jigra / Gamera vs. Deep-Sea Monster Zigra
 Original release date: 17th July 1971
 Running time: 88 mins

CAST

Eiko Yanami Woman X / Chikako Sugawara
 Reiko Kasahara Kiyoko Ishikawa
 Mikiko Tsubouchi Mrs. Ishikawa
 Koji Fujiyama Dr. Tom Wallace
 Isamu Saeki Dr. Yosuke Ishikawa
 Shin Minatsu Kamogawa Sea World Staff
 Arlene Zoellner Margie Wallace
 Gloria Zoellner Helen Wallace
 Yasushi Sakagami Kenichi Ishikawa
 Keiichi Noda Zigra (voice)

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
 Written by Nisan Takahashi
 Producer Hidemasa Nagata
 Music by Shunsuke Kikuchi
 Director of Photography Akira Uehara
 Editor Zenko Miyazaki
 Production Designer Akira Inoue
 Assistant Director Masami Akise
 Special Effects by Kazufumi Fujii

As Daiei Studios and the Gamera series faced the specter of bankruptcy off-screen, an alien woman from the planet Zigra and her spaceship creates a series of earthquakes around the globe. Two children at a marine park are caught in the crossfire as Gamera must combat the monster Zigra to save the earth.

1971. A new year. A new *Gamera* picture... But while kids enjoyed the sight of Gamera battling an alien menace named Zigra in the low-stakes setting of a marine park, some very adult-strength trouble was going on behind the scenes. Daiei Studios – the home of so many classic Japanese films and characters, including Gamera himself – was in a death spiral and would soon declare bankruptcy.

All the major Japanese studios were going through tough times owing to declining ticket sales, but Daiei's troubles were compounded by fiscal problems, labor issues, and mismanaged resources that helped to spell the end of a once glorious company.

During the production of *Gamera vs. Zigra*, director and special effects supervisor Noriaki Yuasa had become a freelance worker and was no longer an official Daiei employee. Expected to work overtime with no pay, Yuasa recalled that the stress level at the company was off the charts, with at least one crew member literally dropping dead from a cerebral hemorrhage. Even studio chief Masaichi Nagata himself would be hospitalized with high blood pressure as the Daiei empire crumbled.

Despite all the difficulties, *Gamera vs. Zigra* delivers the fun as only a low budget (less than \$100,000 USD) *kaiju* film truly can. There's a

large-scale interstellar invasion scenario, with a side dish of brainwashing to digest. There are more surrealistic highlights, such as when Gamera plunks out a tune on Zigra's spiky back like an oversized xylophone. And – thanks to all those dumb humans polluting the planet – there's even an ecological message for kids to chew on. Of course, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* a.k.a. *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster* (*Gojira tai Hedorah*) hit Japanese theaters at the same time, but only *Gamera vs. Zigra* was filmed on location at Kamogawa Sea World!

Back in real life, doom was in the air. *Gamera vs. Zigra* was distributed by Dainichi, a short-lived partnership between Daiei and the also-ailing Nikkatsu Studios. Meanwhile, Noriaki Yuasa had already begun pre-production on yet another Gamera film, to have been called *Gamera vs. Two-Headed Monster W*, before the plug was unexpectedly pulled.

And on December 28th 1971, Daiei Studios, the home of filmmakers like Kurosawa, Mizuguchi, and Kon Ichikawa, was delisted from the Tokyo Stock Exchange. And Gamera, beloved by kids all over the world, went into a state of deep hibernation, as turtles are known to do...

Patrick Macias

ついに、宇宙最強のスーパー・モンスターがやってきた!



GAMERA SUPER MONSTER

宇宙怪獣ガメラ
Uchū Kaijū Gamera / Space Monster Gamera
Original release date: 20th March 1980
Running time: 92 mins

CAST

Mach Fumiake Kilara
Yaeko Kojima Marsha
Yoko Komatsu Mitan
Keiko Kudo Giruge
Koichi Maeda Keiichi
Toshie Takada Keiichi's Mother
Osamu Kobayashi Zanon (voice)

CREW

Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisan Takahashi
Produced by Hirozaki Oba, Shigeru Shinohara,
Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Masaya Tokuyama
Music by Shunsuke Kikuchi
Director of Photography Michio Takahashi, Akira Uehara
Edited by Zenko Miyazaki,
Tatsuji Nakashizu, Shoji Sekiguchi
Production Designer Akira Inoue, Tomohisa Yano
Assistant Director Hiromi Munemoto

After a nine-year break, Gamera returned to the screen with a (sort of) new entry. As a massive alien craft heads to Earth to do evil, three good and powerful superwomen befriend a young boy who has a special connection to Gamera. Old foes return to do battle one more time, albeit mostly through stock footage from previous outings.

While *Gamera* was off the grid for most of the Seventies, the defunct Daiei brand slowly came back to life.

In 1974, publisher Tokuma Shoten acquired Daiei as a subsidiary. New movies were greenlit with Gamera's old boss Masaichi Nagata back in the producer's seat. Big budget adaptations of several Tokuma Shoten books followed, along with Nagata's pet project: the special effects-laden religious film *Nichiren* (1979).

As for the *kaiju* genre, the passing years had not been kind. Godzilla had gone missing since 1975. Gamera himself hadn't graced the silver screen since 1971.

All of that changed in 1980 with the release of *Gamera Super Monster*, which reunited the classic team of director Noriaki Yuasa, screenwriter Nisan Takahashi, and producer Nagata for one more assault on the senses of children everywhere.

I dearly wish I could say that the film they made was a triumphant return to form for all involved. But the truth is *Super Monster* is the literal definition of a hot mess. Even compared to all that's come before, this pic is low budget, punishingly juvenile, heavy on the stock footage from *Gamera* films of old (which in this context, suddenly look like towering

achievements in cinema), and offers little in the way of new *kaiju* effects aside from a freshly built, but not-particularly-expressive, prop of Gamera in flight.

Adding to the fast, cheap, and out-of-control approach is the heavy use of the Totsu ECG system (originally used on Kinji Fukasaku's *Message from Space* [*Uchu kara no messeji*] in 1978): a video-to-film process lacking in the luster department.

Director Yuasa remembered: "New Daiei didn't think of (*Super Monster*) as a new film and just wanted to cut the old footage together. I grieved for my son Gamera – it was a very strange fate."

But lord help me, even with all the suffering behind the scenes, I still adore this film. Even more than the previous *Gamera* films, it feels like a *kaiju* movie set inside a little kid's brain which has now been damaged from overexposure to Hollywood blockbusters like *Star Wars* (1977) and *Superman* (1978) as well as manga and anime like *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū senkan Yamato*, 1974-1975) and *Galaxy Express 999* (*Ginga Tetsudō Surī Nain*, 1977-1987), all of which are referenced (or ripped off) to varying degrees.

And as pro wrestler Mach Fumiake and our pint-sized boy protagonist fly over the Tokyo skyline over the final credits of *Super Monster*, the curtain comes down, very awkwardly, on the Showa era of *Gamera* films.

But don't fret! The best was yet to come!

Patrick Macias



GAMERA

THE GUARDIAN OF THE UNIVERSE

ガメラ 大怪獣空中決戦 / Gamera: Daikaijū Kūchū Kessen / Gamera: Giant Monster Midair Battle
 Original release date: 11th March 1995
 Running time: 96 mins

CAST

Tsuyoshi Ihara Yoshinari Yonemori,
 First Officer of Japan Coast Guard patrol boat Nojima
Shinobu Nakayama Dr. Mayumi Nagamine,
 ornithologist at Fukuoka Zoo and Botanical Garden
Ayako Fujitani Asagi Kusanagi
Yukijiro Hotaru Inspector Tsutomu Osako,
 Nagasaki Police Department
Hiroto Honda Masaaki Saito,
 Deputy Minister of the Environment
Hatsunori Hasegawa Colonel Satake
Kojiro Hongo Captain of Japan Coast Guard
 patrol boat Nojima
Akira Kubo Captain of transport ship Kairyu-Maru
Takashi Matsuo Taxi driver
Yoshihiko Hakamada Michiya,
 graduate student at Kyushu University
Akira Onodera Naoya Kusanagi,
 investigator for Yawata General Insurance
Yuka Sakano Yukino, Asagi's friend
Hiroyuki Watanabe Colonel Ono
Tetsu Watanabe JSDF Captain at Mount Fuji
Masahiko Sakata Director of the
 Dome Movement Command Center
Jun Fubuki Shopping housewife
Yutaka Natsuki TV reporter
Tomiko Ishii Woman in supermarket
Yoko Oshima Lady in Otoko Island shop
Yuichi Mayama NNN News Plus 1 newscaster 1
Yuko Kimura NNN News Plus 1 newscaster 2
Izumi Ogami NNN News Plus 1 newscaster 3
Yukihito Koga Dome field reporter
Minako Nagai Altavision caster
Kenji Wakabayashi Late-night newscaster
Akemi Nakamura Correspondent to
 Dome Movement Command Center
Nanako Kaneko Zookeeper
Takateru Manabe, Jun Suzuki Gamera
Yumi Kameyama Super Gyaos, female newscaster

CREW

Directed by **Shusuke Kaneko**
 Written by **Kazunori Ito**
 Special Effects Director **Shinji Higuchi**
 Produced by **Tsutomu Tsuchikawa**
 Music by **Kow Otani**
 Cinematography **Junichi Tozawa, Kenji Takama**
 Edited by **Shizuo Arakawa**
 Production Designer **Hajime Oikawa**

Following yet another long absence from the big screen, Gamera made a triumphant return to form in time for his 30th anniversary with the help of director Shunsuke Kaneko and special effects wizard Shinji Higuchi. Now a guardian deity, Gamera tussles with a new incarnation of his old foe – the flying monster Gyaos – first in Fukuoka, and then in a spectacular aerial battle over Tokyo.

Fifteen years passed... and while Gamera slumbered in cinematic limbo again, some very big changes were afoot.

In 1985, Masaichi Nagata, the top Daiei exec who had helped to bring Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi, and Gamera himself to the world, passed away at the age of 79.

As for *kaiju* movies, Godzilla's career was resurrected at Toho Studios with a new cycle of films beginning in 1984, but special effects standards had been redefined in 1993 by *Jurassic Park*. How could old-fashioned Japanese monsters ever hope to compete with next-gen CGI blockbusters?

While plans for a new *Gamera* movie had been off and on the table at Daiei since the mid-1980s, a full-scale resurrection of the "friend to all children" finally got the green light under new management as the character's 30th anniversary in 1995 neared. Meanwhile, a new crop of filmmakers, who had been raised during the height of the '*kaiju* boom', were starting to work in the movie industry.

Director Shusuke Kaneko, born in 1955, had begun his career helming *Roman porno* sex films for Nikkatsu before eventually finding mainstream success with award-winning youth titles like *Summer Vacation 1999* (*Nen no natsu yasumi*, 1988).

A lifelong *kaiju* fan, Kaneko had briefly met with Tomoyuki Tanaka, the legendary producer of the *Godzilla* series, in the early 90s to talk about the possibility of directing a film starring the Big G. At the time, Daiei-Tokuma was considering bringing back either their old angry stone god Daimajin or making a new Gamera film. When they decided to go ahead with Gamera, Daiei reached out to Kaneko, having caught wind of his talks with Toho.

As Shusuke Kaneko told the audience at his panel at the G-Fest convention in 2019: "In the beginning, I couldn't take (Gamera) seriously, first of all because of the low budget, and second, because the main character is a flying turtle. I felt that I should make it a comedy rather than something serious. But I realized the producer (Tsutomu Tsuchikawa) was very serious and passionate (about this project). So, I asked one of my good friends to write the script."

Kaneko's friend was none other than anime scriptwriter Kazunori Ito. In 1989, Ito had written the script for Mamoru Oshii's anime classic *Patlabor: The Movie* (*Kidō keisatsu patorebā: Gekijō-ban*), which ingeniously imagined how giant robots might transform daily life, politics, crime, and law enforcement in Japan. In 1995 – the same year

that *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* was released – another collaboration between writer Ito and director Oshii would hit the cinemas in the form of the landmark anime *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*).

Director Kaneko remembered: "When I first received (Ito's script for *Gamera*) and read through it, I was really surprised, and it struck a chord with me. But I also felt nervous wondering if I would be able to make the film in time or not."

Originally, Kaneko considered handling special effects supervision himself (in the style of Noriaki Yuasa, who did similar dual duties for the original *Gamera* films) until up-and-coming effects superstar Shinji Higuchi told Kaneko, "I can do anything."

Born in 1965, Higuchi was a hardcore *otaku* and part of the seminal fans-turned-pro studio GAINAX. In addition to being one of the top storyboard artists in anime, Higuchi had worked on several *kaiju* projects in the past, including *Godzilla* films, the *Ultraman* franchise, and the low-budget 16mm special effects epic fan film *Eight-Headed Giant Serpent's Counterattack* (*Yamata no Orochi no Gyakushu*, 1985).

Together, Shusuke Kaneko, Kazunori Ito, and Shinji Higuchi would form the core creative team on *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe*, the first film of what would become known as the 'Heisei Gamera Trilogy.' But one of the biggest battles they would face would be trying to convince the studio that their new approach was the right way to go.

Says Kaneko: "(Daiei) wanted to target children, so they were skeptical about *Gamera* since our script was more serious than a kiddie *kaiju* movie... Right up to the premiere, they tried to convince me to change the story, but I was able to convince them using my brain and logic."

Instead of trying to beat the recent assembly line *Godzilla* films at their own game, the trio sought to rebuild the *kaiju* film genre from scratch. After so many outlandish *Gamera* films, their new approach seemed like the most outrageous one of all: *realism*. What would it *actually be like* if giant monsters were to appear in Japan? How would the nation react? How would the military and the media react? What would an epic *kaiju* battle look like from a street level view?

Taking this approach meant that monster battles had to be shown from a human perspective, rather than a giant-sized one. Higuchi's twin skills in storyboarding and practical effects meant that visuals could be meticulously planned in advance for maximum impact. Miniatures were constructed at a larger scale, and with denser urban detail, than had become the norm for *kaiju* films before. Natural light was used as often as possible in shooting. CGI was tastefully deployed, along with puppetry and classic monster suit technique, to bring the creatures to life.

But for all the new incredible visuals, at the core of the film remained a strong connection to the *Gamera* films of the past, via returning foe Gyaos, and Gamera's connection to a young person played here by Ayako Fujitani (daughter of Steven Seagal). Says Kaneko: "We questioned how it would make sense that Gamera would be a children's ally and be convincing... Gamera is the children's ally, so that means he is also the human race's ally."

Whereas 1995's *Godzilla vs. Destoroyah* (*Gojira vs. Desutoroiã*) had cost equivalent to \$10 million USD to produce, *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* cost half as much to make and emerged as arguably the better film. Japanese critics voted it as one of the best releases of 1995. Even Roger Ebert gave the movie a "thumbs up" rating when it was released in the USA.

It's funny how things work out sometimes: Gamera had gone from being the goofy "friend of all children" from a bankrupt studio to a critics' darling and the vanguard of a new wave of Daiei films.

Patrick Macias





GAMERA 2

ATTACK OF LEGION

ガメラ2 レギオン襲来

Gamera Tsū Region Shūrai / Gamera 2: Legion Invasion

Original release date: 13th July 1996

Running time: 100 mins

CAST

Toshiyuki Nagashima Colonel Yusuke Watarase, JGSDF Chemical School
Miki Mizuno Midori Honami, Sapporo Science Center curator
Tamotsu Ishibashi First Lieutenant Hanatani
Mitsuru Fukikoshi Obitsu, engineer at NTT Hokkaido network operation center
Ayako Fujitani Asagi Kusanagi
Yukijiro Hotaru Tsutomu Osako, security guard at brewery
Zen Kajihara Mano, security guard at brewery
Tomorrowo Taguchi Ishida, Sapporo city subway driver
Yuka Sakano Yukino, Asagi's friend
Takeshi Yoro Professor of Veterinary Medicine, Hokkaido University
Hatsunori Hasegawa Colonel Satake
LaSalle Ishi NTT Nazaki Transmitting Station worker
Bengarū Honami's father
Kazue Tsunogae Honami's mother
Yusuke Kawazu Akio Nojiri, Sapporo Science Center director
Hiroyuki Okita Sasai, 11th Division Chemical Protection Platoon Commander
Akiji Kobayashi Senior sergeant of the weapon platoon
Hiroyuki Watanabe Colonel Ono, Defense Base and Combat Command Center 3rd Division Operations Manager
Kazunaga Tsuji General Bando, Combat Command Center Division Leader
Hiroshi Okochi Sapporo Odori Command Center Regiment Leader
Shunsuke Takasugi Self-propelled howitzer operator
Yasuyoshi Tokuma Chief Cabinet Secretary
Yoshiaki Umegaki Sapporo Riot Police platoon leader
Hiromasa Taguchi Public bath patron
Kazunori Nobutori Leader of the monitoring base in Sendai
Masato Nagamori Sapporo Subway Regulatory Department chief
Yukitomo Tochino Man clinging to telephone pole
Touta Tawaragi Captain of the escort ship Umigiri
Tasuku Unou Transport helicopter pilot
Yukio Shirabe, Kohei Kowada Correspondents at Defense Base and Combat Command Center
Miyuki Komatsu Sapporo site reporter
Negishi Daisuke Sapporo news helicopter cameraman
Yuko Miwa Tatebayashi news helicopter reporter
Hana Kawadzu Mother in Sendai
Aki Maeda Girl in Sendai
Ayako Sekiya Special newscaster
Masako Yabumoto Newscaster
Akira Ohashi Gamera
Mizuho Yoshida, Toshinori Sasaki Mother Legion
Tomohiko Akayama, Yuji Kobayashi, Yoshiyuki Watanabe, Akihiro Nakata Soldier Legion

CREW

Directed by **Shusuke Kaneko**
 Written by **Kazunori Ito**
 Special Effects Director **Shinji Higuchi**
 Produced by **Miyuki Nanri, Naoki Sato, Tsutomu Tsuchikawa**
 Music by **Kow Otani**
 Director of Photography **Junichi Tozawa**
 Edited by **Shizuo Arakawa**
 Production Designer **Hajime Oikawa**

One year after the events of the previous Gamera film, Earth's ecosystem is under attack by an insect lifeform from outer space bent on colonizing our world. As the city of Sendai is destroyed, Gamera must protect the planet from the monster Legion and gets some help from Japan's Self Defense Forces.

The mid-90s were a weird time in Japan... The Great Hanshin Earthquake and the deadly sarin gas attack by the Aum Shinrikyo cult both struck in 1995, the same year that *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* was released. The fallout from these traumatic end-of-the-century events was reflected in pop culture, starting with the apocalyptic 1995 anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin Seiki Evangelion*, which Shinji Higuchi had helped to storyboard) and the Heisei *Gamera* films.

Released in 1996, *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion* takes a step back from the fantasy and mystical inclinations of the previous film and doubles down on the realism factor. While comebacks for old foes like Guiron and Barugon were initially discussed, the returning staff of *Gamera 2* eventually decided on a new monster: the space-borne insectoid Legion, who was Gamera's first wholly original foe since 1971.

Here Gamera (given a slight redesign by effects wizard and film director Tomo Haraguchi) must fight an ecological threat on a planetary scale, while the Japanese Self Defense Forces (who sat out participating in the first *Gamera* film, but lent their full support this time) fight to push Legion back inch by inch. Oh, and the entire city of Sendai is vaporized in the process... and the film is not even half over yet.

For my money, *Gamera 2* is the best film of the Heisei Gamera series, and a clear forerunner of *Shin Godzilla* (*Shin Gojira*, 2016, co-directed by Shinji Higuchi), which explored the strange new world of post-Fukushima nuclear disaster Japan as much as the Heisei *Gamera* films did with the trials and tribulations of the mid-90s.

Patrick Macias



GAMERA3 REVENGE OF IRIS

ガメラ3 邪神〈イリス〉覚醒
Gamera Sui Irisu Kakusei / Gamera 3: Evil God Awakening

Original release date: 6th March 1999

Running time: 108 mins

CAST

Shinobu Nakayama Dr. Mayumi Nagamine, ornithologist
Ai Maeda Ayana Hirasaka
Aki Maeda Ayana Hirasaka, 4 years ago (voice: Ai Maeda)
Ayako Fujitani Asagi Kusanagi
Yu Koyama Tatsunari Moribe
Nozomi Ando Miyuki Moribe
Takahiro Ito Satoru Hirasaka
Senri Yamazaki Mito Asakura, Cabinet Secretary
Toru Tezuka Shinya Kurata, computer programmer
Yukijiro Hotaru Tsutomu Osako
Hirotarō Honda Masaaki Saito, Deputy Minister of the Environment
Kei Horie Shigeki Hinohara
Norito Yashima Sakurai, National Genetic Research Institute
Yusuke Kawazu Akio Nojiri, Sapporo Science Center director
Kunihiko Mitamura Ayana's father
Kazuko Kato Ayana's mother
Nijiko Kiyokawa Moribe family matriarch
Katsuhisa Namase Yawata Marine Insurance representative
Aimi Takemura Tomomi, Ayana's classmate
Yui Kobayashi Sanae, Ayana's classmate
Nikki Soraneko Natsuko, Ayana's classmate
Hiroyuki Watanabe Colonel Ono,
 37th General Division Regiment Commander
Hikaru Ijuin Police officer in Kyoto
Masahiro Noguchi Constable in Nara
Tomoko Kawashima Office lady in Shibuya
Satoru Saito Shigeki's father
Toshie Negishi Shigeki's mother
Tamotsu Ishibashi, Shoji Kokami, Rita Kosegawa Kairei crew
Takaya Kamikawa, Tsuyoshi Shimada Air force controllers
Kenjiro Ishimaru Air force senior controller
Masahiko Tsugawa Air force commander
Osamu Shigematsu, Katsuko Nishina Street interviewees
Takashi Nishina Self-Defense Force guard
Tarou Oumiya THE WIDE director
Ikkei Watanabe THE WIDE producer
Hitoshi Kusano, Ryoko Ozawa THE WIDE performers
Mika Takanishi Today's Events newscaster
Shinobu Matsumoto Weather caster
Miyuki Komatsu Reporter in Shibuya
Nanako Kaneko Interviewer
Hirofumi Fukuzawa Gamera
Akira Ohashi Iris / Trauma Gamera

CREW

Directed by **Shusuke Kaneko**
 Written by **Kazunori Ito, Shusuke Kaneko**
 Special Effects Director **Shinji Higuchi**
 Produced by **Miyuki Nanri, Naoki Sato, Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Tsutomu Tsuchikawa**
 Music by **Kow Otani**
 Director of Photography **Junichi Tozawa**
 Edited by **Isao Tomita**

As Gyaos monsters begin to attack Japan again, a young girl – whose parents died during a previous kaiju conflict – discovers a new creature called Iris. After merging with the girl, the trauma-powered Iris seeks revenge on Gamera, who seems to be losing his patience with humankind.

Shunsuke Kaneko once said: "In the past, Gamera was always the children's hero, and the president (of the studio) always wanted to keep it that way, but I was kind of sick of it."

In showing the psychological toll and mass death that would result from a monster attack, *Gamera 3* is the darkest of the series that goes where few *kaiju* films have dared to.

The events of *Gamera 2* lead directly into *Gamera 3*, in which a girl's hatred of our favorite turtle "hero" begets a monster named Iris. The influence of the hit *Evangelion* anime hangs large over the film which also depicts psychological distress on a gigantic scale.

There is no pity or mercy as Gamera destroys Tokyo's famed Shibuya district in pursuit of Gyaos, thousands dying as collateral damage depicted in the series' best effects sequence. Other breathtaking images emerge from the darkness, including the near photo-realistic destruction of Kyoto Station and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force's fight with the skyborne Iris, spectacularly rendered with the aid of CGI.

The graduating class of Heisei Gamera did right. Director Shusuke Kaneko would go on to bring some of the winning Heisei *Gamera* flavor to *Godzilla*, *Mothra* and *King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack* (*Gojira*, *Mosura*, *Kingu Gidorā: Daikaijū sōkōgeki*, 2001); Kazunori Ito would continue to advance anime forward with his work on the *.hack* series; and Shinji Higuchi would evolve into a filmmaker in his own right, most recently co-directing *Shin Godzilla*, which won the Japanese Academy Award for Best Picture in 2017.

But there's one more Gamera film to devour before we are done...

Patrick Macias



GAMERA THE BRAVE

小なき勇者たち:ガメラ / Chīsaki Yūsha Tachi Gamera / Little Braves: Gamera

Original release date: 29th April 2006

Running time: 96 mins

CAST

Ryo Tomioka Toru Aizawa
Kaho Mai Nishio
Kanji Tsuda Kosuke Aizawa, Toru's father and owner of Aizawa's Diner
Susumu Terajima Osamu Nishio, Mai's father and owner of Nishio Pearl Shop
Kaoru Okunuki Harumi Nishio, Mai's mother
Megumi Kobayashi Miyuki Aizawa, Toru's mother
Shingo Ishikawa Masaru "Ishimaru" Ishida, Toru's friend
Shogo Narita Katsuya Ishida, Masaru's brother
Kenjiro Ishimaru Professor Soichiro Amamiya, Nagoya University

Tomorrow Taguchi Councilor Yoshimitsu Hitotsugi, Giant Creature Committee

Bokuzo Masana Secretary Yuji Tobata
Himawari Ono Girl carrying red stone
Toshinori Sasaki Avant Gamera / Toto
Mizuho Yoshida Zedus

CREW

Directed by **Ryuta Tasaki**
 Written by **Yukari Tatsui**
 Produced by **Yoichi Arishige, Hirohisa Mukuju**
 Music by **Yoko Ueno**
 Director of Photography **Kazuhiro Suzuki**
 Edited by **Shogo Hirasawa**
 Production Designer **Yuji Hayashida**
 Special Effects Director **Isao Kaneko**
 Visual Effects by **Hajime Matsumoto**

A young boy in a peaceful seaside town gets more than he bargained for when he takes home a mysterious egg. When it hatches, out comes a baby turtle that grows into a new version of Gamera. But will it become powerful enough in time to defeat a rampaging monster named Zedus?

Daiei changed ownership yet again in 2002 and became part of the Kadokawa media company. With the creative staff of the Heisei *Gamera* trilogy moved onto other projects, Kadokawa-Daiei decided to bring *Gamera* back with an approach no one had tried since 1980's *Gamera Super Monster*: a straight-up *kaiju* film for children.

Directed by Ryuta Tasaki, a veteran of many superhero special effects productions, and scripted by film and television writer Yukari Tatsui, *Gamera the Brave* combines the magical realism of the Heisei Trilogy with the kid-centric POV of the Showa *Gamera* films. Gamera himself has been redesigned with a cartoonish cuddly look in mind. Meanwhile, ferocious new monster Zedus eats people alive and the film does not turn away from bloodshed, be it human or monster. Your mileage with the family drama and general low dramatic stakes of the movie may vary.

Gamera the Brave was a big budget production for Kadokawa-Daiei and was released with much merchandise and media ballyhoo. Alas, the film underperformed and a new cycle of *Gamera* films failed to begin again.

Still, it's probably only a matter of time until our gigantic terrapin pal returns. Kadokawa-Daiei announced a new *Gamera* film in 2015 and released proof of concept footage using full CGI, but the feature itself has yet to materialize. Consider yourselves teased either way.

As it stands, *Gamera the Brave* is our coda for the entire cycle, bringing everything back where it all started: with a kid and his turtle.

Patrick Macias is the author of *TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion* and the founding editor of *Otaku USA* magazine.

INTERVIEW WITH NORIAKI YUASA

This candid, in-depth interview with Gamera director Noriaki Yuasa was conducted by David Milner in July 1996, and translated by Yoshihiko Shibata.

David Milner: You began acting when you were a child. Was that because your father was an actor?

Noriaki Yuasa: My father (Hikaru Hoshi) and one of my grandmothers were actors, but I began acting only because I happened to live in housing for members of the film industry. My friends and I would occasionally be asked to appear as extras. That's why I worked on some stage productions during the end of World War II. I was eventually given a leading role in a play, but because of the air raids, the opening of the show was postponed and then cancelled. I was not very interested in acting because I was raised amidst actors and actresses who had illicit love affairs all the time. I was very bothered by their behavior. That's why I never directed a movie featuring a romance.

DM: Did you ever work with your father or grandmother?

NY: I saw both of them on the stage, but never worked with either one.

DM: Did you enjoy working in theater when you were a child?

NY: I appeared in a production about a famous doctor. I played one of the doctor's childhood friends. One time, when my character's name was called, I was supposed to respond by saying, "No answer," but I couldn't remember my line. So, a girl standing behind me had to whisper my line to me.

I remember the smell of the paint. I also remember the sound of the bell that was used to indicate that the play was about to begin. Those are my most vivid memories, so I couldn't have been all that interested in the productions themselves.

In one episode of *Princess Comet* (*Kometto-san*, 1978-1979), a television series I worked on that featured a character very similar to Mary Poppins, there was a bed-ridden ex-actress who would begin performing *Romeo & Juliet* whenever she heard a bell. I used a bell because of the experience I had when I was a child.

DM: You worked in radio. What was that like?

NY: I worked in radio only once. I played a South Pacific native boy and some other parts in a drama that was intended to boost the morale of the soldiers. The drama was broadcast from the Kamushika Theater back when I was called Noriaki Hoshi. By the way, as the air raids gradually got worse, more and more children were evacuated from cities to rural areas. Eventually, roles that would have been given to children had to be given to teenagers.

DM: How old were you when you appeared in your first film?

NY: I appeared in only one movie, *Twelve Hours Before Recruitment* (1943). It was directed by Koji Shima, who was my uncle. It was about medical students who had been recruited into the army. The entire story took place in the twelve hours before the students had to report to boot camp. I played the younger brother of one of the students. (*Mr. Shima also directed Warning From Space* [1956].) By the way, during the war, the government ordered several film studios to unite. That's how Masaichi Nagata founded Daiei.

DM: If you were so disenchanted by the behavior of people in the film industry, why did you pursue a career in it?

NY: Although my own father had a mistress, I didn't dislike movies themselves. I became an assistant director shortly after the Nikkatsu Corporation was founded. Many of Daiei's employees went to work for it, and I helped fill the void.

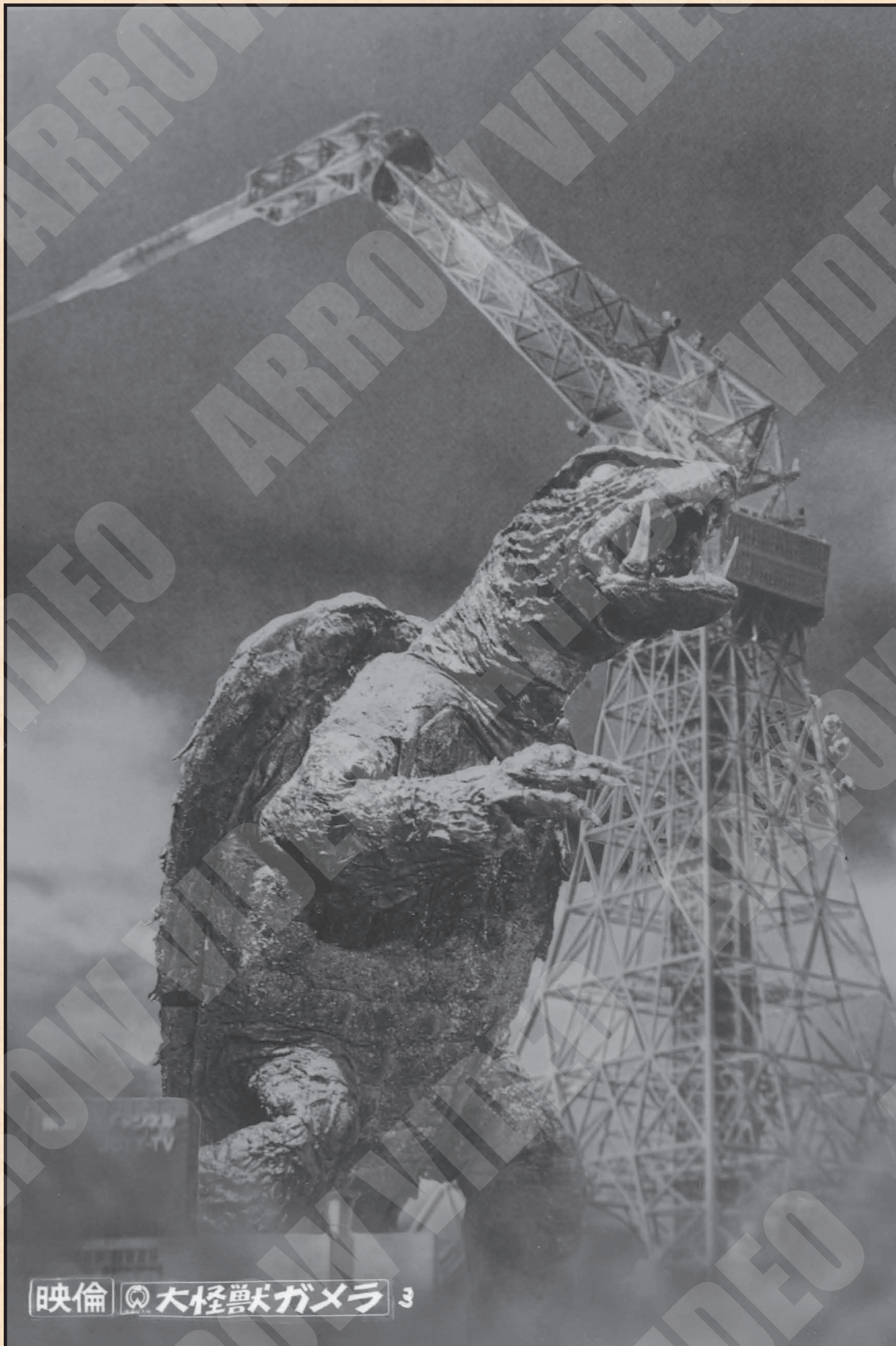
My father was the one who told me that Daiei needed people. He suggested that I take the examination you had to pass in order to become an assistant director. I was in my second year of law school, but decided to take the test. I passed, and then was asked to quit school before beginning my work. I didn't want to quit, so I just said that I would. I ended up working full-time and going to school for two years.

At that time, Daiei's directors reported to the studio chief instead of a board. That's how I got away with remaining in school. Whenever I had a test I had to take, I'd ask the chief assistant director to fill in for me. Right after the test was over, I'd take a taxi to the location of the shooting. I managed to graduate before Daiei's executives discovered that I hadn't quit school.

DM: What kind of questions were on the test to become an assistant director?

NY: There were three parts: a written test, an interview and a physical examination. The written test involved giving your impressions of the film you found most impressive. If there was no particular movie, you were supposed to describe the film you would most want to make after becoming a director. The interview was about movies in general.

The person who interviewed me noticed that I was the son of Hikaru Hoshi, and suggested that I become an actor rather than





an assistant director. However, I refused. I told him that I wouldn't make a good actor.

DM: What film did you first work on as an assistant director?

NY: I don't remember the name of the movie, but I can tell you that it was about judo. The director was Koji Saeki.

DM: Did you then begin working with Mr. Shima?

NY: Yes. I worked as a third assistant director under him for about five years. I spent most of my time running around with a duster. There was little opportunity for me to learn the art of filmmaking.

DM: Were Mr. Saeki and Mr. Shima Daiei employees?

NY: They were independent contractors. They had to direct a specific number of movies per year.

DM: Did Daiei, like Toho, force its assistant directors to quit and become independent contractors after being promoted to director?

NY: Daiei allowed directors to remain employees for several years after being promoted. So, they would receive payment for being an employee and directing. It was very nice. However, the studio chief would eventually come up to them and say, "You are making even more than me!"

By the way, I was allowed to remain an employee until I began working on *Gamera vs. Zigra*.

DM: What other films did you work on as an assistant director?

NY: I worked on about ninety movies over a ten-year period while I was an assistant director. I really can't remember any of them very well.

I mainly worked with four directors. They were my uncle, Umeji Inoue, Yaronori Kinamasa, and Yuzo Kawashima. I worked with my uncle more than any of the others.

I learned a lot from the four because they were all very different. I learned what films are really like from my uncle, what literature is really like from Mr. Kawashima, how to produce hits from Mr. Inoue, and craftsmanship from Mr. Kinamasa.

DM: Which of the four influenced you the most?

NY: I wouldn't say that any one of them influenced me more than the others. I really was influenced by my father more than any other member of the movie industry.

DM: Were you promoted to director before you worked on your first film, *If You're Happy Clap Your Hands*?

NY: I was credited as the director, but I hadn't been officially promoted.

DM: Did you enjoy working on *If You're Happy Clap Your Hands*?

NY: I enjoyed it very much. However, the film was not very successful. The only positive review it received was published

in a Communist party newspaper. So, I was made a member of Daiei's Television Division.

I was convinced that I had no future as a movie director, but one year later, I was assigned to direct *Gamera*. It had been turned down by many other directors. Fortunately, it was a big hit.

DM: Why was *Gamera* turned down by other directors?

NY: *Giant Horde Beast Nezura*. The rats carried parasites. So, many directors got the impression that special effects films were very expensive and difficult to produce.

DM: Who was going to direct *Giant Horde Beast Nezura*?

NY: Mitsuo Murayama. He'd directed *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly* (*Tōmei ningen to hae otoko*, 1957) and a number of war movies.

DM: At what point during production was the film canceled?

NY: The screenplay had been completed and a few scenes shot.

I was assigned to create a trailer for the movie. I asked Yonesaburo Tsukiji, the special effects director, to show me the footage he'd shot, but he, like Mr. Tsuburaya, never allowed anyone to see his rushes. So, I had to ask one of Daiei's top executives to show me the footage. I didn't think it was very convincing.

I once saw the top of the Nezura costume. Daiei's executives often asked me to use it in one of the *Gamera* films, but I just couldn't do it.

Mr. Tsukiji worked on *Gamera*, but then left to work for another studio. Daiei's only other special effects expert was Tetsuro Matoba, and he had no staff. So, it was impossible for Daiei to produce several science fiction movies per year the way Toho did.

DM: How did you react when you were asked to direct *Gamera*?

NY: I didn't know what to do. So, I asked many other directors for their advice. Some of them said that I'd be ruining my career. Others said that I should play *Gamera* because I didn't need a costume to do it!

I was somewhat familiar with special effects, but knew nothing about making monster films.

DM: Were you surprised by the great success of *Gamera*?

NY: Yes. I'm not sure why it was so successful. It reflected the spirit of the mid-1960s. Maybe that's why.

The people who took part in the production of the *Godzilla* movies had been involved in World War II, so I can understand why they made *Godzilla* (1954) the way they did, but to me, showing casualties was outrageous. I had a very strong reaction against it. It was not an accurate portrayal of the aftermath of war.



Toho cooperated with the military during the war. For example, special effects footage that it created showing American planes being shot down was passed off as real footage. I think Toho's executives felt guilty about that.

Hydrogen bombs were part of *Gamera*, but only provided the explanation for Gamera's appearance. They were not used to symbolize man's malevolence. I think that may be another reason for *Gamera's* success.

To me and the other people who worked in the Japanese film industry during its Golden Age, successful movies were no surprise. They seemed natural. However, Japanese filmmakers react very differently nowadays. If they have a hit, they feel like they've conquered the world.

DM: Who came up with the idea of a flying turtle?

NY: Nisan Takahashi. Gamera's spinning was modeled after the kind of fireworks that spins. Frankly, the spinning of the newer Gamera comes closer to the original concept than that of the one we created. We did our best, but did not have computers at our disposal. Making Gamera spin while he flew was very difficult.

That's why we eventually stopped trying to make him spin. If all four of the jets did not light properly, the shot would be ruined.

DM: Who designed Gamera?

NY: Akira Inoue drew about 500 pre-production sketches, but his original design ended up being used.

DM: Who named Gamera?

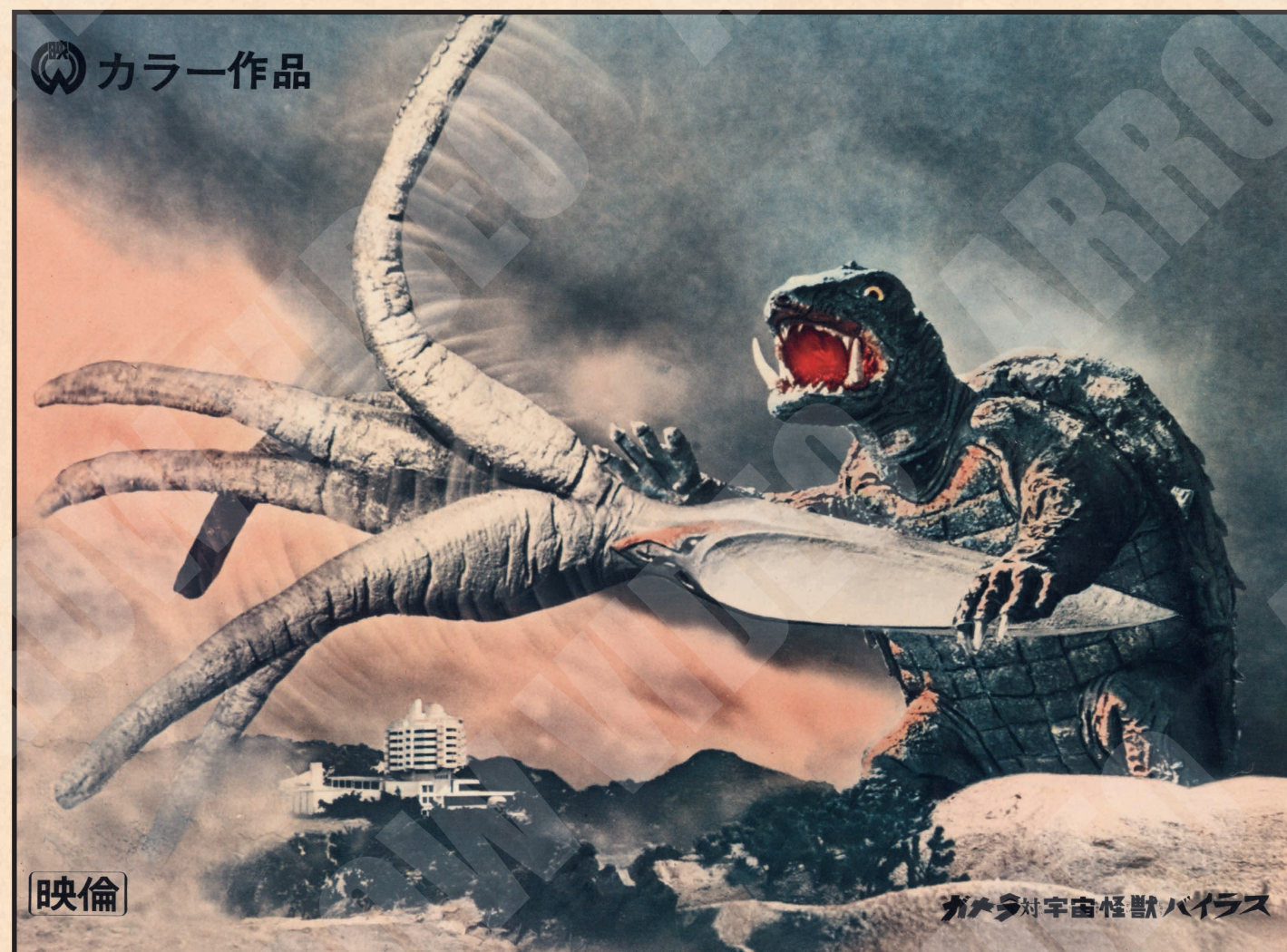
NY: Mr. Takahashi probably came up with the name. Many of the monsters Toho had created had 'ra' and/or a 'g' in their name. By the way, by the time I began working on *Gamera*, Gamera had already been named.

I remember that the first planning meeting I attended ended around 10 A.M., and Mr. Takahashi had a synopsis written by noon. His original title for *Gamera* was "Fire-Eating Turtle Attacks Tokyo."

Films produced by Daiei were divided into two classes: Class A and Class B. Class A movies would be given a sizeable production budget, and class B films would be given a production budget two-thirds smaller. *Gamera* was a Class B movie. That's why it was shot in black and white.

DM: Did you find working on *Gamera* frustrating since it was a Class B production?

NY: Even though the movie had a big budget for a black-and-white film – about eighty million yen – I felt frustrated while working on it and the other movies in the series. I quickly learned to save as much money and time as I could for the special effects.



Unlike Toho, Daiei had no in-house film developing laboratory. It also had no optical laboratory. So, I'd have to calculate the exact cost of development and optical work. I remember that each time Gyaos used his sound beam in *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, it cost ¥3,500.

After *Gamera* was made, many of Daiei's younger employees asked if they could work with me because of their resentment toward the older staff members. I remember that one of the older cinematographers would regularly criticize the younger ones who were members of the special effects staff. I eventually had to go to one of the studio's top executives and ask him to put a stop to it.

Gamera was produced solely by Daiei's Tokyo staff, but the studio's Kyoto staff was involved in the production of *Daimajin* along with the Tokyo staff. The miniature set was constructed by the art staff instead of the special effects staff because of its scale. The Majin costume was made by an independent company.

DM: Was *Gamera vs. Barugon* a Class A or Class B film?

NY: *Gamera* proved to be very successful, so *Gamera vs. Barugon* was made a Class A movie. Daiei's executives were concerned about trusting a large production budget to an inexperienced director like me. So, they assigned Shigeo Tanaka to direct the film and me to direct the special effects.

DM: Did you edit the special effects footage?

NY: Yes. Mr. Tanaka and I had a very good relationship.

DM: Why was *Gamera vs. Barugon* released on a double bill with *Daimajin* (1966)?

NY: Double bills bring in more customers.

DM: I've heard that American International Pictures (AIP) asked you to include Americans in the cast of *Gamera vs. Viras*. Is this true?

NY: I was introduced to AIP's representative by a member of Daiei's International Division. I don't remember the person's name, but I do remember that his Japanese was very good. AIP's representative had seen all of the *Gamera* films and said that he didn't think much of the performances of the Americans in *Gamera the Giant Monster*. He also said that if we wanted to have success distributing *Gamera* movies in foreign markets, we should put American boys in them. So, a member of the International Division went to the American military bases in Japan and interviewed some of the children of the soldiers. I then conducted final interviews and made a selection.

DM: I can understand why AIP would request that you have American children in the films, but they always seemed out of place to me. So, I enjoyed the movies less because American kids were in them.



NY: We asked the children to act the way we imagined American kids would act. Since you're an American, you could tell that they sometimes were not acting the way they really would.

DM: Why did you have Gamera spin on a bar in *Gamera vs. Guiron*?

NY: I did that because the production budget was so limited. We couldn't build a large miniature set, so we were forced to make the most of what we had. Besides, the Olympics were being held at the time, and I thought that children would enjoy seeing Gamera act like an Olympic athlete.

Films featuring special effects require a production budget two to three times larger than a standard one, but the budget for *Gamera vs. Viras* was only slightly larger. So, we could not construct as many miniature buildings as we had for *Gamera the Giant Monster*, *Gamera vs. Barugon* and *Gamera vs. Gyaos*.

By the way, the budgets for *Gamera vs. Guiron*, *Gamera vs. Jiger* and *Gamera vs. Zigra* were larger than the one for *Gamera vs. Viras*, but not by much.

DM: I've heard that Guiron's name comes from the French word "guillotine." Is this true?

NY: That's right.

DM: How much work had been done on the next Gamera film (*Gamera vs. Two-Headed Monster W*) when it was canceled?

NY: Right after *Gamera vs. Zigra* was completed, I went to talk with the members of Daiei's Planning Department about the next *Gamera* movie. I remember that the next monster was going to be a twin-headed one. The monster costume had been made, but Mr. Takahashi had not yet written the script when Daiei declared bankruptcy.

Mr. Takahashi always wanted to create a monster film that did not have people in it. I think that might be possible with computer graphics, but it would be very difficult.

DM: Why did Daiei declare bankruptcy?

NY: Hidemasa Nagata was too much of an artist to run a movie studio. (*Mr. Nagata is the son of Masaichi Nagata.*)

DM: Why did you decide to kill Gamera in *Gamera Super Monster*?

NY: I was asked to combine footage from all of the Gamera films into one movie shortly after the Tokuma Publishing Company resurrected Daiei. I remember that when I met with Yasuyoshi Tokuma and asked him how large the production budget would be, he told me that it would be very small because he didn't want to risk a large amount of money.

I was given four months to do the editing. It was a very painstaking job. Mr. Takahashi and I never imagined that there would be a new *Gamera* series. That's why we decided to go ahead and kill Gamera.

DM: You worked on some television series. What was that like?

NY: One of the series on which I worked, *18-Year-Old Wife* (*Okusama wa 18 sai*, 1970-1971), was very popular. So, I am very proud of it. During the 1950s, there were many television series produced by television studios, but they were not very enjoyable because the studios did not know how to create good dramas. It wasn't until the late 1960s that the film studios began producing television series.

DM: What was working on *Ultraman 80* (*Urutoraman Eitei*, 1980-1981) like?

NY: Tsuburaya Productions wanted to just remake the original Ultraman television series, but the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) wanted to produce something a little different. That's why Ultraman was made a schoolteacher. That presented him with the problem of not being able to turn into Ultraman in front of his students. (*Tsuburaya Productions produced all of the Ultraman series. It was founded by Eiji Tsuburaya, who directed the special effects for almost all of the science fiction and war movies produced by Toho before 1970.*)

After the first season, a key member of the staff was assigned to work on a radio program. That's why the series became more like the original series, and why it was not very successful.

DM: Were you involved in the production of either of the recent Gamera films?

NY: I was shown the script and storyboards for both. I went to the test screening of *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe*. The monsters' rays had not yet been added.

DM: Was there a conscious effort made to make the *Gamera* movies different from the *Godzilla* films?

NY: Yes. We tried to make the movies different right from the start.

DM: How much time did Mr. Takahashi spend writing each of the scripts?

NY: I don't know. However, I can tell you that once he got started, he worked very quickly. It took him much longer to come up with ideas for a screenplay than to actually write one.

Once Mr. Takahashi finished a script, he would leave it completely in my hands. He never did any editing during production.

DM: How many drafts would Mr. Takahashi usually submit?

NY: Three.

DM: Were the final drafts usually very different from the first ones?

NY: There were always some changes.

I never requested any changes, but the studio sometimes did in order to save money. For example, the opening sequence of *Gamera vs. Zigra* was originally going to be a very long one



showing disasters occurring on Zigra's home planet, but Mr. Nagata insisted that the sequence be deleted because it would have cost too much to shoot.

DM: Were you in any way involved in writing the screenplays?

NY: Mr. Takahashi was very imaginative, so he didn't need any help from me. However, I would sometimes get an idea during shooting and ask him about it. For example, I came up with the idea to have Gyaos slice a car in two with his sound beam in *Gamera vs. Gyaos*.

DM: Did anyone other than Mr. Takahashi take part in writing the scripts?

NY: No.

Mr. Nagata didn't know much about science fiction. His son (Hidemasa) liked monster films very much, so he would sometimes offer ideas. Unfortunately, they usually weren't very good ones.

DM: How much time did you spend drawing the storyboards for each of the movies?

NY: About a month.

DM: Did you select the cast members?

NY: Yes.

DM: Did you allow them to do any improvisation during filming?

NY: I allowed them to improvise as long as what they did was appropriate for the scene.

Many actors who were under contract to work on a specific number of movies per year would ask me for a role, so I would try to find one for them. The Gamera series made it possible for a large number of actors to fulfill their contractual obligations, so the Acting Division was very grateful for it.

DM: Who played Gamera?

NY: We used a different actor for each film.

DM: Was a new Gamera costume constructed for each of the movies?

NY: We made three or four for each one. If one of the costumes happened not to be damaged during shooting, we would usually reuse either the upper or lower half of it.

DM: Who choreographed the monster battles?

NY: I did.

DM: How much time did you spend shooting footage for each of the films?

NY: About four months.



DM: Did you usually stick to the storyboards very closely?

NY: Yes.

DM: Did Mr. Nagata ever come to visit the set?

NY: Never.

DM: Did he ever offer any advice?

NY: No.

DM: How much time did you usually spend in post-production?

NY: One month.

DM: Did you offer any advice to the people who composed the scores?

NY: Shunsuke Kikuchi and I knew each other very well, so there was no need for me to give him any advice.

We showed rushes to the musicians during the recording sessions for *Gamera the Giant Monster*, *Gamera vs. Barugon* and *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, but could not do so afterward because of budgetary constraints. So, I'd ask Mr. Kikuchi to compose one-minute-long musical phrases, and then work them into the movies as best as I could. (Mr. Kikuchi scored *Gamera vs. Guiron*, *Gamera vs. Jiger*, *Gamera vs. Zigra* and *Gamera Super Monster*.)

By the way, I used to play trombone. I was self-taught. I played in a brass band while I was in school.

DM: Who came up with the idea to give Gamera his own theme song?

NY: Daiei's Music Division asked us to do that. The lyrics to the song were written by Hidemasa Nagata.

DM: How large were the production budgets for the *Gamera* films in comparison to those for the *Godzilla* movies?

NY: The studios all did their accounting differently, so it's difficult to know for sure. However, I think they were about the same. I do know that the amount of money spent on the monster costumes gradually got smaller.

DM: How successful were the *Gamera* films in comparison to the *Godzilla* movies?

NY: They were at least as successful in the beginning, and then became even more successful. The *Gamera* series had an advantage in that it appealed to children more.

DM: The *Gamera* films are generally more childish than *Invasion of Astro-Monster* (*Kaijū daisensō*, 1965), *Ebirah*, *Horror of the Deep* (*Gojira*, *Ebirā*, *Mosura: Nankai no daiketto*, 1966), and so on, but also are more violent. Why is this?



NY: *Gamera the Giant Monster* was intended to show a giant monster on the rampage, and little else. Daiei's executives requested that some human drama be included in *Gamera vs. Barugon*, but discovered that children went to get some food or just ran through the corridors of the theater during the movie.

Before production on *Gamera vs. Viras* got underway, the other members of the production staff and I decided to make the *Gamera* films children's movies. That's why we started focusing on the relationship between Gamera and children.

I did not want to portray the monsters anthropomorphically, and showing bloodshed was one way of avoiding that. I knew that it was shocking at times, but it helped make the monsters seem like animals instead of people.

One day, I ran into a girl in a park who had a message for me from Mr. Tsuburaya. He said that I shouldn't show bloodshed in the *Gamera* films. I didn't respond because I had not received the message directly from Mr. Tsuburaya.

DM: Did you do anything else to make the monsters seem like animals instead of people?

NY: I tried to avoid showing their hind legs. They made it obvious that the monsters were really men in a costume.

DM: What was your professional relationship with Mr. Nagata like?

NY: He was a dictator. Whenever there was a screening of a new production for the studio's top executives, everyone would wait for him to comment before saying anything. If Mr. Nagata liked the movie, everything would be okay, but if he didn't, the director would never work for Daiei again.

After we showed *Gamera the Giant Monster* to the top executives, the studio chief whispered to Mr. Nagata, "Well, that's the way it is sometimes." I heard the comment, and then began waiting for my sentence to be pronounced. To my great surprise, Mr.

Nagata asked, "Isn't the film good?" All of the other executives then immediately said, "Yes, it is! It's fantastic!"

DM: What was working with Kojiro Hongo like? (*Mr. Hongo plays Kasuke, one of the fortune hunters in Gamera vs. Barugon; Shiro Tsutsumi, the engineer in Gamera vs. Gyaos; and Nobuhiko Shimada, the scoutmaster in Gamera vs. Viras.*)

NY: Mr. Hongo started out by working on period movies shot in Kyoto, but ended up in Tokyo working on films set in the present. He was the most dedicated of the actors who took part in the production of the *Gamera* series. He took all of his roles seriously. Of course, an actor does have to exaggerate a little when he is working on a monster movie. I remember that Kichijiro Ueda, who played the village mayor in *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, came up to me at one point during shooting and said, "I will defeat Gamera in performance!"

DM: Did you find working with child actors difficult?

NY: I love children, and am a little childish myself. If you focus on having them perform for one scene at a time, you can work with them.

My feelings regarding children come from my childhood experiences. During World War II, most of the adults I knew, including many of my teachers, continually stressed the importance of nationalism. However, after Japan was defeated and many political parties were formed, a teacher of mine switched from being a nationalist to a Communist and then started openly advocating Communism. This was very traumatic for me. So, I made *Gamera* a guardian whom children could rely on and trust.

DM: That must have been very gratifying for you.

NY: Many people in their thirties were very strongly influenced by the *Gamera* series, but I really don't know what kind of influence it had on them.

DM: What was your professional relationship with Mr. Takahashi like?

NY: We were just like father and son or master and apprentice.

The script for *If You're Happy Clap Your Hands* was originally written by another screenwriter, but Daiei's executives thought that it was not very exciting. So, they had Mr. Takahashi revise it.

I'm very proud because Mr. Takahashi always praised my work. He once said that no matter how fantastic his writing, I could create film footage from it. In addition, the *Gamera* movies were the only ones he worked on that he went to see.

I'm not in touch with Mr. Takahashi anymore. The story is a very complicated one. When Daiei declared bankruptcy, it owed more money to him than to any other person. However, because the studio was in bankruptcy, it could not pay him. In addition, Mr. Takahashi had never joined the screenwriters' union, so he could not receive any money from its fund for uncollected wages. Mr. Takahashi eventually went to see Mr. Nagata, and received all rights to *Gamera* from him.

Mr. Takahashi consented to the production of the *Gamera* laserdisc boxed set in 1991, but was not contacted by Daiei when it decided to make *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe*. The studio claimed that since it was not the old Daiei, the document granting all rights to *Gamera* to Mr. Takahashi did not apply to it. He thought the argument was outrageous. So, he cut off all communication with anyone ever associated with the studio, including me. Daiei's executives simply don't understand people who work in the film industry.

Mr. Takahashi called me about a year ago. Unfortunately, I was not home. I called one of his daughters back since he does not have a telephone, but never heard from him again.

DM: Could Mr. Takahashi sue Daiei?

NY: I think he might be receiving payments from the studio now. Besides, the document granting him all rights to *Gamera* wouldn't compel a judge to order Daiei to pay. It's not that strong.

DM: Were you and Mr. Takahashi good friends?

NY: Yes. We were very close. After Daiei declared bankruptcy, we worked on several television series together.

Around 1970, Mrs. Takahashi had to have brain surgery. The first operation was successful. However, Mrs. Takahashi died after the second one.

She was Christian, but Mr. Takahashi was born into a very strong Buddhist sect. So, his wife was not accepted by his family. He eventually converted to Christianity.

When Mr. Takahashi and I met to work on the laserdisc boxed set, he told me that he was working on a stage production that would feature elderly and poor people instead of professional actors. That was the last time I saw him.

DM: What was working with Koichi Kawakita like? (*Mr. Kawakita directed the special effects for a number of Ultraman 80 episodes. He also directed the special effects for six Godzilla movies between 1989 and 1995.*)

NY: Mr. Kawakita was very good at what he did. You could always tell exactly what kind of ray you were seeing.

Mr. Kawakita was very competitive. So, I think that he should have directed the standard footage as well.

DM: Did you enjoy working on television series any more or less than you enjoyed working on films?

NY: Movies and television series are completely different media. So, you have to approach making them differently. We would shoot sixty or seventy takes per day for an episode of a television series.

DM: What do you think of the *Godzilla* films?

NY: The newer *Godzilla* movies are too contrived. I think the finest monster film ever made is *Jurassic Park* (1993).

DM: What do you think of Ishiro Honda's direction? (*Mr. Honda directed Godzilla [Gojira, 1954], Terror of Mecha-Godzilla [Mekagojira no gyakushu, 1975], and many of the other Godzilla movies.*)

NY: Mr. Honda was much too modest. Directors are supposed to be egotistical and criticize their peers' work!

Mr. Honda was a prisoner of war in China for a number of years. That experience may have had a lasting effect on him.

DM: How do you like the *Daimajin* films?

NY: The stories are very good. However, the premise allows for little variation. TBS once considered having me direct a *Majin* television series, but after brainstorming for a week and coming up with very little, we gave up on the idea.

DM: What do you think of *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* and *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion*?

NY: They are movies for older fans of monster films rather than children. I'd prefer them to be children's movies. The two films are too dramatic. For example, there is no need for Asagi's cheek to be cut in *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe*. There's also no need for *Gamera* to be the guardian of the universe. They're just *Gamera* movies. They're not art films.

DM: Which of the films you directed are your favorites?

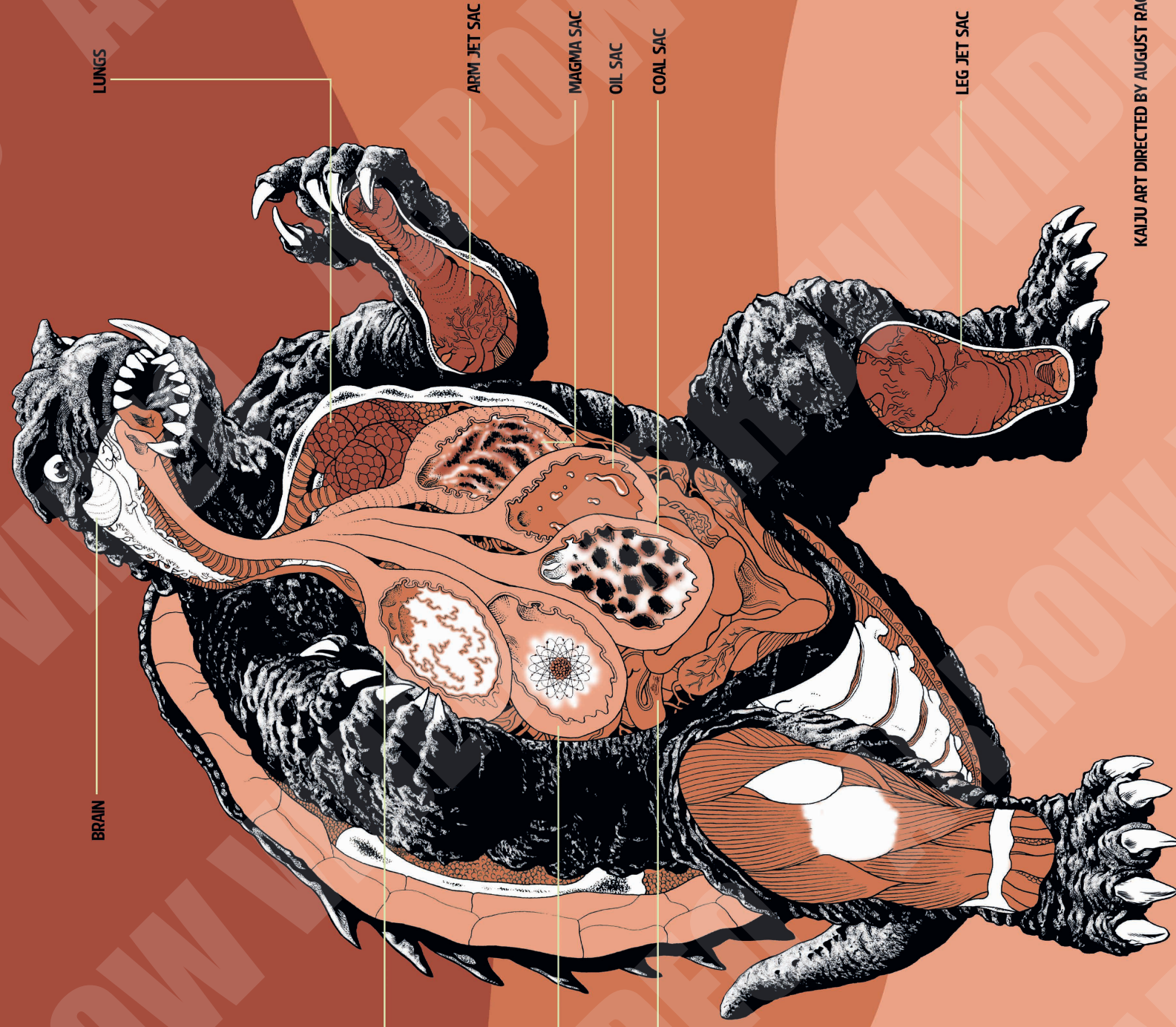
NY: *Gamera vs. Viras*. It's a pure children's movie. *18-Year-Old Wife* is my favorite of the television series I directed.

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カイク

KAIJU X-RAYS

HEIGHT 60M
WEIGHT 80 TONS
FLIGHT SPEED MACH 3
UNDERWATER SPEED 150 KNOTS
LAND SPEED 20M STRIDE

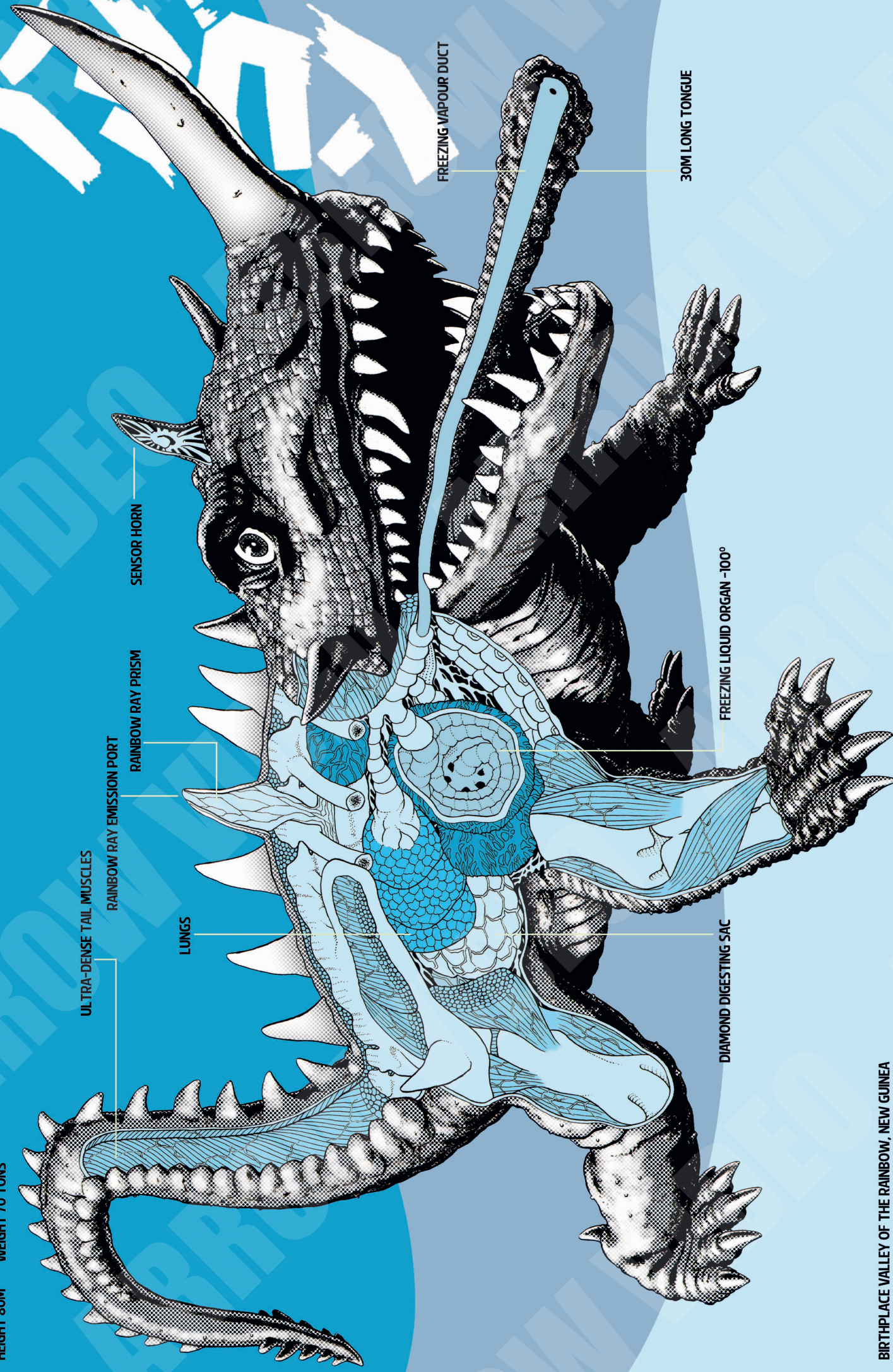


FAVOURITE FOODS: OIL, COAL,
GEOTHERMAL FLAME, ATOMIC BOMBS

DANCE MOVE: MONKEY DANCE

KAIJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE | JOLYONBYATES

HEIGHT 80M
WEIGHT 70 TONS



BIRTHPLACE VALLEY OF THE RAINBOW, NEW GUINEA

FAVOURITE FOOD: DIAMONDS

KAIJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE | JOLYONBYATES

RADAR HORN

RADAR EAR

POISON CLAWS

POISON SAC

STOMACH

3 MILLION CYCLE
SOUNDWAVE ORGAN

LUNG

FIRE EXTINGUISHER SAC

2ND INTESTINE

BOWEL

HEIGHT 65M

WEIGHT 25 TONS

WINGSPAN 172M

FLIGHT SPEED MACH 3.5

FAVOURITE FOOD: BLOOD

BIRTHPLACE FAULT LINE IN SHIZUOKA PREFECTURE

KALJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE JOLYONBYATES

GLADIUS WHICH CAN PIERCE 1M OF STEEL

SPACE RAY

MAXIMUM HEIGHT 96M

MAXIMUM WEIGHT 120 TONS

BIRTHPLACE PLANET VIRAS

FAVOURITE FOOD: NITROGEN

SUPERCATCH RAY EMITTER SAC

BRAIN

BRAINWAVE CONTROL DEVICE SAC

GILL

HENSHIN SYNTHESIS SAC

HEARTS

STOMACH

CELL FUSION SAC

CAECUM

EACH TENTACLE HAS 1000 TIMES THE
POWER OF AN ELEPHANT TRUNK

KALJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE JOLYONBYATES



SHURIKEN LAUNCH PORT

CONTROL RECEPTION DEVICE

RADAR EYES

POISON SAC

MAGNETIC SUCKERS

WATER STABILITY FIN

HEAD 1000 TIMES THE HARDNESS OF DIAMOND

キリ

HEIGHT 85M

WEIGHT 110 TONS

JUMP 1300M

BIRTHPLACE PLANET TERRA

SPUTUM SAC

SPACE LUNG

INTESTINES

ENERGY SAC

STOMACH

JET SAC

KALJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE JOLYONBYATES



HEIGHT 80M

WEIGHT 200 TONS

SEA JET SPEED 162 KNOTS

BIRTHPLACE: MU EMPIRE

SOLID SPUTUM MISSILES

MAGNETUM BEAM EMITTER HORN

MINERAL LIQUEFYING STOMACH

MAGNETUM RAY SAC

SEAWATER JET GILLS

MAGNETUM STORAGE SAC

EGG SAC

EGG EJECTION TUBE

EGG IMPLANTATION STINGER

LEGS CAN CRUSH THE DIET BUILDING IN ONE STEP

キ

VACUUM SUCTION CUPS A MILLION TIMES STRONGER THAN A VACUUM CLEANER

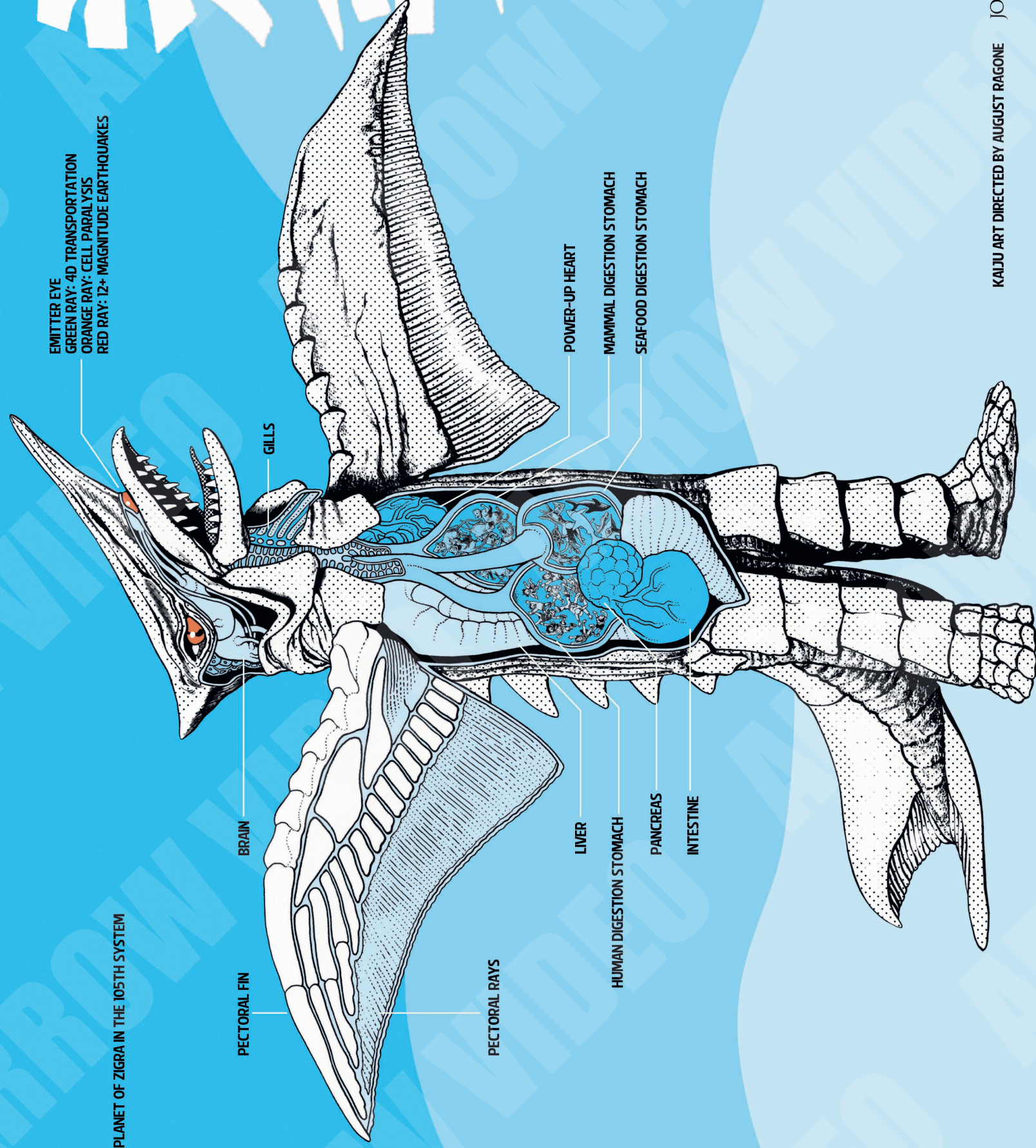
KALJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE JOLYONBYATES

HEIGHT 80M

WEIGHT 75 TONS

BIRTHPLACE: 4TH PLANET OF ZIGRA IN THE 105TH SYSTEM

EMITTER EYE
GREEN RAY: 4D TRANSPORTATION
ORANGE RAY: CELL PARALYSIS
RED RAY: 12+ MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKES



PECTORAL FIN

GILLS

BRAIN

PECTORAL RAYS

LIVER

POWER-UP HEART

HUMAN DIGESTION STOMACH

MAMMAL DIGESTION STOMACH

PANCREAS

SEAFOOD DIGESTION STOMACH

INTESTINE

KAIJU ART DIRECTED BY AUGUST RAGONE JOLYONBYATES

MAXIMUM HEIGHT 140M
MAXIMUM LENGTH 160M
MAXIMUM WEIGHT 600 TONS

FLIGHT SPEED MACH 1
BURROWING SPEED 50KM/H

BIRTHPLACE SOMEWHERE
IN OUTER SPACE, BORNE TO
EARTH BY METEORITES

FAVOURITE FOOD: SILICON

NAMED AFTER "LEGION" IN THE
"NEW TESTAMENT" MARK 5:9

A ROMAN LEGION WAS
APPROXIMATELY 5000 MEN

LEGION SOLDIERS CONSUME SILICON & EMIT OXYGEN,
FEEDING THE LEGION PLANT UNTIL IT EXPLODES AND
SPREADS SEEDS TO ANOTHER PLANET, WHERE THE
GIANT LEGION GROWS AND SPAWNS THE SOLDIERS

HIGHBAND ELECTRONIC EYE: CAN SEE IN
ALL ELECTROMAGNETIC WAVELENGTHS

BRAIN: ELECTROMAGNETIC
LINK TO SOLDIERS. LEGION
ATTACKS ANY SOURCE OF
INTERFERENCE

MICROWAVE PULSE HORN

PROMOTAL
HORN

MICROWAVE SHELL: MOUTH EMITS
BLUE MICROWAVES, CAN EVAPORATE
TYPE 90 TANK IN ONE SHOT

MICROWAVE ARC HORNS

RED ROD ENERGY SAC

RED ROD MANIPULATION FIBRES

RED ROD: RED HOT WHIP TENTACLE

MICROWAVE ENERGY SACS

DISRUPTOR WAVE CLAWS: PARABOLIC
ELECTROMAGNETIC WAVE DISRUPTS
ELECTRONICS, COMMUNICATES WITH
SOLDIERS, NEUTRALISES GAMERA'S
PLASMA FIREBALL

SYNAPTIC CONDUCTOR

EGG CHAMBER: SPAWNS
INNUMERABLE COLONIST
LEGION SOLDIERS

OVARY: HUNDREDS
OF SPAWN PER HOUR

SLEDGE-ARM: FOR HITTING,
POKING AND EXCAVATING

ELECTRO EXPLOSION TUBE



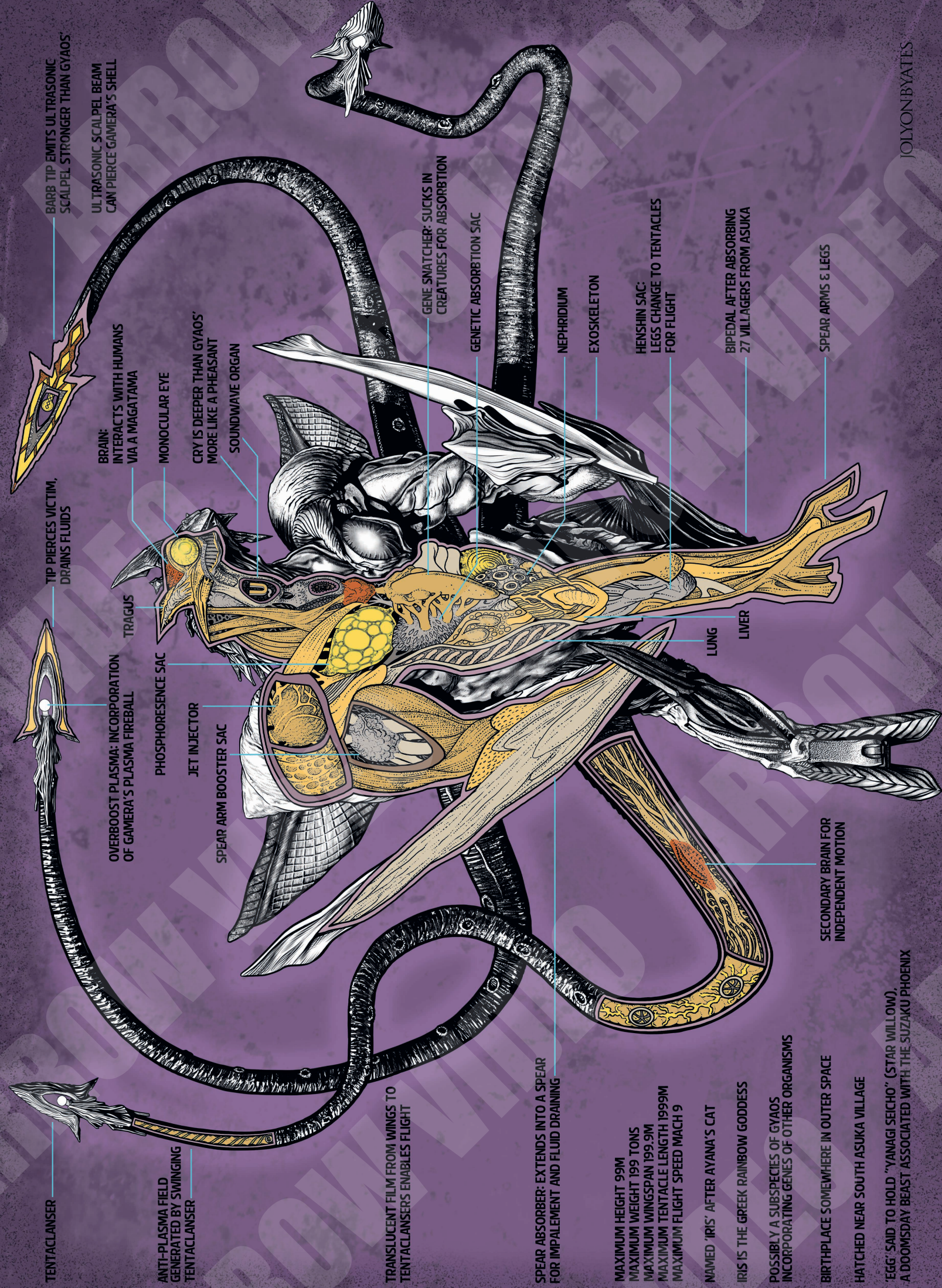
SCYTHE LEG: CAN CUT
GAMERA'S SHELL

SILICON SEMI CONDUCTOR-LIKE BODY

HARD SILICONE RESIN-LIKE SHELL
COATING REPELS ANY ATTACK
REFLECTS ELECTROMAGNETIC WAVES

MOVEMENT THROUGH GAS
PRESSURE INSTEAD OF MUSCLES

JOLYONBYATES



BARB TIP EMITS ULTRASONIC SCALPEL STRONGER THAN GYAOS' ULTRASONIC SCALPEL BEAM CAN PIERCE GAMERA'S SHELL

TIP PIERCES VICTIM, DRAINS FLUIDS

BRAIN: INTERACTS WITH HUMANS VIA A MAGATAMA

MONOCULAR EYE

CRY IS DEEPER THAN GYAOS' MORE LIKE A PHEASANT

SOUNDWAVE ORGAN

GENE SNATCHER: SUCKS IN CREATURES FOR ABSORPTION

GENETIC ABSORPTION SAC

NEPHRIDIUM

EXOSKELETON

HENSHIN SAC: LEGS CHANGE TO TENTACLES FOR FLIGHT

BIPEDAL AFTER ABSORBING 27 VILLAGERS FROM ASUKA

SPEAR ARMS & LEGS

SECONDARY BRAIN FOR INDEPENDENT MOTION

TENTACLASER

ANTI-PLASMA FIELD GENERATED BY SWINGING TENTACLASER

OVERBOOST PLASMA: INCORPORATION OF GAMERA'S PLASMA FIREBALL

PHOSPHORESCENCE SAC

JET INJECTOR

SPEAR ARM BOOSTER SAC

TRAGUS

LUNG

LIVER

TRANSLUCENT FILM FROM WINGS TO TENTACLASERS ENABLES FLIGHT

SPEAR ABSORBER: EXTENDS INTO A SPEAR FOR IMPALEMENT AND FLUID DRAINING

MAXIMUM HEIGHT 99M
MAXIMUM WEIGHT 199 TONS
MAXIMUM WINGSPAN 199.9M
MAXIMUM TENTACLE LENGTH 1999M
MAXIMUM FLIGHT SPEED MACH 9

NAMED 'IRIS' AFTER AYANA'S CAT

IRIS IS THE GREEK RAINBOW GODDESS

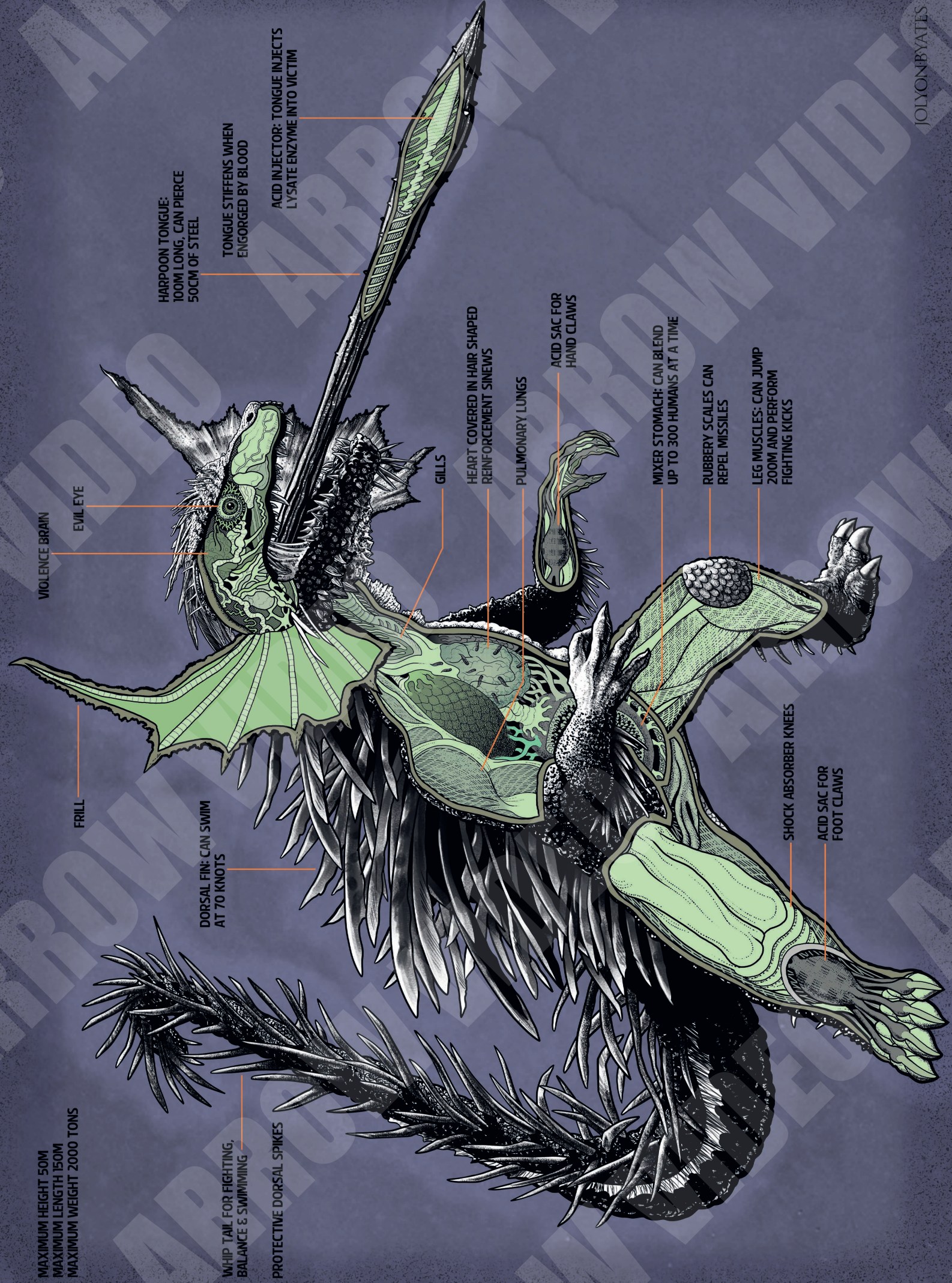
POSSIBLY A SUBSPECIES OF GYAOS INCORPORATING GENES OF OTHER ORGANISMS

BIRTHPLACE SOMEWHERE IN OUTER SPACE

HATCHED NEAR SOUTH ASUKA VILLAGE

'EGG' SAID TO HOLD "YANAGI SEICHO" (STAR WILL OW), A DOOMSDAY BEAST ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUZAKU PHOENIX

JOLYONBYATES



VIOLENCE BRAIN

EVIL EYE

FRILL

DORSAL FIN: CAN SWIM AT 70 KNOTS

WHIP TAIL FOR FIGHTING, BALANCE & SWIMMING

PROTECTIVE DORSAL SPIKES

GILLS

HEART COVERED IN HAIR SHAPED REINFORCEMENT SINUES

PULMONARY LUNGS

ACID SAC FOR HAND CLAWS

MIXER STOMACH: CAN BLEND UP TO 300 HUMANS AT A TIME

RUBBERY SCALES CAN REPEL MISSILES

LEG MUSCLES: CAN JUMP ZOOM AND PERFORM FIGHTING KICKS

SHOCK ABSORBER KNEES

ACID SAC FOR FOOT CLAWS

HARPOON TONGUE: 100M LONG, CAN PIERCE 50CM OF STEEL

TONGUE STIFFENS WHEN ENGORGED BY BLOOD

ACID INJECTOR: TONGUE INJECTS LYSATE ENZYME INTO VICTIM

MAXIMUM HEIGHT 50M
MAXIMUM LENGTH 150M
MAXIMUM WEIGHT 2000 TONS

JOLYONBYATES



INSIDE THE HEISEI TRILOGY

By Norman England

Journalist and filmmaker Norman England interviewed the cast and crew of the Gamera Heisei trilogy for three articles printed in Fangoria magazine between 1998 and 2000. All three articles are reprinted here, courtesy of Fangoria magazine and Cinestate.

The Guardian of Gamera
(originally published in *Fangoria* #173, June 1998)

"When I was young, I loved *kaiju* more than anything else," reveals Japanese film director Shusuke Kaneko. "I spent months putting together my own personal illustrated encyclopedia of every monster I'd ever seen. It was my first real accomplishment." While most children trade their fantasies and drawings for desk jobs and family, Kaneko stayed with *kaiju*. It finally paid off in 1993, when the Daiei company announced that the award-winning filmmaker would be reviving their Gamera series.

While this assignment was the accumulation of long-held passions, Kaneko knew it wouldn't be easy. Gamera had such a bad reputation that when the news hit the media, you could almost hear the snickering throughout Japan. Gamera was just a giant turtle that liked to spit fire, befriend lonely boys with weight problems and spin over the country like a flaming pinwheel. Worse still, Daiei had milked the series to a nearly unrecoverable point. When last seen in the 1980 film *Uchukaiju Gamera (Gamera Super Monster)*, the creature had been pitted against space aliens riding an unabashed *Space Cruiser Yamato* knockoff, amongst stock footage from his past adventures. Undaunted, Kaneko was determined to turn the situation on its head and make the kind of *kaiju* film he had always dreamed of seeing as a child. After years of gruelling comedy work, this was his chance to bring his oldest passions to life.

The Tokyo-born Kaneko's filmmaking interest began in high school after he saw the 1970 movie *The Strawberry Statement*. "I had never seen anything like it before," he says. "Here was a film about real people and how their lives fit, or at least tried to fit, with the outside world. I thought I could do the same, got an 8mm camera and began making a movie about the student's lives in my school. While in college, I spent all my free time at the school's film club. I had gone to study to be an elementary school teacher, but I was never serious about it. At that time, the late '70s, the (Japanese) film industry had hit rock bottom, and even if I was the top student in a film school there was no guarantee I could find a job in the field. Teaching was my security." Regardless, Kaneko found a job almost immediately with Japan's oldest and most prestigious film company, Nikkatsu.

But even that mighty studio had fallen on hard times. Where once the trendsetting company had produced the finest real-life dramas, they had degenerated to making 'roman-porno,' romantic adventures spiced up with softcore sex scenes. Kaneko stayed with Nikkatsu for six years, working as an assistant director. During this time, he moonlighted as a writer for the Japanimation shows *Urusei Yatsura* and *Creamy Mami*.

In 1985, Kaneko left Nikkatsu and went independent. He released his first feature in 1987: *Kyofu-no yacchan*, a comedy about young men on the bottom rung of the Yakuza ladder. In 1988, Kaneko had his first hits with *Summer Vacation 1999* and *Last Cabaret*, the latter winning him the coveted Nikkatsu Award. It was these two films that drew him into the major leagues of Japanese filmmaking.

Pumping out as many as three films a year, despite his frail appearance, Kaneko built a reputation as a powerhouse, work-driven director. Even while *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* was in pre-production, he accepted a directorial assignment on the Brian Yuzna-produced horror anthology *Necronomicon*. Having previously made the comic vampire film *Kamitsukitai (I Want to Bite You)*, Kaneko was looking to do something a little more serious in the horror field. "Japan does not have a horror tradition like America," he explains. "Here, it's considered one of the lowest forms of filmmaking. Perhaps even lower than roman-porno!"

When Yuzna and Japanese producer Taka Ichise were looking for directors for *Necronomicon*, Ichise recommended Kaneko based on his reputation for bringing in productions within budget and on schedule. Kaneko and scriptwriter Kazunori Ito went to work



expanding one of the director's favorite H.P. Lovecraft stories into a segment called "The Cold." Though involved in the scripting, Kaneko did not take part in preproduction, a step he considers crucial. Still, the experience of working with an American crew was invaluable. Having always revered U.S. film techniques, Kaneko was surprised to find that while there were differences, there were many similarities between the way American and Japanese crews worked. "I had imagined it to be very different in the States, but it wasn't really," he says. "The goal of film is the same, so the work ethic is identical. The biggest difference is that the U.S. crew is very aware of where the boundaries fall. During filming, crew members shared ideas, even suggesting cuts they felt I might have overlooked. In Japan, the crew never steps out, never suggests a thing. They rely on the director totally. In America, the director is president; in Japan, he is the emperor."

Necronomicon left Kaneko with two fond memories. One was working with actor David Warner, whom he says is as dynamic offscreen as on. The other was collaborating with Japanese-born FX artist Screaming Mad George. "Mad George has this incredibly reserved focus," Kaneko says. "He never panicked or complained, even when the budget prevented him from achieving what the script necessitated. His concern was only to understand the demands and then execute them as best he could. I learned a lot by watching how he approached his job."

With *Necronomicon* finished, Kaneko returned to Japan to work on *Gamera* full-time and deal with pressures that had arisen from Daiei. Kaneko found himself receiving a long list of what the company envisioned Gamera for the '90s to be, some of it contradictory. "Daiei wanted Gamera to be responsive to children," he recalls. "They didn't want this part of the character changed, and were adamant about it. But they also wanted the film to be adult in style. By using children as protagonists, I thought the original movies alienated themselves from the adult audience. I came up with the notion that by using a high-school girl, I could still keep contact with the children without losing the adults. I explained this to Daiei, and they eventually relented, ultimately seeing that it worked in favor of Gamera's character."

The actress who wound up playing the psychic teenager Asagi in both *G1* and *G2* is Ayako Fujitani, the daughter of American action star Steven Seagal. Kaneko was first introduced to Fujitani during a break in Gamera's preproduction at a film festival in the city of Osaka. "She was very distant and aloof," Kaneko recalls, "and I was taken back by this somewhat cold attitude." Two months later, they met again at the open audition for the role of Asagi. "I felt that the part of Asagi was the most important casting decision to be made, as the humanity of Gamera centered around her. Also, she was the only character I planned to carry over to the sequel. I knew the kind of actress I wanted, and the kind I didn't want. With young actors, it's difficult to tell what they are really like because they try their hardest to hide themselves and be what they think the director or casting agents want them to be."

"For the audition, I had each actress stand on stage, look up to the ceiling and yell, 'Gamera!'" he continues. "It was painfully obvious that Ayako was shy. Her face was a bright red; even her ears were crimson. I remembered her dark personality from the party and felt that between the two meetings, she had shown me her true self. I decided I could trust her, and gave her the part based on that."

As for Gamera himself, Kaneko had big plans for the monster's design. "I always hated that Gamera could fly, but I was stuck with this. So my idea was to make him like a sea turtle, his arms transforming when he flew. This was my attempt at making the film a bit more believable." But the studio balked. Gamera flies, but not with wings, they insisted. "In the beginning of production, Daiei refused so many of my ideas that I felt I was close to getting fired." Finally, the studio and director came to a mutual understanding about the character.

Still, Kaneko had his own personal reservations about how to approach the story. At first, he envisioned Gamera as being a comedy or satire. "Gamera is a ridiculous character," he says. "Here's this huge turtle that lumbers on the ground and flies in the air by spinning. I didn't see how a serious picture could be made around something so unbelievable. Daiei had given me two studio-approved scripts that only augmented this. After I talked them out of these, I brought in Ito, whom I had just worked with on *Necronomicon* (and who went on to write *Gamera 2* and the recently filmed *Gamera 3*), and we hit upon the idea that Gamera was a creation, a secret weapon invented by an ancient race of people. After that, we decided the character could be capable of anything. With this point clarified, I felt I could go ahead and make a serious film."

Kaneko was heavily involved with the scripting of *Gamera*, but he and Ito had very different ideas about the type of film they wanted to see made. Ito imagined the movie as a modern version of the most successful *kaiju* film of all time, *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, but Kaneko differed. "Ito thought the strong point of that film was there were two unrelated monster stories gradually brought together. But I felt, wanting to make as realistic a movie as possible, that since giant monsters are in no way real, having two separate monster stories only augments its fictitiousness. I was stuck with using Gyaos because Daiei demanded it be in the film, so I wanted Gamera and Gyaos to be linked in some way. My image was more like the film *War of the Gargantuas*, with two monsters that originate from a single source." Inevitably, Ito's approach won out as this was more in line with Daiei's ideas.

Even while working on the script, Kaneko knew that to make the film succeed and truly reinvent Gamera, he would have to integrate the special FX in a way not yet seen in Japanese cinema. The *Godzilla* series, which he felt strong rivalry with, had the problem of appearing as two separate films: one, the work of the director and live actors; the other, the work of the FX director and monsters. "As soon as I got the script into a workable form, I sat down with Shinji Higuchi (FX director of *G1* and *G2*), and the two of us drew storyboards. I did all the human scenes, and he all the *kaiju*. We then spread them out on a large worktable and matched them together. It took months to complete, but this, I thought, was best for what I had in mind. I wanted everything worked out beforehand."

Inevitably, the production was besieged by a feeling of *Godzilla* envy. "There was a lot of pressure to make a film up to *Godzilla* standards, even though we didn't have the budget. There wasn't anyone in preproduction who wasn't obsessed by the pressure of *Godzilla*. In fact, we often mistakenly referred to Gamera as *Godzilla*."

Gamera's live-action scenes took two months to complete, with the FX scenes taking four. For Kaneko, it was an exhilarating experience. "As much as I like filmmaking, I don't enjoy the process," he admits. "It's a real labor. But when I made *G1* it was different. I've made comedy, and nothing can compare to the stress involved in getting a joke translated onto film. *Gamera* was the most enjoyable experience of my professional career."

Opening across Japan on March 11, 1995, *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* took *kaiju* to a new level despite the small budget (a piddling \$5 million). Daiei was so ecstatic over the quality of the film that they assigned Kaneko the sequel even before the movie opened, and he repeated his success with the July 13, 1996 release of *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion*, a film that is in almost every way superior to the first. "After *G1*, I felt very comfortable with the character," the director says. "When I was young, I always preferred *Godzilla*, but now I can honestly say I love Gamera more. I feel he is real and that I can rely on him to help me through the series."

G2 took Gamera in the direction that Kaneko had hoped to start with in the first but was dented by studio interference. The focus shifts from monster battles to the humanity of the characters and how they deal with the impending threat of national annihilation at the hands of the alien Legion. "*G1* was much more a formula film than *G2* because we had used an already-existing film (*King Kong vs. Godzilla*) as a model. This was not the case with *G2*. There was no model to work with. Instead, I based the film around traditional war films. I wanted to show how people react when under attack and threatened by a large menace."

The Japanese Self-Defense Force played a major role in the film, and Kaneko is quick to praise their input. "I couldn't have had a better group playing soldiers if I paid them," referring to the fact that the military personnel and all their equipment cost the production nothing. "We had a liaison who was the embodiment of a soldier. Before each scene, I explained what I wanted, and then he would trot off and order his men about as if they were going into battle."

Budgeted the same as *G1*, *G2* employed fewer FX scenes, leaving more money available for each individual *kaiju* sequence. With the experience of the first film and the extra money, the FX team was able to improve upon the first movie's visuals. And Kaneko – who could now do no wrong in the eyes of the studio – was able to radically alter Gamera's design, giving him the sea-turtle stance and arms that morph into flippers via CGI technology.

No longer feeling any competition with Godzilla, Kaneko notes that his approach to *kaiju* is opposed to the one taken by Toho's filmmakers. "*Kaiju* films are the Japanese equivalent of American action movies," he notes. "In U.S. films, the panic arises from a focused situation. For example, the siege of the building in *Die Hard*. In *kaiju* films, this comes from a national, collective panic. Godzilla and Gamera films have the same goal: to show Japan in a panic. Toho's way is to present Japan as an economically strong, traditionalistic country that then has inharmonious elements dropped in that disrupt the flow of order. In my Gamera films, I approach Japan from underneath, showing the people and their daily lives, and create panic by threatening that life.

"*Kaiju*, itself, has no reality, and so is difficult for most people in the audience to accept," he adds. "There should then be as much reality, things the audience feels familiar with, surrounding this unreal thing – the *kaiju*. The more the audience feels connected with the film's reality, the more readily they accept the unreality happening on the screen."

If audience reaction is any way to gauge success, then Gamera has far surpassed Godzilla. Across Japan, the praise for the series' realism is unanimous, and the Gamera titles have become the standard by which *kaiju* films are judged. And with the success of *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* outside Japan (unlike the recent Godzilla films, it played theaters in the United States), Kaneko finds himself in a position few Japanese filmmakers do. When asked why he thinks Japanese monsters, creatures so rooted in the culture, have international appeal, Kaneko takes a long pause before answering.

"*Kaiju* films are original to Japan," he says. "But like most things original, it came with a price. During World War II, Japan did horrible things: invaded other countries and destroyed the lives of many innocent people. Consequently, we had the atomic bomb dropped on us. For the Japanese, war is very serious, and so we can't make the kind of war or action films that are done in the U.S. To Japanese people, those kinds of films tend to be nullifying. But with *kaiju*, we are able to deal with war, even if it is done in metaphor. In *Godzilla* (1954), the monster was the symbol of the A-bomb. Godzilla destroyed Tokyo and we were helpless. *Kaiju* is our way of making war films in a roundabout, original manner. I feel it is this originality that gives them their international appeal."

But *kaiju* are about to step from the local market into the international ring with the upcoming release of the American *Godzilla*, and Kaneko once again feels at odds with the spine-backed destroyer. "Traditionally, Japanese *kaiju* designs have been superior to American ones," he says. "While American filmmakers are good at showing disasters, they've never understood that *kaiju* is to be treated like a force of nature. It's nerve-racking to think that Americans may finally be able to make good *kaiju*. I want very much to see it, but deep down I'm nervous about the upcoming American *Godzilla* and the effect it will have on Japanese *kaiju*."

Between the hiatus of *G2* and *G3*, Kaneko directed two films, *Gakko no Kaidan 3* and the soon-to-be-released *F*. With *Gakko no Kaidan 3*, Kaneko returned to horror, albeit a children's genre film. "I love horror, and it was a pleasure to work with Toho on that highly successful series," he says. "Horror for children is nearly identical to horror for adults, the biggest difference being the amount of blood you can show." *F* marks another departure for the director, who has made almost every type of film conceivable: this movie is a romantic tale involving real-life London Royal Ballet star Tetsuya Kumagawa.

With his third Gamera adventure under way, Kaneko reveals that it will likely be his last. "I think that after *G3*, I'll have had my fill of Gamera," he says. "In film, the most important thing is reality. The three Gamas have a pre-planned continuity. In *G1*, Tokyo Tower is destroyed, in *G2*, the city of Sendai is laid to waste and in *G3*, perhaps the fate of Japan and the world will be in the balance. That leaves nothing for *G4*. To do it would only be to rehash, and Gamera would lose validity. I don't plan to leave the genre, but for me Gamera is a three-act play. Instead of *G4*, I want to start with a fresh, original series." Kaneko is mum about the plot of *G3*, but admits that the focus will be on the history of Gamera. The main theme is derived from the final moments of *G2*, when one of the main characters is reminded that Gamera only appears to be our friend, but as soon as mankind threatens Earth, he will turn on us.

While Kaneko is enjoying his success with Gamera, it has come with a price. Making *kaiju* films had always been a secret drive, with the ultimate prize being to direct the King of the Monsters, Godzilla. The night he came home with the news of Gamera, considered by Toho to be Godzilla's archrival, his wife sat him down. "You know," she said, "you may as well kiss Godzilla goodbye."

Special thanks to Leo Anzai, Nobuko Ohmachi and Tsuyoshi Kobayashi.

The Turtle Scoop on *Gamera 3* (originally published in *Fangoria* #185, August 1999)

The Japanese summer is hot, with the city of Kyoto best likened to a microwave stuck on high. Yet despite marsh-level humidity, director Shusuke Kaneko is on location in the city's new billion-dollar train station, diligently lensing Daiei Pictures' latest and largest project to date, *Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris*.

Employing a crew of 30, culled from the first two *Gamera* outings, Kaneko prepares to direct the 120 extras who have turned up for the night's shoot. The scene to be filmed at 2 a.m. on this Sunday is of panic-stricken commuters, tourists and station employees running away from Gamera as the giant turtle squares off against his latest nemesis, Iris, for the movie's climax.

With two Gamera films under his belt, Kaneko is an old hand at directing 'fleers,' those stampedes of terrorized citizenry who have populated every Japanese giant monster (or *kaiju*) film since the original *Gojira* in 1954. With a small megaphone in hand, he explains the scene to the crowd gathered about the terminal.

"There is a large creature about to knock down the station. You are scared and don't want to die – so run like never before." Kaneko's instructions are simple, but rightfully so considering that there is probably not a soul in Japan – or the world, for that matter – unfamiliar with what's expected of the upcoming scene. Kaneko starts back for his station behind a small, camera-fed monitor before abruptly halting and returning the megaphone to his mouth. "Oh, and scream a bit too," he adds calmly.

The camera set and the extras grouped about the station, Kaneko calls for the scene to begin. With flailing arms and pounding feet, the extras tear past the camera. Parents with children, high school students in uniform, businessmen with their suitcases – they plow out of the station as if their lives really do depend on a speedy exit.

"Cut," crackles Kaneko's voice over the megaphone. "Once more... but not quite so fast." The scene is done ten more times and from several different angles. In the end, two hours later, every extra is complaining of the heat, sore feet and an intense desire for bed. Who ever said running from giant Japanese monsters is easy?

Gamera 3 is the highly anticipated caper for the film series begun over five years ago by director Kaneko, scriptwriter Kazunori Ito and FX director Shinji Higuchi. Both *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe* and its sequel, *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion*, revitalized a genre whose creativity was thought to have seen its day with the passing of FX master Eiji Tsuburaya in 1970 and the retirement of Godzilla director Ishiro Honda in the late '70s.



Accomplishing what no Japanese *kaiju* film had done in over ten years, the first of the new Gamera films played movie houses in both America and England, garnering solid reviews (including a “thumbs up” from Roger Ebert) for its adult handling and realistic portrayal of the giant monster genre. Although *Gamera 2* has not yet received an international release, it surpassed the box office of its predecessor in Japan. With *Gamera 3* deep in production, Daiei’s hopes are that magic will strike a third time.

As much as *Guardian of the Universe* marked a radical departure from the audacious kiddie fodder that became the direction of the initial Gamera series, *Gamera 3*, Kaneko hopes, will distance the new series even further. “This time, the theme is extremely heavy,” says the director. “By comparison, *G1* and *G2* were easy films to make. *G1* was a conventional ‘what if’ type of film, that is: What if *kaiju* really were in our world? For *G2*, I set out to make a war story between Gamera and the space creature Legion, with Japan’s Self-Defense Force and people caught in-between.

“This film,” he stresses, “is far more difficult. Preproduction went on an unusually long time, because for a while, I wasn’t sure what kind of movie I wished to make. I knew I didn’t want something like the previous two, as rehashing doesn’t appeal to me. Thinking deeply about the series and noting that the tone has gotten heavier with each film, I thought to continue this by shifting the focus onto the people whose lives have been destroyed by *kaiju*. For *G3*, I want to show how people can be driven to insanity by *kaiju*.”

The story of *Gamera 3* is set in the year 1999, where Earth’s environment is out of balance due to mankind’s relentless raping of its resources and the cancer-like growth of its population. The Gyaos – vicious, flesh-eating flying creatures last seen in *G1* – have started to appear around the world in a much more lethal form renamed Hyper-Gyaos. Gamera, arriving in Tokyo, battles the Hyper-Gyaos, but in doing so, takes out much of the city.

The tale continues with ornithologist Mayumi Nagamine (Shinobu Nakayama) being summoned to Tokyo from her Gyaos research abroad by a newly formed branch of the Japanese government created to deal with the *kaiju* dilemma. There, Nagamine tangles with Mito Asakura (Senri Yamazaki), an attractive government secret agent, and Shinya Kurata (Toru Tezuka), a computer genius who has simulated the devastation the Hyper-Gyaos will cause if left unchecked.

Meanwhile – bearing a grudge going back to her parents’ death during Gamera’s first battle with Gyaos – teenager Ayana Hirasaka (Ai Maeda) vows to see Gamera dead. Finding an egg in an ancient temple, she raises the creature within. Later, when Gamera has followed the Hyper-Gyaos to Kyoto, Ayana’s instrument of revenge, Iris, intervenes.

“In *G1*, Gamera is very much a hero,” explains Kaneko. “In *G2*, we begin to question his allegiance to humanity that maybe it is not us, but the Earth he owes his loyalty to. In *G3*, the truth of Gamera will be revealed. Is he our friend? Is he our enemy? What is Gamera exactly and, touching on traditional themes, why are *kaiju* always attacking Japan? All of the film’s human characters are involved with these giant monsters in different ways, and I am weaving their stories together to create as rich a tale as I can. As ambitious as it sounds, I am trying to create a new style of *kaiju* film with this movie.”

“The development of Gamera has been a natural process,” notes *Gamera* series scriptwriter Ito. “Daiei originally asked for *G1* to be a children’s movie, but I didn’t think the old-style Gamera could be done any longer. I suggested that instead of Gamera being a child’s hero, he should be mankind’s hero instead. While we had wanted to start the series with a more ferocious-looking Gamera, making movies is sometimes a compromise and so we (the core creative team) compromised, as did the studio in letting us alter Gamera’s character.

“When I wrote *G2*,” Ito continues, “I asked myself, ‘What does protecting mankind mean?’ I concluded that it means to protect the Earth and its ecological system. Thus, when Legion comes from space, Gamera protects Earth and at the same time man. During the scripting of *G2*, I began to wonder how Gamera would react if man became a threat to the Earth, and I ended the film on that note. With *G3*, this dilemma is confronted.”

The Gamera series is rich in world cultural icons, and Ito is glad for the chance to address them and their importance in the monster’s mythos. “If I had to place a label on the Gamera series, it would be mythic sci-fi,” he says. “In *G1*, I employed the legend of Atlantis, and in *G2*, I referred to the Bible for the name of Legion. I wanted *G3* to relate to Asian myth, so many of the character names are derived from old Japanese legends. This is also the reason for setting the film’s climax in Kyoto, the capital of Japanese tradition.”

Actress Nakayama is making a return to the series as bird scientist Nagamine. Drying off from a storm scene on the Kyoto location, she eagerly explains, “I play the same character I did five years ago in *G1*. I was in *G2*, but I think it was the briefest cameo in film history, as I appear only in a photo on the inside flap of a book my character wrote. With *G3*, I am once more relentless in my pursuit of understanding what the Gyaos are. But unlike in *G1*, where I was a bit protective of Gyaos, now I am more protective of humanity.”

Nakayama, who received a nomination for best actress in the Japanese equivalent of the Oscars for her performance in *G1*, is ecstatic to collaborate with Kaneko again. “He is one of the most unique directors I’ve worked with,” she says. “At the beginning of *G1*, I often got upset because I didn’t understand him, as he gives almost no direction. Eventually, I came to realize that the thing

about Kaneko is he has vision. It is as if the finished film is floating before his eyes. If he doesn’t like a performance, he will say something, but when it’s right it just seems natural to him, thus requiring no comment.”

Also reprising his role for *G3* is Yukijiro Hotaru as Tsutomu Osako, a man whose life is constantly disrupted by *kaiju*. “In *G3*, I’ve hit rock bottom,” he explains. “But after a call from Nagamine, I’m assisting her and at the same time trying to overcome my personal terror of *kaiju*.” Hotaru is insistent that acting in this kind of film is no easy task. “Sometimes when we do an effects scene, for example with a *kaiju* in the sky, a man from effects will stand with a long stick with a ribbon tied at the end. ‘This is Gamera!’ he yells as he waves it about. And I have to act against this ribbon! For me this is a challenge, but ultimately a lot of fun.”

New to the series is 15-year-old Maeda. An up-and-coming actress in Japan, she starred in the recent hit film *Toire no Hanako-San*, a no-holds-barred tale of terror set within a modern-day Japanese high school. Before taking on the pivotal role of Ayana, Maeda had her prejudices against the *kaiju* genre. “I never had any interest in these films, even when all the boys in school were talking about Godzilla,” she admits. “I watched *Gamera 2* because my sister Aki was in it, but I always thought of these films as just a guy in a suit. Being in this movie, with the serious script and so many talented people involved, my image has completely changed.”



The demanding pace and gruelling schedule has been somewhat difficult for the young actress. The Kyoto location could only be fully utilized after closing, causing filming to last until 4:30 a.m. nightly. “The first shot in Kyoto was a pain,” Maeda recalls, “because it was in reality the last one for that scene. Not only was it demanding doing things out of order; but the scene was set in a typhoon and I was constantly being sprayed down, dried off and sprayed down again. But I got through it, and in the end it all worked out. Also, working with Kaneko is interesting, because no matter how tough things get, he never becomes upset. Even if he is upset, who knows? He never shows it.”

But the defining character of the Gamera series is Ayako Seagal (formerly Fujitani, the daughter of action star Steven Seagal) as Asagi Kusanagi, the young girl who shares an emotional bond with Gamera. “For *G3*, my connection with Gamera has changed again,” Seagal says during a break in production. “In *G1*, I am connected with Gamera body and soul; when he gets hurt, I get hurt. He is in many ways like a father to me. In *G2*, our relationship develops to where he is more like my boyfriend. But we break up when we lose our connection. This time around we have no link, but I am still concerned and chase after him. He is like an ex-lover – but Gamera doesn’t seem to care!”

Although *Gamera 3* is being filmed on a sparse – by American standards – budget of 15 billion yen (\$11 million), the low cost belies the quality of the production. “If this movie was done in the US, it would cost \$50 million or more,” says producer Miyuki Nanri with

pride. "If you look at the production, you will see no frivolity. There are no lines of camping trailers or personal assistants; none of the excess and ego-feeding superfluity that has come to define Hollywood." And he is right. No one on the crew sports embroidered leather crew jackets, nor is there anything but the most basic of catering.

"In America," Nanri continues, "a studio gets a script and then works out a budget. If it doesn't match what they think the return will be, they play games. The producer might bring in a star who, although costing more, will justify a raise in the overall production. In Japan, we can't play these sorts of games. Star or no star, we have a budget that cannot be broken."

The majority of *Gamera 3*'s shooting is being spread between Tokyo and Kyoto, with a week of location work in the Philippines. By the middle of production, things have gone off without a hitch. "Well, we did have one minor problem," Kaneko admits. "When filming a scene with Kunihiko Mitamura as Ayana's father, being a former *Godzilla* actor (in *Godzilla vs. Biollante*), he kept referring to Gamera as *Godzilla*. It was annoying, but funny."



While Kaneko and his cast and crew struggle with the film's human scenes, the equally challenging task of bringing Gamera and his foes to life is being done on the Daiei stages in Tokyo. At the helm again is award-winning FX director Higuchi, whose highly detailed sets and effective use of low-angle camera positions caused a sensation throughout the Japanese film community with the release of *Guardian of the Universe*, his first film.

Working with a crew of 70, Higuchi directs within a large, airplane hangar-sized stage. At one end is a platform on which rests the miniature cities that Gamera and company will do battle in. The opposite end occupies what Higuchi hopes will be the money shot for *G3*: a 30-foot-wide, 1/20th-scale model of Kyoto Station. It is the biggest such set ever built for a Gamera film, and possibly the largest for any Japanese movie. Requiring over six months to construct, it is eerie in its accuracy, with a meticulous attention to detail. Even while noisy monster fight scenes occur not a dozen feet away, craftsmen sit about the model in silence, focused on placing the exacting touches that will help match the miniature to the real station once the two are brought together on film.

While *G3* is Daiei's most expensive production for 1998, it still is frugal for the sort of film Higuchi would like to create. "The budget is nothing to brag about," he says. "Even so, I am striving to make this the best *Gamera* to date. Making movies in Japan, you have to deal with the fact that budgets are next to nothing. My style is always suited for its reality, but reality is expensive. In Japan, one of the challenges is always finding the best ways to create reality within a small budget. *G3* will employ fewer effects than the previous *Gameras*, about 250 shots in all. While it may seem like less is bad, the truth is I have more money for each shot and can achieve much more in terms of quality."

When asked what new things the audience can look forward to from *G3*'s FX, Higuchi is quick to respond. "In the previous films, the outcome was always up to who was the more powerful *kaiju*," he says. "Gamera was stronger than Gyaos and Legion, and so he won. The people were always just on the sidelines, pretty much doing nothing. For this film, I am attempting to create coexistence between the *kaiju* and human characters. This will be the big difference of *G3*."

Debuting as Gamera's performer is Hirofumi Fukuzawa, who, at 6 feet, is the tallest person to play the giant turtle to date. Wearing a satiny leotard to protect his skin from the coarse, 60-pound Gamera suit, Fukuzawa explains, "My Gamera is large and menacing. While this makes for a powerful-looking character, the acting is difficult, as it's hard to move freely about the miniature sets. I have to be careful to avoid knocking into buildings not designated for destruction."

"Higuchi coached me extensively on the kind of Gamera he wants," Fukuzawa continues. "This Gamera is to be scary, not just in the way he fights but also by his pose. To express the rage and horror within Gamera by stance alone is a great challenge for me as a suit actor."

Previous Gamera performer Akira Ohashi is this time playing Iris, a stealthy creature with squidlike tentacles and a single glowing orb for an eye recessed deep in its pointed face. "My portrayal of Gamera in *G2* was a bit different than Fukuzawa's is turning out," he says. "In *G2*, Gamera wasn't as strong as he was determined. In *G3*, my character of Iris is very cool. It is humanlike and fast-moving. I'm giving Gamera a real run for his money."

One major change to the series is in Gamera's look. No longer sporting the heroic appearance of *G1*, for *G3* his face displays unbridled rage, and the edges of his shell are razor-sharp, giving the appearance of a circular saw blade about to cut into action. "This time around, Gamera appears brutish," says Kaneko. "At a glance he looks evil, but we are striving to preserve his gentle side as well."

Higuchi concurs: "Gamera's face in the new film is a bit scary. In actuality, his face is showing the brunt of something within his soul. Gamera is misunderstood by humanity and must carry that weight. His new look is the reflection of this misunderstanding."

"To tell you the truth, I wanted to take the look of Gamera further," Ito says. "I wanted Gamera to be the hands-down enemy of humanity, but Daiei wouldn't accept this. Considering the film from a commercial point of view, I suppose they are right."

While it is thought that with the less-than-spectacular reviews and box office of the U.S. *Godzilla*, the market for giant monsters has been effectively squashed, Kaneko responds with confidence. "I don't think it will affect *kaiju* films in Japan. In the U.S. maybe, but in Japan the U.S. *Godzilla* is not seen as part of the *kaiju* genre."

"I've always felt a little strange about America's approach to *kaiju*," says the director, who during the hiatus between *G2* and *G3* wrote and published a book on Gamera and his lifelong love of the genre. "American *kaiju* films almost always focus on the weapons that work. In the U.S. *Godzilla*, if he is shot, he dies, so the monster is always running to avoid being hit. To the Japanese, the image of *kaiju* is that of a natural disaster. I mean, weapons can't work against tornados, earthquakes or an atomic bomb. Since weapons don't work on *kaiju*, the problem has to be solved with diligence and cunning. But in America, it seems people can't believe their weapons won't work. Americans believe in the power of their weapons more than they do the *kaiju*."

Having opened in March 1999 in Japan, *Gamera 3* has no U.S. distribution at this writing; it will screen at Montreal's Fant-Asia film festival this summer. With a little luck, U.S. audiences might get to see the serious *kaiju* film that the American *Godzilla* proved not to be. And for a genre widely considered as nothing more than an outlet for those moviegoers who fantasize about being able to smash model train sets in leftover Halloween costumes, *Gamera 3* just might turn out to be the film that once and for all lays that long-held stereotype to rest.



Bringing Up "Gamera"
(originally published in *Fangoria* #191, April 2000)

At 36 years of age, Shinji Higuchi is a rare wunderkind. Practically sidestepping Japan's time-honored seniority-based pecking order, he went from near anonymity to the top of his country's special FX field with the release of *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe*. Subsequently, the follow-up, *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion*, and his work on the highly popular *Evangelion* anime series led Higuchi to be hailed as the vanguard of Japanese film wizardry. And last year saw the release of the film containing arguably his greatest work to date: *Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris*.

Working out of his birth city of Tokyo, Higuchi looks more like a roadie for a heavy metal band than a highly skilled illustrator and FX director. His long hair is kept in a frayed ponytail and his chin sports a tousled tuft of hair. Owing to a highly animated face, he talks with a friendliness that is less directorial and more like that of a fellow worker or schoolmate. And not surprisingly, school is where Higuchi got his first taste of filmmaking.

"In high school," Higuchi remembers, "I played keyboard in a local rock band. At that time, the big group was YMO. In concert, they projected films behind them, and my band wanted to do the same thing. So, getting an 8mm camera, I made a movie. To tell you the truth, I didn't have much talent on the keys, but I found making this film to be the most stimulating thing I'd ever done."

Growing up in Japan of the 1970s, it was only natural that Higuchi be reared on the endless parade of suited *kaiju* and *Ultraman* adventures that dominated movie theaters and TV. Japan at that time was not the economic power it is today, and many of the shows were dark and foreboding. "Back then there was a lot of pessimism," Higuchi says. "It even made its way into kids' programming — things like *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* and *Return of Ultraman*. For good or bad, this pessimism was a critical part of my formation.

"But even though I watched a lot of *kaiju* stuff," he continues, "it really didn't inspire anything within me. Most of the programming after (FX master Eiji) Tsuburaya died was simple, low-budgeted TV shows featuring a couple of guys in suits rolling around a dusty field. What did inspire me was the film *Submersion of Japan* (edited and released in the U.S. as *Tidal Wave*). When I saw Japan sinking in that film, I became very excited. I had never seen anything like it before. Here were towns I knew collapsing and volcanoes I knew erupting. I was completely blown away by the reality and connection with my life. I was only a child when I saw it, and while I didn't think I could actually get a job doing films like this after growing up, I had a fantasy that I would."

While still in school, Higuchi landed a part-time job at Toho, the studio famous for the *Godzilla* franchise. Assigned odd jobs on the film *Sayonara Jupiter*, he started working for FX director Koichi Kawakita. After this, he was put on the team making miniatures for 1984's *The Return of Godzilla*, released Stateside as *Godzilla 1985*, and subsequently continued at Toho working on small projects and staging events, many supervised by Kawakita.



"I learned a lot from Kawakita," Higuchi says. "I worked under him on various effects scenes, such as tankers exploding on the sea and the like. The budgets were always small, which prevented the making of big miniatures. Still, I was impressed by what was created and even today refer to this work when I make movies. After Kawakita started doing the *Godzilla* series, he began using bigger and bigger sets, and his style changed. Originally, Kawakita had a style that drew the most effect from the least set – something I strive for now."

Over the next several years, Higuchi went on to what can best be described as an *On the Road* existence in the FX trade. He joined several film companies, doing storyboards for both anime series and motion pictures and working on miniature FX for many live-action films. During this tenure of sundry jobs, Higuchi inevitably felt that while many of the projects turned out to his liking, his work was not being used in the way he had originally envisioned. Increasingly, he began longing for a project to which he could attach his name and create in the direction he saw fit.

While Higuchi labored through these minor TV and film productions, unbeknownst to him, Daiei Pictures was gearing up to revive their defunct *Gamera* series. When the time came for Daiei to begin production on *Guardian of the Universe*, the last member of the creative team to be decided on was the FX director. A list of possible candidates was compiled at a meeting attended by Daiei executives, director Shusuke Kaneko, scriptwriter Kazinori Ito and producer Tsutomu Tsuchikawa. Ito remembered Higuchi, whom he had known from a previous job, and suggested that he be considered for the position.

"Daiei called me in one day and told me their idea for the new *Gamera* film," Higuchi recalls. "I knew right then and there that this was the opportunity I had been waiting for. And with a confidence that surprised me, I told them straight off that I was the man for the job. They had another meeting and the movie's producer, Tsuchikawa, made the final decision to give me the position. Really, I had very little in the way of directing experience. Daiei took a real chance with me."

With the job his, the first thing Higuchi had to do was give *Gamera* a facelift, yet retain a close resemblance to the earlier incarnation. "After getting the offer to take on the movie," Higuchi says, "I asked Daiei if I could do anything I wanted, and they said this was fine. I did my original designs under this impression, but when they saw what I had in mind, it turned into a terrible fight. The company had a certain idea about *Gamera*, so in *G1* I couldn't do exactly what I wanted. When I saw the U.S. *Godzilla*, I didn't mind that *Godzilla* had a different style from the old Toho version. On the contrary, I was impressed at how they were able to get away with changing the look so much. I envy the person who was able to persuade Toho to let them do what they did!



"Originally," Higuchi continues, "I wanted *Gamera* to be like a sea turtle and not a land turtle. Instead of arms, I wanted flippers to be employed while flying. The bosses at Daiei, however, felt this was too radical and rejected the design. But for *G2* I was able to incorporate this idea at last."

Guardian of the Universe was released to overwhelming acclaim, with critics and fans praising Higuchi's effective use of low-angle shots that seemed to drop the audience right into the battle between *Gamera* and his flying enemy *Gyaos*. Even before its release, Daiei was so sure they had a winner on their hands that they assigned Higuchi the FX director seat for the sequel. *G2* posed many challenges, the biggest of which was coming up with an adversary for *Gamera* unlike anything that had come before.

"*Gyaos* was a part of the previous *Gamera* series," Higuchi explains. "All I had to do was take the old design and progress it further. The creation of new *kaiju* is difficult today, because the modern audience does not accept them readily. Old *kaiju* benefit from having something specific in their characters, making them easily remembered. Even today, years later, people can still recite their names and abilities. Recent *kaiju* are plagued with muddled characteristics that make it hard for the audience to differentiate between them. My goal is to create *kaiju* that the audience will remember.

"I notice that I am bound a little by old *kaiju*," he adds. "Especially the ones from my childhood. Sometimes I come up with a design, only to realize that it is a restructure of different *kaiju* from my memory. What I do now is sketch a lot of cool images and then cut out the parts that are familiar."

An example of Higuchi's approach to *kaiju* design can be seen in *G2*'s space creature *Legion*, a massive arthropod bearing no resemblance to any previous design. "For *Legion*, which came from a world with evolution different from ours, I had the idea to place the bone structure outside the body. But it's pretty hard to create such a type of creature using people in suits, as the joints of human beings are fixed. Not wanting the creature shaped like a man, I thought of putting two people in a suit. I tried different placements and finally found a position with two in the back that was like nothing I'd seen before. I had a test suit put together using foam, and then had some of the crew try it on. The test went perfectly, and I knew I had something original.

"The finished suit was really heavy and was difficult on the actors," Higuchi notes. "For close shots I used one actor, Mizuho Yoshida, but for full shots there were two, with the job of assisting Yoshida shared between Kouichi Tamura and Hironobu Sasaki. When it was a two-actor scene, Yoshida would get in first, followed by one of the others. Unfortunately, Yoshida had to wait a long time for the second actor to get in. There is usually a limit to the amount of time someone can stay in a suit, about 10 minutes, but it took 10 minutes just to put this suit on. I felt very sorry for them, especially Yoshida. But owing to these guys, *Legion* was able to come across as totally convincing and, without cables, could stand by itself. I am very proud of *Legion* and think it is one of the five best *kaiju* designs of all time."

While *G1* takes place mostly in the midst of Tokyo's near-endless urban expanse, *G2* is mainly set outside the sprawling metropolis, something that pleased Higuchi. "We wanted *G2* to be different from *G1*," he explains, "and if we had set the fight scenes within the city, it would have just been more of the same. I realize that tall buildings are the symbol of modern Japan, but there are other ways to show this without having to always be in the city. Placing certain advertisements and signs around the miniatures, the same feelings can be induced. Also, most people don't live in the big city, they live in the suburbs, and I wanted to show the audience the world that they live in.

"The suburb of Tokyo I built for *G2* was not a specific place, just a general locale of small homes surrounded by electrical poles and cables. For me, this brings back strong memories of my own childhood. I was born in Tokyo and, when I was young, moved to Ibaraki prefecture and lived there through high school. I always wanted to go back to Tokyo, and when I would see the electrical cables – lines that connected directly to Tokyo – it always made me a little homesick. For me, the suburb is a pretty unforgettable place, and I thought it would make a great location for a *kaiju* fight scene."

With *Gamera 3*, Higuchi struggled to top his previous work on *G1* and *G2*. With a crew of 70, he returned to the indoor stages at Daiei and an outdoor set at Nikkatsu Studios. *Gamera*, as well as returning nemesis *Gyaos*, was once again redesigned. New for the film is the *kaiju* *Iris*, a multitentacled creature that bears a heavy *Japanimation* influence.

"I couldn't do what I wanted in the first film," Higuchi says. "But this time I was able to do things more the way I wanted; I was given much more freedom. And, to be honest, with the current state of technology in Japan, I don't think things can be taken much further than what I attempted with this movie."

Besides the usual stretches of generic buildings designed to be crushed, kicked and blown apart, the miniature centerpiece was a huge 1/20th-scale model of the newly opened train station in Kyoto. It is the largest miniature built in the history of Daiei – nearly 30 feet wide and taking close to six months to construct – and was used for the film's climax, when *Gamera* faces *Iris* for the final battle.

Where Tsuburaya would allow his suit actors the freedom to choreograph their own movements, Higuchi works closely with his *kaiju* performers, mapping out every action until he is satisfied with the result. He personally chooses the actors that bring his creations



to life, and for *Gamera 3* he assigned Hirofumi Fukuzawa the decisive role of Gamera. Higuchi is ecstatic with the actor's work on the film: "I am totally satisfied with Fukuzawa's performance. He is taller than the former Gamera, which is something I wanted. But moreover, he has really big, dynamic movements."

If Higuchi has a regret, it is submitting the actors to the rigors of the suits. The outfits are heavy, hot and hard on the body in almost every way imaginable. "To be a suit actor, you must have a positive character, because it is an extremely difficult job," Higuchi admits. "They get locked up in what is a real sweat suit, and while I feel sorry and want to let them out, because of the time involved in putting it on and taking it off, I have to sometimes go against my sympathy. I find I am always yelling, 'Please be patient!', 'Hang on!' or 'Just one more minute!' To be a suit actor, you must have unending amounts of patience and stamina."

Today, the cutting edge of FX rests in the ability to turn out eye-popping visuals through computer technology, and while the *Gamera* series does employ CGI, the budgets do not allow for its use on the scale seen in the U.S. "I like CGI," Higuchi says, "but it depends on the cut. I use it but only when it benefits the content. The same thing with suits; when only a suit will do, I'll go with it."

"In America," he continues, "the effects director I most admire is Phil Tippett, particularly his work on *Starship Troopers*. His choreography is not simple animation, but true monster performances in which his creations behave in ways genuine to the movements of all living things."

One of Higuchi's trademarks is a strong sense of reality within shots. Overflowing with highly detailed miniatures, they capture the country's landscape with uncompromising precision. For *Gamera 3*, Higuchi attempted to take this approach in a direction that he hoped would be a fresh experience for the audience. "If you really want realism, the best way is to mix the *kaiju* with actual backgrounds, which is something I did on *G3*. Another way is to use big miniatures, like in the U.S. *Godzilla*, where they had a 1/6th-scale model. These are the best methods if all you want is reality."

"But realism is difficult, because it has a limitation," he notes. "Due to my work on *Gamera*, I'm labelled as a director who does 'real' effects. But with the small budgets available in Japan, this is getting harder, leaving me wondering what it is I should do. In Japan, we have to face the fact that we can't reach the level of the U.S. *Godzilla*. So I'm thinking that maybe having my own style is preferable, since I can't achieve total reality. Tsuburaya gave up reality, but he had his own distinct style. I find myself wanting my own style too. But even if I find it, I think I could apply it only to a single film. Therefore, after *G3*, I am considering focusing on TV effects. I very much want to do a show like *Thomas the Tank Engine*, which is a fabulous children's show. I also want to do an effects series on TV for children. Something like *Ultraman*, yet altogether different."

At presstime, however, Higuchi had begun work on *Sakuya*, a supernatural adventure film based on traditional Japanese ghost legends. The film is being co-produced by Warner Bros, and directed by Tomo Haraguchi, a suitmaker on the *Gamera* series, with filming scheduled to begin this month.

For the moment, Higuchi's reputation lies mainly with his work on *Gamera*. And with the giant turtle admittedly a backseat player to the king of monsters, *Godzilla*, it is inevitable that comparisons between the two be brought up. But with three successful films behind him that have taken *Gamera* in a direction different from that of the *Godzilla* series, Higuchi feels less like he is playing second fiddle than he did at the series' start.

"In the beginning, I felt a great competition with Toho's *Godzilla* films, but that has passed," Higuchi says. "The two are very different creatures. For one, *Gamera* is a hero; *Godzilla* is not. *Godzilla* was born of nuclear force and is like a ghost. He is darker than *Gamera* and is, in his true form, the image of death. This is one of the reasons why many people in Japan have refused to accept the American *Godzilla*. This image is not present in that film."

"*Gamera* has more possibilities," he says. "There is flexibility to the character. And while there is a certain style that *Gamera* must follow, he is not as rigid as compared to *Godzilla*. I'm lucky to be able to work with such a diverse character."



A GUIDE TO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE GAMERA

By James Flower

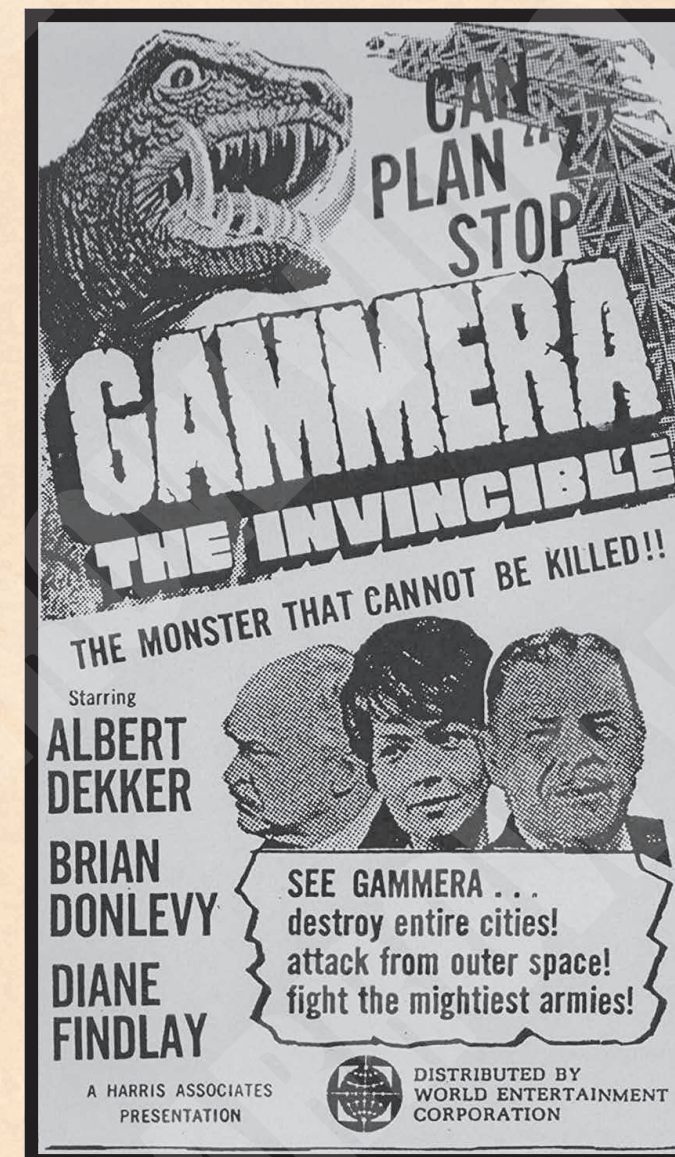
While exploring each disc in this boxset, newbie Gamera fans (and even some veterans) could be forgiven for being overwhelmed by the various language options available, including more than one English dub on some films, as well as different cuts in some instances. If you've enjoyed the original Japanese versions and want to delve further, then this guide to the English-language release history of each film should help you plan your evening's viewing.

Gamera the Giant Monster a.k.a. *Gammera the Invincible*

In December 1966, a little over a year after *Gamera the Giant Monster's* blockbuster opening in Japan in November 1965, the film had its American premiere – but in a significantly different form to that seen by audiences on the other side of the Pacific. Now retitled *Gammera the Invincible* (the extra 'm' added in the hopes American audiences wouldn't call the eponymous creature 'Camera'), the film not only featured a new English dub track, but nearly ten minutes of additional sequences featuring American actors, and a catchy new theme song to boot!

Little is known about how the producers responsible, Harris Associates, Inc. and World Enterprises Corporation, happened upon Gamera and decided to bring him to America, but it certainly seems to have been with Daiei's involvement; in addition to the newly shot footage, the *Gammera* version features outtakes left on the cutting room floor of the original *Gamera*, such as a shot of Gamera first approaching the nuclear power plant. In the same vein as *Godzilla! King of the Monsters* (1956) and *King Kong Vs Godzilla* (1962), new footage featuring American actors was quickly filmed in New York to beef up the Yank on-screen presence and influence within the plot, including turns from veterans like Brian Donlevy and Albert Dekker. This was also done to replace footage from the original version featuring either Japanese actors struggling with English dialogue, or unconvincing amateur performances by actual American military personnel serving in Japan.

The English dubbing was carried out by the NYC-based Titra Productions, whose staff and performers included the likes of Peter Fernandez, Corrine Orr, Jack Curtis and Bernard Grant, all of whom would achieve cult followings of their own



WE'VE GOT THE TURTLE WHO GETS TOP-BILLING OVER A SHARK AND A VAMPIRE.

Gamera

TURTLE POWER IS COMING!

ROUNDS 3 AND 4 FOR GAMERA TWO MORE CLASSICS

ROUND 3 From ROUND 4

Celebrity's FEATURE CREATURES

for their consistently excellent dubbing work on numerous other Japanese fantasy films as well as series such as *Speed Racer* (*Mahha GoGoGo*, 1967-1968). (Their dub for 1974's *Sister Street Fighter* [*Onna hissatsu ken*] is included on the Arrow Video Blu-ray of that film.)

Tadashi Yamauchi's music was largely left intact, except for some instances of similar library music used to pad out the additional scenes, and of course, the addition of the aforementioned theme song, "Gamera" by 'The Moons'. It is unknown whether such a band even existed, or was just songwriters Wes Farrell and Artie Butler pulling multiple duties, but the back cover of the 7" single nonetheless hyped them up as "the most exciting group since The Beatles!! With the new out of this world... PSYCHEDELIC SOUND!!" Such an approach was emblematic of World Enterprises' moxie in promoting the film, wherein they tried to impress exhibitors by claiming to spend an unprecedented million dollars in advertising the film; a patently absurd claim that didn't appear to work.

(Incidentally, while *Gamera* never received a UK release, a few months later the instrumental version of The Moons' theme song included on the B-side of the 7" single somehow found its way onto British Northern Soul dancefloors as a bootleg retitled "Shing-A-Ling At The Go-Go" on the appropriately named Mickey Mouse Records label!!)

Following its blink-and-you-missed-it solo theatrical release, as well as brief stints in drive-ins on double bills with Mario Bava's *Knives of the Avenger* and *The Road to Fort Alamo*, National Telefilm Associates (who had bought World Enterprises and its catalogue) distributed a pan-and-scanned 16mm version of *Gamera* to television, where it often played alongside the US TV versions of the sequels released by American International (more on them in a moment). This heavily cropped version has been the basis for most 'public domain' video releases to this day, with the exception of a widescreen VHS and laserdisc (remastered from the original elements) released by Neptune Media and Synapse Films, respectively, in 1998. The high-definition transfer of *Gamera the Invincible* on Disc 1 of this boxset, found in the 'Special Features' section, marks the film's worldwide Blu-ray debut.

Twenty years after *Gamera the Invincible*, and with World Enterprises' rights safely expired, the first Gamera film would return to American shores again in yet another iteration. Sandy Frank is a name very familiar to fans of Japanese fantasy media, not least for *Battle of the Planets*, his heavily re-edited and re-dubbed version of the animated series *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman* (1972-1974). Frank's company made a deal with Daiei to acquire five of the Gamera films for the US, including the original cut of the first film. (All five of the English-dubbed Gamera films issued by Sandy Frank Film Syndication would later achieve notoriety when they were relentlessly heckled by the cast of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.)

This version of *Gamera the Giant Monster*, simply titled *Gamera*, was released on VHS and laserdisc by Celebrity Home Video. (Celebrity briefly mooted a computer-colored version of the film, but according to a 1987 *Variety* article, changed their minds following fan outcry.) It features a new credit sequence, wherein the cast and crew names are imposed over footage of the sea's waves. As an existing dub for the original Japanese version did not exist, a new dub was commissioned, recorded at Anvil Studios in England in 1985, featuring actors such as Garrick Hagon (better known as Biggs Darklighter in the original *Star Wars*) and Liza Ross. This dub track has been conformed to the HD master of the Japanese version and is accessible via the 'Set-up' menu on Disc 1.

Gamera vs. Barugon

a.k.a. War of the Monsters

Shortly after its production, Daiei commissioned an English-language dub for the second Gamera film, which was recorded in Hong Kong with actors such as Barry Haigh, Warren Rooke and Ted Thomas. Though Daiei may have anticipated a wide American theatrical release following *Gamera the Invincible* and prepared a dub accordingly, this ultimately did not transpire. The Hong Kong dub would not find a wide release until it was utilized on the version syndicated in the USA by Sandy Frank in the late-1980s (including a VHS release by Celebrity Home Video), which also featured new credits. On Disc 2 of this set, this 'international' dub has been conformed to the HD master of the original Japanese version, and is accessible via the Set-up menu as the 'English #2 (Daiei)' option.

In 1967, having pre-bought the rights to *Gamera vs. Viras* and consulted on its production, American International Television (the television division of James Nicholson and Samuel Arkoff's American International Pictures) also acquired the syndication rights to the second and third Gamera films, which had not been picked up for US distribution. Their version of *Gamera vs. Barugon*, newly re-titled *War of the Monsters*, started airing from early-1968 as part of a syndication package of Japanese monster movies on American television. (Other titles in the package included *Majin*, *Monster of Terror* [a.k.a. *Daimajin*, 1966], *Monster from a Prehistoric Planet* [a.k.a. *Gappa The Triphibian Monster*, 1967] and *Godzilla Vs The Thing* [a.k.a. *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, 1964].)

For this version, American International commissioned a new English dub track, recorded in Rome, Italy by the English Language Dubbers Association (ELDA) and supervised by Salvatore Billitteri. While this dub is arguably superior to the 'international' dub, it may have been necessitated by the fact that American International also re-cut the film, shortening it from 100 minutes down to a brisk 89 minutes. This was likely to fit in more commercials in a two-hour timeslot, but also may have been a response to reports that children became restless and uneasy with the uncut version's more portentous tone and slower pace.

There are two ways to experience *War of the Monsters* on Disc 2 of this boxset. Firstly, the American International dub track has been newly remastered and conformed to the original uncut Japanese version; whenever a scene occurs that is not in the shorter version, the audio reverts to the 'international' dub, and then back again. You can play the film with this audio option by going to the 'Set-up' menu and selecting 'English #1 (A.I.T.V.)'. Alternatively, if you prefer a more seamless and streamlined experience, the 89-minute version has been recreated in HD and is included in the bonus features on Disc 2.

Gamera vs. Gyaos

a.k.a. Return of the Giant Monsters

American International may have changed the title of the third film (as was standard operating practice for them) to *Return of the Giant Monsters* but did not recut it this time around. (That said, the American International version does feature two brief unique insert shots of English-language signs filmed especially for this version.) The English dub for *Return of the Giant Monsters* was likely recorded by ELDA concurrently with the *War of the Monsters* dub, as evidenced by the dubbing performers repeatedly mispronouncing the main monster's name as "Guh-MER-ah". This dub track has been remastered and conformed to the HD master of the Japanese version and is accessible via the Set-up menu as 'English #1 (A.I.T.V.)'.

Daiei also commissioned a separate English dub for the third Gamera film, recorded again in Hong Kong and released by Sandy Frank as *Gamera vs. Gyaos* (again with new credits) in the late-1980s, including a VHS and laserdisc from Celebrity Home Video. This has been conformed to the original Japanese version and is available via the Set-up menu as 'English #2 (Daiei)'.

Gamera vs. Viras

a.k.a. Destroy All Planets

This was the first Gamera film produced with American International's involvement (most evident in its introduction of a Caucasian co-lead), with the film's distribution on American television a foregone conclusion. Despite this, a drastically streamlined budget compared to the previous films resulted in a meagre 72-minute runtime when the film was initially released theatrically in Japan. To be syndicated into a two-hours-with-commercials timeslot, *Gamera vs. Viras* – or as it was now known, *Destroy All Planets* (an obvious nod to *Destroy All Monsters*, the Godzilla film recently released in theaters by American International) – would have to be expanded to 90 minutes.

Rather than film more new footage, the decision was made to double down on the film's already copious use of stock footage from the preceding films, specifically in the 'Videotron' sequence where the alien invaders read Gamera's mind to "learn about his past." This sequence, which barely runs three minutes in the Japanese theatrical version, was ruthlessly expanded to 18 minutes in the American International version, letting entire fight scenes from *Gamera vs. Barugon* and *Gamera vs. Gyaos* play out in almost their entirety. This version was dubbed into English by Titan Productions, the latest iteration of Titra Productions, who had dubbed *Gamera the Invincible* (though many of the in-house dubbing artists from that film had since moved on). It appears that Daiei did not commission their own dub for this film, or at least one is not known to exist.

In 1986, Daiei released a widescreen transfer of the 90-minute cut on laserdisc, touting it as the first release of the "uncut" version. When the film was re-released on laserdisc in 1991, Noriaki Yuasa supervised the editing of an intermediary 81-minute version (mainly losing footage from *Gamera vs. Gyaos*), which has been the dominant version available since.

On Disc 3 of this collection, all three cuts of the film are available in widescreen and HD via seamless branching. When you press 'Play' from the main menu, you will be asked to choose from three different options: 'Original Theatrical Version (72 mins)', 'Director's Version (81 mins)' and 'US Television Version (90 mins)'. The original Japanese and dubbed English audio, the latter newly remastered and conformed to the film, are available for all three cuts of the film.

Gamera vs. Guiron

a.k.a. Attack of the Monsters

Despite American International's involvement in the production of the fifth Gamera film, Daiei went ahead and commissioned their own English dub anyway. Its origins were debated by Gamera fans for years until a keen-eared fan noticed the same voices on the English dub for another Daiei production from the same year, *The Falcon Fighters*. The credits for that film listed "Pedro Productions" as the company responsible, with translation and direction credited to one Pedro H. Komiyama. Whoever is responsible, it remains arguably the most ineffective of the original Gamera dubs, with the two young male protagonists very clearly being dubbed by mature women. The dub was ultimately used for the version syndicated by Sandy Frank in the late-80s and released on VHS and laserdisc by Celebrity Home Video, and achieved instant notoriety when it was screened on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. If masochism is your thing, then you can watch the film with this dub by going to the Set-up menu on Disc 3 and selecting the audio track 'English #2 (Daiei)'.

It is unknown whether American International were offered this dub and refused, but in any case they wisely commissioned their own English dub, once again supervised by Bret Morrison at Titan Productions, and retitled the film *Attack of the Monsters*. The quality of this dub is much superior to the export dub, though it comes with a caveat. For *Attack of the Monsters*, American International decided to cut out the scene where Guiron chops Space Gyaos to pieces; instead, Space Gyaos flies away after losing its leg and is never seen again. This version first started airing on US television stations in 1970, following the pattern of debuting over a year after its Japanese release.

For this Blu-ray, the American International dub has been newly remastered and conformed to the uncut Japanese version; for the shots and dialogue not dubbed for *Attack of the Monsters*, the audio reverts to the original Japanese audio, as this was felt to be less jarring rather than going to the other English dub. To watch the film with this option, go to the Set-up menu on Disc 3 and select the audio track 'English #1 (A.I.T.V.)'.



Gamera vs. Jiger

a.k.a. Gamera vs. Monster X

The last of the original Gamera films to be distributed by American International Television, *Gamera vs. Jiger* was once again dubbed into English by Titan Productions for the film's Stateside television debut (re-titled *Gamera vs. Monster X*), airing from early-1971. (No other English dub is known to exist.) For this Blu-ray, the American International dub track has been newly remastered and conformed to the uncut Japanese version, and is accessible via the Set-up menu on Disc 4.

Gamera vs. Zigra

Possibly due to Daiei's collapse, *Gamera vs. Zigra* was not picked up by American International, and appears not to have been dubbed around the time of its original release. The film would instead make its Stateside debut when it was included in the package acquired and distributed by Sandy Frank Film Syndication. Due to the lack of a pre-existing English track, as with the first film, Sandy Frank commissioned a new dub, again believed to be recorded at Anvil Studios in London in 1985 (the year a character gives as the present date at one point in the dubbed audio of the film). This audio track has been conformed to the uncut Japanese version and is accessible via the Set-up menu on Disc 4.

Gamera Super Monster

The final Showa-era film in the franchise was dubbed into English and was acquired by American International's successor, Filmways Pictures, for distribution in English-language markets, including North America and Australia. The origins of the dub are unknown, but it is suspected to come from Hong Kong, partly due to the "Guh-mer-uh" mispronunciation rearing its head again. This version allegedly premiered in America on MTV in 1981. Two slightly different masters appear to have been circulated: a letterboxed widescreen version titled *Super Monster*, and, more commonly, a fullscreen print titled *Gamera Super Monster*, with squashed opening credits and drastically cropped end credits; both versions featured the same dub, however. This dub track has been newly remastered and conformed to the uncut Japanese version, and is accessible via the Set-up menu on Disc 4.

Gamera the Guardian of the Universe

Gamera's triumphant return was acquired for the US by A.D. Vision, a distributor predominantly specializing in dubbing and distribution for anime content. After releasing the original Japanese version in theaters, the company's home video division, ADV Films, released an English-dubbed version on VHS in 1997, and later again on DVD in 2003. This dub was written, produced and directed by ADV co-founder Matt Greenfield, and features a number of ADV regulars among the dub cast who had also dubbed the company's releases of series like *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. This dub track has been conformed to the new 4K remaster of the original Japanese version, and is available in both 5.1 surround and 2.0 stereo options via the Set-up menu as 'English (U.S.)'.

Curiously, the film was also released theatrically in the UK in 1997 by fledgling distributor Arrival Films, making it the first Gamera film to be released in Britain. (Arrival briefly planned to partner with Neptune Media and Synapse Films in bringing the earlier Gamera films to the UK; however, this did not transpire.) In addition to doing their own bespoke dub with non-professional British actors, Arrival further customized their "UK Special Edition" (as it was billed in the end credits and posters) by replacing much of Kow Otani's score with a selection of thumping techno music, curated by Truelove Label Collective. Following Arrival Films' dissolution, the video rights were taken up by Manga Video, who released this same version on VHS in 1999 and also published a DVD that was given away for free with the video game magazine *Playnation* in 2002. This dub track has been conformed to the new 4K remaster of the original Japanese version, and can be accessed via the Set-up menu as the sole 'English (U.K.)' audio option.

Gamera 2: Attack of Legion

Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris

The second and third films in Shusuke Kaneko's trilogy would be released straight-to-DVD in the US and UK by ADV Films simultaneously in 2003. ADV once again produced their own English dubs, this time written and directed by Kyle Jones. The 5.1 surround and 2.0 stereo tracks for both dubs have been conformed to the 4K remasters of both films and are available on the Set-up menus of each film's respective discs.

ADV Films often had an irreverent sense of humor that would manifest itself in additional 'comedic' dub options for their films. For *Gamera 2*, ADV recorded the infamous "Lake Texarkana" dub, where the actors read their lines in Southern 'hillbilly' accents. For *Gamera 3*, a tongue-in-cheek commentary track featuring actors playing the roles of 'Gamera' and 'Soldier No. 6' was recorded. Both audio options are available on their respective discs via the Special Features menu.

Gamera the Brave

The final Gamera film was released in America by Media Blasters on DVD in 2008, with a new English dub commissioned by the distributor. This dub was carried over to the company's 2012 Blu-ray release, but due to a technical error, featured a misaligned right surround track that caused sync errors in the music and sound effects. This has been corrected for the Blu-ray included in this boxset, which includes 5.1 surround and 2.0 stereo options for the English dub, available via the Set-up menu.

A FOOTNOTE: In many cases, the English-language versions of the Gamera films have been wrongly assumed to be in the public domain due to lapsed copyrights. This is, in fact, inaccurate – Daiei and subsequently Kadokawa retained the rights to all of the films after the original US distributors' licenses lapsed. (The only exception to this may be the *Gamera the Invincible* version of the first film, which does not feature a copyright notice during the credits.) Regardless, poor-quality home video releases of dubious legality have been commonplace; we hope the release of this set renders all other versions redundant.

Many thanks to the dozens of kaiju fans and scholars whose tireless research was of invaluable assistance during the writing of this guide, including (but by no means limited to) Keith Aiken, Cody Himes, Will Offutt and Paulie Senkowsky. My sincere apologies to anyone whose name I have missed out.

ABOUT THE TRANSFERS

The masters for all twelve original Japanese films were prepared and supplied to Arrow Films by the Kadokawa Corporation. *Gamera the Guardian of the Universe*, *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion* and *Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris* were restored in 4K by Kadokawa and approved by director Shusuke Kaneko in 2015.

Original 16mm and 35mm materials relating to the English-language versions originally distributed in the United States by American International and Filmways were accessed through the kind courtesy of Metro Goldwyn Mayer, in association with the Kadokawa Corporation. The English-dubbed audio was restored from the original magnetic and optical tracks by Deluxe, who also conformed it to the Japanese masters. Some additional 16mm materials were sourced from UCLA Film Archive. The film elements, which include English-language credit sequences, insert shots and trailers, were scanned at EFILM and restored at R3store Studios. Additional English-language materials for the series were kindly supplied by Shout! Factory, ADV Films and Media Blasters, with additional thanks to Paulie Senkowsky and Will Offutt.

For *Gamera the Invincible*, the American theatrical version of *Gamera the Giant Monster*, attempts were made to access the original negative held at UCLA Film Archive, but this is no longer legally accessible. A 35mm exhibition print was scanned in high definition by Legend Films, who supplied this HD master to Arrow. This print was missing some shots of a jet pilot at the start of the film, and another film source for these shots could not be found. To ensure an uncut presentation, these missing shots were re-integrated into the master using the HD master for *Gamera the Giant Monster* for the video and an analogue tape master for the dubbed English audio. As a result, some of these shots have burnt-in Japanese subtitles that did not feature on the original American theatrical release, and could not be removed here; we hope these do not affect your enjoyment of the film. Additional restoration took place at R3store Studios.

Additional picture grading, restoration and audio remastering work supervised by **James White** and **James Flower**, Arrow Films

R3store Studios: **Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Nathan Leaman-Hill, Rich Watson**

EFILM: **David Morales**

Deluxe Audio: **Jordan Perry**

MGM: **Dee Dee Dreyer, Rachel Wilson**

UCLA: **Todd Wiener, Steven K. Hill**

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Packaging Produced by **James Flower**

Artwork/Associate Producer **Matthew Frank**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**

QC **James Flower, Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**

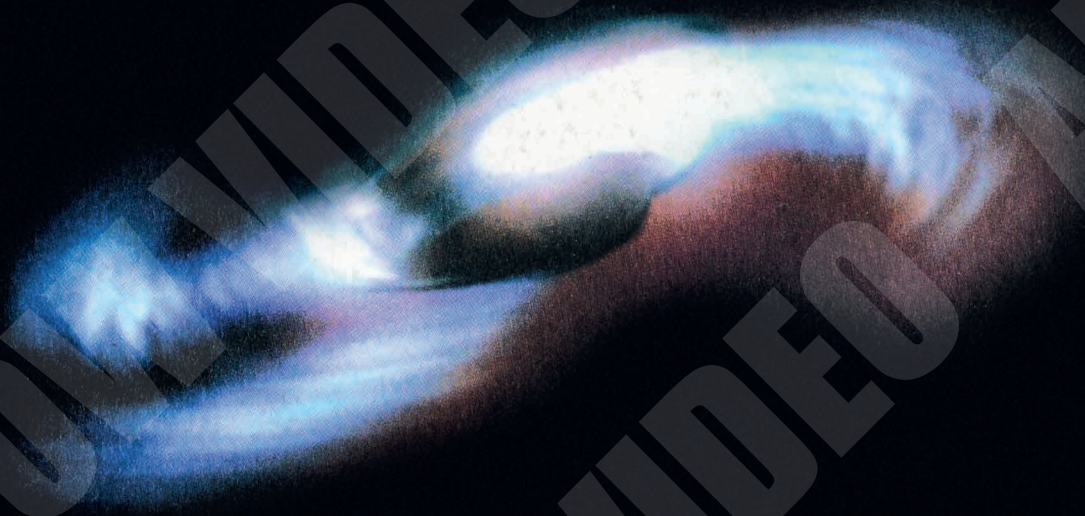
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Design **Obviously Creative**

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