

SHE'S MY SEXY FRANKENSTEIN

When one looks back on the nineteen-eighties teen films from acclaimed writer-director John Hughes today, his sexist impulses become painfully apparent in certain moments. While movies like *The Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink* hold up much better, *Weird Science* (1985) is problematic because its basic premise—two horny, socially awkward teen boys (Anthony Michael Hall and Ian Mitchell-Smith) use then-high-tech to conjure a hot, provocatively dressed woman (Kelly LeBrock) to be their real-life girlfriend—certainly flies in the face of modern #MeToo and “woke” culture. (Of course, the way date rape is laughed off in *Sixteen Candles* is far worse.) Having not seen *Weird Science* in a long time, I found myself rolling my eyes throughout its first half.

But then the second half came along, and it changed my perspective on *Weird Science*. While LeBrock's character Lisa is originally paraded around as a sex goddess for the boys, they never actually take advantage of her nor do they know what to do with the fantasy they have brought to life. She in turn starts teaching them life lessons about being social, talking to real women, and standing up to bullies, particularly by conjuring a trio of *Mad Max*-type bikers to invade their house party and threaten them.

I can certainly see how Millennials and Gen Z kids will look at this movie and go “WTF?” There are many aspects that could have been excised to keep this sci-fi comedy from being so blatantly boy-centric and chauvinist, although in one of two liner notes essays included in the Blu-ray package, gender politics-focused journalist Alexandra Heller-Nicholas argues for a reappraisal of the movie. She does not condone the overtly sexist material, but she does argue that Lisa is in fact smarter and deeper than one would expect, and that she serves a higher purpose. I can appreciate that viewpoint.

At the end of the day, this is a movie best left for Gen Xers who grew up with John Hughes flicks and appreciate the craziness of science fiction and fantasy films of the decade. There are certainly better examples of the genre that one could point to, but even more evolved Gen Xers will probably have a soft spot for a lot of the comedy material here, particularly Bill Paxton's obnoxious military sibling. As expected, Arrow's Video reissue includes loads of new and vintage bonus material to satiate fans of this quirky curio.

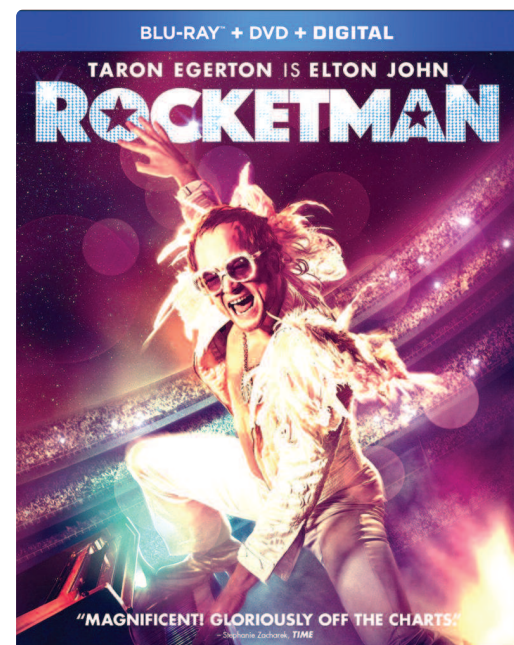
MONSTER MASH OF THE TITANS

I've been a lifelong Godzilla fan ever since I terrorized my kindergarten classmates with my impression of beloved *kaiju* clashes. My adoration for the Big G has not abated as evidenced by my substantial collection of movies, toys, T-shirts, and soundtracks. When Hollywood put him on screen back in 1998 in that awful Matthew Broderick vehicle directed by Roland Emmerich, I was pretty sure they were never going to get it right the way that the Japanese had. But along came Gareth Edwards and the solid 2014 reboot, made in conjunction with Toho Studios, and my stance softened.

This long-awaited sequel, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019) which is written and directed by Michael Dougherty, resurrects many of the massive “Titans,” which is how the giant *kaiju* are referred to in this series. Ecoterrorists (led by Charles Dance) want to bring balance back to a world overrun by humans, so they set about releasing long dormant Titans being monitored and contained by a secret global group called Monarch. With the three-headed dragon Ghidorah, also known as Monster Zero, leading the pack, a number of giant creatures are re-awakened, including Rodan (who is not on our side) and Mothra (who is). Naturally, our human protagonists, who include a constantly griping Kyle Chandler, Vera Farmiga, Millie Bobby Brown, Bradley Whitford, and Ken Watanabe, figure out how the hell they can contain these creatures before they destroy our world. There is also a family drama element that involves Brown being caught between two parents (Farmiga and Chandler) with clashing world and monster views. Both of them play critical roles in the story.

I'll be honest: I was expecting more from this movie. Despite the dazzling visual effects, intense pace, and rousing score from Bear McCreary, the writing itself feels a bit lazy, paying lip service to lofty themes without diving deep enough into them. The solid cast can only do so much with that. Dougherty does well culling together mythology from past Japanese efforts to update it to the modern day, but the character motivation and development are often lacking. *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* relies too heavily on digital overkill to make an impression on its audience, when a bit more restraint and more introspective human moments would have balanced out the immense scale of this piece. That's what made many of the classic Godzilla movies work.

The thermonuclear finale takes place in my hometown of Boston, which earns the dubious distinction of being leveled during its climatic showdown. That actually does have a highly emotional component that I wish had existed throughout other parts of the movie. Many Godzilla fans will likely enjoy this updated retelling of the *kaiju* franchise, but I wish Dougherty had managed to push things further rather than essentially turning our childhood icon into a big screen videogame.



A WILD ROCKET RIDE

I've got to admit that I've never been an Elton John fan. I was never drawn to his music nor flamboyant stage persona. However, *Rocketman* has ignited interest from me. Dexter Fletcher's film is a very entertaining and unusual biopic told both with regular dramatic scenes and fantasy-driven musical sequences that add an element of magical realism to the milieu. This set-up also allows for songs to be thematically presented out of order of their emergence—in real life, a teenage Elton did not sing “Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting”—which was a major complaint about *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Beyond portraying the larger than life persona of Elton John, star Taron Egerton sings every number that he performs in the film, which is an impressive feat in itself. While the Elton John that we know has publicly projected a strong air of confidence, this story shows us both his vulnerable and angry sides that arose as a result of abandonment by a stern military father and betrayals by various family members and associates over the years. The entire narrative is framed around an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting that John immediately attends at the start of the movie. From there, we learn about his troubled childhood, profound collaboration with lyricist Bernie Taupin (played by Jamie Bell), rise to stardom, and lapse into drug and alcohol abuse as a result of the pressures of fame and keeping himself closeted for years. My one chief complaint is that the years are never fully laid out. While the closing titles indicate that the depicted timeline could end around 1991, it finishes with the recreation of the video “I'm Still Standing” from 1983.

Rocketman is a very fun ride—the choreography of the musical sequences is truly impressive and Egerton's star turn really sells the movie. The Blu-Ray comes packed with bonus material, including extended musical sequences, deleted scenes, behind-the-scenes featurettes, and liner notes from John himself that discuss both this movie as well as his forthcoming autobiography, *Me*, which is due out in October. For Elton John fans in particular, they should make good companion works. And as you can guess from the construction of this film, there will likely be an attempt to turn it into a Broadway musical. John has actually written for the Great White Way, so that makes total sense.