

**An Official 'Bad-Bug-Movie' Review**  
**ENT 812, Insects in the Cinema**  
**Michigan State University**

Mothra (or Godzilla Vs. The Thing)  
Reviewed by John Green



Background:

The 1964 film *Mothra vs. Godzilla* (also called *Godzilla Against Mothra*, *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, and *Godzilla vs. the Thing*), should not to be confused with the 1992 movie *Godzilla vs. Mothra*. It was directed by Ishiro Honda (pictured below) and produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka and Sanezumi Fujimoto of Toho Company Ltd. during the Shōwa era (Shōwa era refers to the period of time in Japanese history that corresponds to the reign of Emperor Shōwa. The whole of the Godzilla series is partitioned into three eras grouped on the basis of monster movie production style). It is the fourth Godzilla movie overall, and the second film to feature Mothra. Honda directed this film during the height of his career, as he was still reeling from the success of the most successful film of the Godzilla series. *King Kong vs. Godzilla* was released two years prior to the epic battle with Mothra, and grossed more at the box offices than any other Godzilla picture. Perhaps Godzilla's success as an antagonist in this movie led Honda to alter the dynamics of the giant lizard for the battle with the giant moth, as many of the other Shōwa era films lean more towards portraying Godzilla as a friend or protector of humanity. *Godzilla vs. Mothra* is often considered to be one of the darker members of the Shōwa series for this reason. Interestingly, this film is also viewed by fans of this film genre as the ultimate Godzilla movie. It had everything you



could ask for: wonderfully cheesy special effects, “great” dubbing, a couple of hot Japanese twins, and wanton, widespread destruction. I know...Mothra vs. Godzilla is bad, but the film so unashamedly revels in its sheer and absolute badness that you can't help but like it.



#### Movie Synopsis:

The movie starts out with a massive storm that washes a gigantic egg from the shores of Infant Island into the ocean. The egg then washes up on shore near Nagoya, Japan. The three main human protagonists enter the movie at this point. Ichiro, the reporter, and Junko, the photographer arrive to report on the the egg and interview the head scientist at the site, Professor Muira. While still under evaluation, the egg is ‘sold’ by fishermen of the area who apparently



hold rights to it. The Hitler-esque developer and self-proclaimed entrepreneur for the new owner of the egg, Happy Enterprises, (Kumayama; pictured left), interjects himself upon the scene at this point to announce that anyone who wants to see the egg (including scientists) will have to pay because he plans to build an amusement park around the egg (which, amazingly, is constructed in only a few days time). Two tiny, twin girls (the ‘shobjin’) later appear at Happy Enterprise’s headquarters to ask Kumayama and his partner to return the egg to Mothra and its home, Infant Island. The

businessmen not only refuse, but attempt to capture the girls to display as an additional exhibit. The girls then make the same plea to the human protagonists of the movie, but despite their efforts the egg is not returned. The girls return to their island with Mothra at this point in the film, but warn that when the larvae hatch they will destroy the surroundings in their search for nourishment.

On a different area of the island, Godzilla is awakened and proceeds to destroy Nagoya. The military responds with tanks, frontier missiles, and electrical attacks, but are unable to thwart the giant lizard's advance. The human protagonists then travel to Infant Island in hopes of enlisting Mothra's aid in defeating Godzilla. They are greeted by the orange-skinned natives of the island with open hostility, and their plea for help is turned down because the egg was not returned, and the natives are still angry about previous nuclear testing on the island by the Japanese government. Junko eventually convinces the natives to aid them, and the two tiny girls appear again at this point. Through song they convince Mothra to fight Godzilla, even though the creature knows it will not have enough strength to return home before it dies. The scene then cuts to a confrontation between the greedy owners of Happy Enterprises in which one kills the other. Kumayama feels used and wants his money back so he tries to empty his partner's safe, but is shot in the back for his efforts. The shooter gathers his money and attempts to exit the building, but is crushed by falling rubble from Godzilla's rampage before he can make it out.



Mothra arrives on the scene none too soon, just as Godzilla is planning to make a giant omelet out of her egg. The epic battle ensues, and it seems that Mothra may have the upper hand as she sheds her deadly poison scales over Godzilla. But suddenly Mothra is struck by the lizard's radiation breath and perishes over her egg. Godzilla then turns his attention to the pesky humans whose failed attempts at thwarting him only gets their tanks melted again and again. A lightning net attack is used against Godzilla, but it's effectiveness is short-lived. While

the giant lizard is distracted, the tiny twin girls appear and sing until the egg hatches and two caterpillar/silkworm-like creatures emerge. Mothra's progeny seek revenge for their fallen mother and pursue Godzilla across the island. They defeat Godzilla by shooting a web-like substance from their mouths that eventually encases him in a cocoon and causes him to plummet to the bottom of the sea. The movie concludes with the tiny twin girls and the giant twin larvae returning home to Infant Island.



#### Cultural Aspects:

Economic growth and relative political harmony characterized 1964 Japan when this movie was released. This time in Japanese history is often referred to as the end of reconstruction after WWII. The Summer Olympic Games were held in Tokyo the same year, and helped to solidify this view throughout Japan. People born during or after this time are often referred to as "shinjinrui" (new people) because they did not endure the hardships of the war, or its aftermath. One notable scene of this movie related to the cultural attitude of Japan this time involves the "Frontier Missile" sequence, where American battleships, from sea, are inaccurately bombarding Godzilla (who is on a beach in Japan) with missile fire. This scene was deleted from the

Japanese version because many native movie-goers, still sensitive from World War II, took issue with seeing American missiles strike Japanese ground.

Reflections of Japanese attitude towards rich, entrepreneurial capitalists are obvious in the portrayals of the owners of Happy Enterprises. Ishiro attacks corporate greed with the Hitler-like Kumayama and his smug boss Torahata (dressed indicative of an American businessman;



pictured below) who are characters purposefully easy to despise. Their Western clothing and mannerisms are also portrayed intentionally. The reinstatement of the Japan-United States Mutual Security Assistance Pact had angered citizens, and spurred many protests throughout the nation when it was signed in 1960. The pact proclaimed the United States as one of Japan's military protectors in order to limit and control the scope of the Asian nation's military development.

The scientist (Professor Muira) in this movie takes on the role of lead human protagonist. Although his particular area of science is never discerned (he is evaluating the giant egg in the beginning of the movie, and later “deradiates” other human good guys with some sort of gas chamber), other characters defer to him throughout the film. When he decides that only Mothra can defeat Godzilla, and to subsequently travel to Infant Island to enlist her help, everyone else agrees without question to go along. Even in Japan, it seems common knowledge among people that “scientists are trained to think right.”

The female sex is portrayed very positively in this film. Although the plucky young photographer (Junko Nakanishi) is often talked down to by her partner the reporter (Ichiro Sakai), she always seems to know just what to say. She convinces Professor Muira in the beginning of the movie to do an interview about the egg even after he had steadfastly refused. She also convinces the natives of Infant Island and the tiny twin girls to ask Mothra for help, after these people had already refused to consider doing so. The tiny twin girls are very powerful in that they are the only beings who can telepathically communicate with Mothra (and may possibly represent the dual powers of the cosmos in this movie). Then, of course, you have Mothra, hero of the film and one of the only insects in cinema that is portrayed in a positive light.

This is the first Shōwa era Godzilla film to be released in the United States with only minor editing. Although, when it was released in the U.S., the film's title was changed to *Godzilla vs. The Thing*. The movie poster made no mention of Mothra as Godzilla's opponent, but instead featured some sort of tentacled monster mostly obscured by lettering. Presumably, this was done as a marketing ploy probably because the U.S. affiliates in charge of marketing this film did not believe Mothra was fearsome enough to draw a crowd. American movie-goers became confused during the film because in this version, human characters make reference to both the Thing as well as Mothra when speaking of the giant Lepidopteran-like monster. To complicate things

even more, Mothra's unnamed progeny are hatched at the end of the movie to avenge their fallen mother.



### Physical Aspects:

The Godzilla suit used in this film is a favorite among fans for a couple of reasons. It is less reptilian than previous versions, in that the face and eyes are not as dinosaur-like. A contemplated malevolence is seen in the eyes of the giant lizard as opposed to the blind rage of an animal. The upper lip also has a slight wobble which apparently lends more animation to Godzilla's character.

The special effects for this film aren't really all that special. Godzilla is a guy in a rubber suit and Mothra flies around on cables. The rest of the set is scale down versions of the originals. The use of miniatures in film-making was an accepted, standard cinematic tool when this film was made, but it makes the movie difficult to take seriously for modern viewers approaching it with no reference. The artificial lightning shots do look cool though.

The composer for this film as well as the original Godzilla movie was Akira Ifukube. Akira is also responsible for the creation of Godzilla's trademark roar which is produced by rubbing a resin-covered leather glove along the loosened strings of a double bass. This film marks the only known professional disagreement between Ishiro Honda and Akira. Ishiro added music post-production during Godzilla's initial assault on Iwa Island when Akira had intended there to be none.

### Entomological Aspects:

The use of an insect for this movie was not particularly important to the storyline .

As Mothra doesn't possess a very intimidating demeanor, practically any flying or avian creature could have been "giganticized" and used as Godzilla's opponent (Rodan perhaps). Her special abilities as a moth or as larva (scale abscission and silk web shooting) don't relate to the actions of actual moths or caterpillars. Although many of the giant Moth's attributes are incorrect entomologically, she mostly closely resembles the real European Peacock butterfly (*Inachis io*). Among other major discrepancies in the moth form, Mothra's eyes more resemble the eyes of bees, while her antennae are semi-plumose in contrast to the European Peacock butterfly's clubbed antennae. The larvae most resemble silk-worms, but even that is a loose comparison as silk-worms use silk for their cocoons and not as a weapon. Though tough, no silk-web should be strong enough to neutralize Godzilla. There is more going on with this webbing than meets the eye it seems. Despite her character as an insect being mostly unnecessary to support the storyline of this film, it should be appreciated that Mothra has earned her place as a monster movie immortal.



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