



TOHO KAIJU MARATHON

OFFICIAL PRESS KIT



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Press Kit Formatting Note

All names in this press kit are rendered in the Western style. That is, with the given name first and family name second. This is opposed to the Eastern style, favored by the actors themselves, which renders the names in the reverse order.



Toho Kaiju Eiga

The genre of the giant monster movie has existed for nearly as long as moving pictures have been recorded onto celluloid. From 1925's silent *The Lost World*, which featured a stop-motion brontosaurus rampaging through London, the idea of creating a special-effects reality of fantastic creatures inflicting massive carnage on an unheard of scale has captivate audiences worldwide. Though often berated for being mindless B-movies with sketchy dialogue and unrealistic premise, filmmakers often found the genre to be a prime ground for relating real-world messages through other-worldly imagery.

This was especially true with Japanese filmmakers. Where their American and British counterparts tended to focus on giant monsters simply for giant monsters sake, the Japanese storytellers embedded topical meaning into their films. *King Kong* (1933) is little more than a story of a giant ape that runs into conflict with the modern world and its tender feelings towards the female lead. It's ultimate deep meaning, that "beauty killed the beast." Ishiro Honda's *Gojira* (1954), on the other hand, imbues Godzilla with all the attributes of a walking atom bomb, a stark reminder of the terrible effects of World War II. This gives Godzilla a far more dangerous aura than Kong and Honda's film becomes that much more human as a result. Godzilla as an analogue to atomic warfare is much more tangible for viewers to relate to than the moral of "beauty killed the beast."

The success of *Gojira* was not ignored and Toho studios shifted its production efforts into producing more films. It would be another eight years before Godzilla films became a franchise and Toho experimented with a great number of monsters in all shapes and variations in the meanwhile. Many stand-alone monster films were produced during this time, each set on testing out a new monster in the hopes of exploring its popularity and feasibility for sequels. *Varan* (1958) was one such experiment and, since that film failed to generate the interest and popularity of the other monsters, Varan was not invited back for repeat appearances. The genera of *Kaiju Eiga* – literally, "monster movie" – was born. With the largest of the lot, like *Gojira*, *Rodan* (1956), *Mothra* (1961), and their ilk, came the *Daikaiju Eiga*, the "giant monster movie." With this newfound *raison d'être*, Toho became an absolute powerhouse during the sixties and seventies, churning out film after film at a breakneck pace, with scores of new titles coming out each year.

(continued)



Most remarkably this massive quantity of films was primarily monopolized by a select few filmmakers, each individual working on several different productions each year. That makes it no surprise that the three films in this marathon were all directed by Ishiro Honda, produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka, and with special effects by Eiji Tsuburaya. Cast-wise, Yoshio Tsuchiya has roles in all three as does Haruo Nakajima, performing the *kaiju* “suitmation” as he did as Godzilla. Likewise, Akihiko Hirata, Fuyuki Murakami, and Kenji Sahara star in two of the films and, for the most part, the rest of their cast-mates were no strangers to this type of movie.

Toho did not remain alone in this venture. Daiei studios began producing their own series of *Daikaiju Eiga* in the form of Gamera, the jet-powered flying turtle. Daiei never had the budget and – daresay – talent of Toho and their films reflected this. Gamera’s monsters and effects were generally inferior to Toho’s and the writing weaker. This goes to show how lucky Toho had been with its *kaiju* dream team of Honda, Tanaka, and Tsuburaya.

Toho remained this movie-making powerhouse until the energy crisis in the 1970s forced the company to slow production down to nearly a halt, as all Japanese cinema suffered. Revitalized in the mid-1980s, Toho quickly returned to Godzilla production, leaving behind the quest for stand-alone monster flicks. Today the *Kaiju Eiga* no longer have the widespread appeal to dominate an entire film company’s production efforts and the monopoly has been lifted allowing companies other than Toho and Daiei to produce their own distinct monsters, each with different meaning and appearance, to continue the legacy of fascinating audiences just as that small brontosaurus puppet did eighty-three years ago.



Godzilla, the best known *Kaiju*



Toho Kaiju Marathon



The insignia for the Toho Kaiju Marathon features Toho's own emblem roundel front and center. The two Katakana letters spell out the studio's name (*to-ho*) while the marathon's descriptive name is indicated below. Under that are the three films that make up the Toho Kaiju movie day: *The Mysterians* (1957), *Varan the Unbelievable* (1958), and *Matango* (*Attack of the Mushroom People*) (1963).

The Toho shield is mounted upon a *torii*, the symbolic gateway to Shinto shrines. This very Japanese icon often features in the *kaiju* films that come out of the country. Traditionally constructed of wood and painted red, *torii* serve as an entranceway and transition point, passing between the sanctity of the shrine and the vulgarity of the outside world. Nonetheless, this important distinction rarely prevents the *daikaiju* from destroying them during the course of their rampage.



Films in this Marathon

The lineup for this particular marathon is as follows:

- 1) *The Mysterians* (1957)
- 2) *Varan the Unbelievable* (1958)
- 3) *Matango* (1963)

The three films all come from Toho's experimenting era of the late fifties and early sixties, trying out new concepts, new monsters, and new species. What is unique is that, while they are all *Kaiju Eiga*, they represent different aspects of the genera.

The Mysterians is much more steadfast science fiction than the other two, focusing on threats from outer space and advanced technologies. *Varan* is the quintessential monster film, much in the vein of *Godzilla* and *Mothra*. Finally, *Matango* is a horror film about human beings losing their individuality and transforming into grotesque new lifeforms.

What follows is a closer look at each of these movies.



The Mysterians at work



The Mysterians



Chikyū Bōeigun (*Earth Defense Force*) / The Mysterians

Directed by Ishiro Honda, 1957. 85 minutes.

Staring: Kenji Sahara (Joji Atsumi), Yumi Shirakawa (Etsuko Shiraishi), Momoko Kochi (Hiroko Iwamoto), Akihiko Hirata (Ryoichi Shiraishi), Takashi Shimura (Dr. Kenjiro Adachi), Susumu Fujita (General Morita), Hisaya Ito (Captain Seki), Yoshio Kosugi (Commander Sugimoto), Fuyuki Murakami (Dr. Nobu Kawanami), Tetsu Nakamura (Dr. Koda), Yoshio Tsuchiya (Mysterian Leader), and Haruo Nakajima (Moguera).

Japanese premier: December 28, 1957.

American premier: May 15, 1959.



SYNOPSIS:

Aliens from the destroyed planet Mysteroid arrive on Earth to request a patch of land and women to marry. The humans don't take to kindly to this request causing the Mysterians to deploy their giant robot, Moguera, to cause damage until the humans capitulate. Undeterred, the humans launch an assault against the technologically-superior Mysterians in a war to determine which power ultimately controls planet Earth.

KAIJU:

Moguera.

A giant robot constructed by the Mysterians for use against the humans on planet Earth. Capable of burrowing and drilling underground, Moguera is capable of destroying infrastructure from below its foundations. Moguera is also capable of firing blasts of heat energy from its eyes, causing widespread fires and damage.



The Moguera



Varan the Unbelievable



Daikaijū Baran (Giant Monster Baran) / Varan the Unbelievable

Directed by Ishiro Honda, 1958. 87 minutes.

Staring: Kouzou Nomura (Kenji Uozaki), Ayumi Sonoda (Yuriko Sinjou), Fumindo Matsuo (Motohiko Horiguti), Hisaya Itou (Ichirou Sinjou), Nadao Kirino (Yukata Kawata), Korenari Senda (Dr. Sugimoto), Fuyuki Murakami (Dr. Majima), Akihiko Hirata (Dr. Fujimura), Akio Kusama (Colonel Kusama), Yoshio Tsuchiya (Lcdr. Katsumoto), Akira Yamada (Issaku), and Haruo Nakajima (Varan).

Japanese premier: October 14, 1958.

American premier: December 7, 1962.



SYNOPSIS:

When a scientific expedition searching for a rare species of butterfly goes missing a second team is sent to find them. They discover not the first team but rather Varan, a giant monster who emerges from the river and makes for Tokyo. Revered as a god by the villagers who live along the river, Varan's path of destruction and carnage provoke the military to spring into action, hoping to put an end to the scaly menace before he can do more harm.

KAIJU:

Varan.

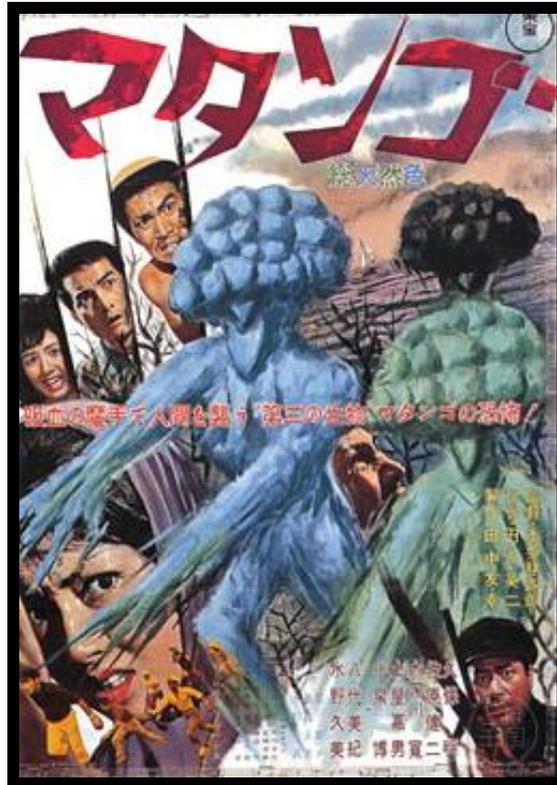
Known to the villagers as *Baradagi-Sanjin*, Varan is actually a sort of very large river iguana. Armed head to tail with a row of sharp spikes, Varan is capable of holding his own against the intensity of a concentrated military attack. Though primarily aquatic by nature, Varan sports a membrane under his forearms granting him the ability to take flight.



Varan, the Unbelievable



Matango



Matango / Matango (Attack of the Mushroom People)

Directed by Ishiro Honda, 1963. 89 minutes.

Staring: Akira Kubo (Kenji Morai), Kumi Mizuno (Mami Sekimuchi), Hiroshi Koizumi (Aoyuki Sakuda), Yoshio Tsuchiya (Kasoko Kasai), Kenji Sahara (Senzo Koyama), Hiroshi Tachikawa (Etsuro Yoshida), Miki Yashiro (Akiko Soma), Eisei Amamoto (Transitional Matango), and Haruo Nakajima (Matango).

Japanese premier: August 11, 1963.

American premier: 1965 (on television).



SYNOPSIS:

During a terrible storm a pleasure boat is lost and its survivors washed onto a deserted island. To their surprise they discover an abandoned ship, similarly washed onto the beach. This vessel, devoid of any crew is heavily infested by fungus but the foodstuffs stored on board are found to be edible. This, however, only buys time from the inevitability of starvation. As the survivors begin eating the plentiful mushrooms on the island they quickly learn what became of the older ships crew ... and that they are not alone on the island.

KAIJU:

Matango.

There is no singular creature named Matango. Rather Matango refers to the creatures that normal humans transform into after eating the mushrooms found in abundance on the island. Consuming said fungi leads to the gradual change into a walking mushroom being.



Eating Matango mushrooms



Press Release

The official press release for the Toho Kaiju Marathon:

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Wednesday, March 5, 2008.

Life's too short to take it too seriously. That's why we have Japan to thank for their abundant supply of campy and ridiculous monster flicks. For this marathon we plan to watch three of Toho's sillier releases while basking in the free-for-all attitude of summer. This isn't a marathon for thinking too hard and taking seriously. This is a marathon for kicking back and realizing that the world doesn't have to be so stressful.

Like the majority of Toho's *Kaiju* films of this era, all three of these are directed by Ishiro Honda, are produced by Tomoyuki Tanaka, and feature special effects by Eiji Tsuburaya, all of Godzilla fame. As a bonus, the late Akihiko Hirata (Gojira's Dr. Serizawa) is in two of the movies!

The Mysterians. 1957. 88 minutes.

Varan the Unbelievable. 1958. 87 minutes.

Matango (Attack of the Mushroom People). 1963. 89 minutes.

Total running time: 264 minutes / 4.4 hours

All movies are in Japanese with English subtitles

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The Toho Kaiju Marathon is to be held at Josh's House.

Marathon date: Saturday, July 19, 2008 at 4:00 PM.

Particulars:

- Marathon guest list is *open registry*.
- Marathon format is *fixed schedule*.
- Marathon type is *multiple series*.
- Marathon length is *4.5 hours total*.