

A different kind of monster mash

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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The lizard takes on the ape in 'Godzilla vs. Kong'

Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time: 113 minutes

This feature is playing at open cinemas and is also available for streaming on HBO Max.

It has been 67 years since the gargantuan green lizard made his debut on the big screen and 88 years for the massive ape. In the decades since, there have been dozens of sequels and reinventions of these characters, some of which have been better than others. The latest is *Godzilla vs. Kong*, which attempts to combine the icons in its recent series of giant monster movies. This is a silly flick with creatures that are more relatable and interesting than the humans following them around.

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However, if your primary reason for watching is to see the two giant behemoths go head-to-head, you will get an enjoyably over-the-top and mayhem-filled climax.

After events of 2019's *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, the two monsters are being kept apart to maintain peace and prevent a swath of destruction. When Godzilla appears unexpectedly and attacks the Apex Cybernetics factory run by Walter Simmons (Demian Bichir), the world fears that the giant lizard has turned evil. The CEO decides to fund the research of geologist Nathan Lind (Alexander Skarsgård) and test his "Hollow Earth" theory. It contends that there is an incredible power source at the center of the planet that could stop the monster.

To get there, they need the assistance of the giant ape Kong, now under the care of Dr. Ilene Andrews (Rebecca Hall) and her daughter Jia (Kaylee Hottle). As they begin the journey, teenage Godzilla authority Madison Russell (Millie Bobby Brown) and her friend Josh (Julian Dennison) team with conspiracy theorist podcaster Bernie (Brian Tyree Henry) to find the true reason behind Godzilla's violent turn.

In truth, this is more of a Kong movie than a Godzilla film, with the primary focus on the primate and the team's attempt to reach the center of the Earth. Godzilla really is a secondary character here who only shows up to engage in fighting. In addition to the misleading title, the screenplay has its fair share of issues. Those familiar with the original Toho franchise will immediately be able to predict the story's ultimate plot twist.

It also suffers from clunky and awkward dialogue. One feels very sorry for the cast members, who are often forced to literally explain their own actions when they perform tasks. And when they attempt to detail the "science" behind monster behavior or the hypothesis about the "Hollow Earth," it couldn't be more leaden.

Of course, it's difficult for a movie like this not to be absurd, especially given the exaggerated nature of what is occurring. The characters occasionally crack wise about the situation and a couple of their observations are amusing. Yet it's hard to say whether some of the funniest elements are on purpose or unintentional. This includes the remarkably lax security at the secretive high-tech Apex factory as the young heroes try to sneak in, or Dr. Andrews panicking about the safety of her daughter while continually putting her in harm's way.

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I'm going to assume that the movie is aware of its shortcomings and that the stilted yammering is to be chuckled at as the feature races toward its epic finale. The monster material looks CGI-heavy, but at least the conflicts themselves are energetically rendered. And there are some original visual flourishes and creative ideas injected into the proceedings. There's an amusing skirmish at sea that involves Kong trying to stay on stable ground by jumping from ship to ship.

During a later exchange when the giants trade blows, the camera will hold on a monster's head as its body is thrown into buildings. Admittedly, the climax is a blast to witness and does provide the necessary cheesy thrills.

Overall, this title is better than the film that preceded it, even if it does have plenty of notable defects. The human characters are given little to do other than deliver lengthy doses of exposition and behave irrationally. But the film's main selling point does provide entertaining action for fans of giant monster movies. *Godzilla vs. Kong* isn't a fight for the ages.

But, when it focuses on its unusual stars, the flick does manage to land a few blows.

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