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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

“Go, go, Godzilla!” Defining and Creating Meaning in the Godzilla Franchise

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements of HON 420

Fall 2023

By

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“Go, go, Godzilla!” Defining and Creating Meaning in the Godzilla Franchise

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Abstract: Godzilla is one of the longest running film franchises in history. Its core anti-nuclear message has stood the test of time, giving it continued relevance in the modern world, especially in its home country of Japan. However, after 69 years and 36 movies, it is safe to say that Godzilla, both as a movie franchise and as a character, has changed drastically since 1954. These changes, coupled with the globalization of the franchise and the creation of a new, US based Godzilla series, have created a complex and at times contradictory web of differing themes and adaptations. This project examines how the idea of Godzilla has changed over time, both in Japan and in the United States. After extensive research into both the original films as well as secondary material analyzing the franchise, it can be concluded that Godzilla, in both Japan and the United States, has evolved into multiple distinct, yet interconnected characters that serve to represent the different beliefs, hopes, and fears of the two nations. This scholarly analysis is synthesized into a creative piece that further explores the meaning of Godzilla, as well as how Fandom and Fanfiction inform our understandings of media.

Keywords and Phrases: Godzilla, Fanfiction, Fan-historian, cultural studies, comparative analysis, film analysis, film history.

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Page 21 Figure 1: A collage of a portion of my Godzilla collection

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Scholarly Analysis

The Godzilla franchise is one of the longest-running film series in history and its iconic, namesake character is one of the most well-known movie monsters around the world. Initially a metaphor for nuclear destruction and an embodiment of Japan's attitude in the post-war world, Godzilla quickly evolved into a much more complicated, varied character that continues to evoke a variety of feelings from audiences today. Godzilla, while originating as a purely serious, nuclear metaphor, has managed to become a symbol embraced by a variety of audiences, young and old, and one that represents a myriad of different issues, ranging from the ongoing debates about nuclear power, to environmentalism, and Japanese nationalism. The recent revival of the franchise during the 2010s has raised questions about Godzilla's evolution and how he has changed in the modern era to maintain relevance. One such question, brought about by the stark differences in both tone, imagery, and themes between the recent American and Japanese releases, is what is the overall meaning of Godzilla? This project will assert that the meaning of Godzilla has slowly changed since the first film's release in 1954, with both Japan and the US utilizing Godzilla as a way to embody and deal with the issues that define the times when the films were made, showing that Godzilla, both as a franchise and a character, while still maintaining his anti-nuclear roots, has managed to take on new meanings to stay relevant in the modern age.

The origins of the Godzilla franchise are directly tied to the widespread devastation Japan experienced throughout World War II, especially the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States. While Godzilla's nuclear origins are commonly understood on a basic level, it is important to remember how significant

Godzilla's meaning is to Japan as a nation. Author David Kalat summed the Japanese perspective up succinctly by stating that, "Only the Japanese have directly experienced the horrors of nuclear war, and their perspective as victims of the atomic age carries a deeper significance" (Kalat, 2010, p. 15). It is important to remember that, no matter how much the perception of the franchise has changed throughout its history, Godzilla is a lasting reminder of the first and only time nuclear weaponry was used against a nation and its citizens, an event that only Japan can truly comprehend. While other nations have experienced nuclear accidents in the time since World War II, nothing has come close to the sheer amount of nuclear fueled death and destruction caused by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, giving Japan an unmatched emotional attachment to the idea of nuclear power in the modern world.

While the atomic bombings provided the atmosphere for Godzilla's creation, the franchise was much more directly inspired by the Lucky Dragon No. 5 Incident, where a Japanese fishing boat was irradiated due to the American Castle Bravo test in March of 1954. This event brought nuclear fear back to mainland Japan and ultimately inspired Producer Tomoyuki Tanaka with the idea for what would become *Gojira* (1954). Tanaka hired director Ishiro Honda to head the project, a choice that would have widespread ramifications on the film's tone and messaging. A World War II veteran, Honda's experience had left him with a staunchly anti-war perspective (Kalat, 2010). This perspective, coupled with Japan's nuclear history, resulted in a film much different from previous monster movies (Brothers, 2011).

Steeped with symbolism and meaningful imagery, *Gojira* was released on November 3rd, 1954. Before *Gojira* many monster movies, especially those in the United

States, while having underlying symbolism, were mostly treated as action spectacles. One prominent example is *King Kong* (1933), arguably the most important monster movie of all time. While Kong is presented as a somewhat tragic character in the original film, he is still the film's main antagonist whose defeat is something to be celebrated. *Gojira's* tone is much more dark and somber than pre-existing and contemporary monster movies. It is a film that does not shy away from the pain, suffering, and widespread destruction brought about by a kaiju (Kaiju is a term commonly used by fans of Japanese monster media that is commonly translated as "monster". While it can technically be used to describe any "monstrous creature", it is typically used to describe the giant, Japanese monsters that were popularized by the Godzilla franchise). We see the human cost of the attack, with hospitals overflowing with injured and doctors using Geiger counters to check individuals for signs of radiation (Ikeda, 2011). The nuclear imagery is not limited to the destruction shown throughout the film, as Godzilla himself is a symbol of the atomic bomb (Brougher, 2013). It is also important to realize that, while Godzilla is defeated in the end, the mood at the end of the film is not celebratory. Godzilla is only defeated through the use of another potential weapon of mass destruction, the oxygen destroyer, and its creator, Dr. Serizawa, sacrifices himself to ensure that it is never used again. As the film ends, Dr. Yamane, an old scientist, states that, "I can't believe Godzilla is the only survivor of its species. If we continue testing H-bombs, another Godzilla will one day appear again, somewhere in the world" (*Gojira*). Rather than triumph, the film leaves the audience with a hopeful, yet ominous call to action: end the use and development of nuclear weapons, or there will always be the potential for them to be used again.

The success of *Gojira* would ultimately spawn one of the longest-running film franchises in history. Before delving into the complex evolution of the franchise, it is important to have a general understanding of Godzilla's chronology to avoid potential confusion. The Japanese Godzilla Franchise can be divided into four distinct eras: Showa, Heisei, Millennium, and Reiwa. Showa refers to the first era of Godzilla that ran from 1954-1975. Named after Japanese Emperor Showa (commonly known as Hirohito in the United States), the 15 films of the Showa era were defined by large amounts of thematic evolution and diversity. The franchise took a nine-year break before coming back in 1984. This marked the beginning of the Heisei Era of Godzilla. While the first film, *Godzilla* (1984), was released during the reign of Emperor Showa, a majority of the films in the era, which included seven movies released from 1984-1995, were released during the reign of Emperor Heisei. The Heisei Era marked a return to form for Godzilla, with more serious films than that of the late Showa Era. The Millennium Era followed the Heisei Era and was named after the turn of the century. The Millennium Era included six films released from 1999-2004. Most of the Millennium films were reboots, with a lack of narrative direction leading to stagnation and the franchise taking a break after its fiftieth anniversary in 2004. The final and current era of Godzilla, the Reiwa Era, named after the most recent Japanese Emperor, started in 2016 and currently includes two films, *Shin Godzilla* (2016) and *Godzilla: Minus One* (2023). While original American Godzilla films also fall into these eras, they are typically separated into their own chronology. Specifically, there is the standalone *Godzilla* (1998), released by Sony and directed by Roland Emmerich, and the Legendary "Monster-verse" films, which began in 2014 and are still ongoing.

While *Gojira* had successfully established the serious roots of the franchise, the meaning of Godzilla quickly shifted. After a financially disappointing sequel in *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955), Toho waited seven years before releasing a new Godzilla movie. To maximize the film's appeal, Toho and RKO, the studio who had released *King Kong* (1933), collaborated to create the film *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), which was released by Toho in Japan, with a dubbed and edited American version being released by Universal Studios a year later. The film was a massive hit, and its monumental success forever changed the trajectory of the Godzilla franchise. Where *Godzilla Raids Again* had introduced the idea of two monsters fighting, *King Kong* had utilized it as the driving force behind the movie and was met with stunning results, becoming one of the highest grossing Godzilla movies of all time (adjusted for inflation). This, coupled with the film's outwardly comedic tone, signaled a major shift for the Godzilla franchise. The deadly serious tones of *Gojira* and *Raids Again* were left behind in favor of less heavy, more lively storytelling. Godzilla himself also started to become more of a character, with the expressionless monster from the first two films being much more lively in his battle with King Kong. Now, instead of ominously trudging through Tokyo, Godzilla clapped at the sight of his enemy, King Kong, in pain. While this drastic tonal shift did impact the overarching themes of Godzilla, it is easy to forget about the horrifying nuclear history of Godzilla when he's locked in combat with a giant gorilla, the franchise still used its platform to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing Japan. *Mothra vs. Godzilla* (1964) is a quintessential example of how the franchise managed to preserve meaning through the franchise's stark tonal shift. The film was the first to explicitly address the theme of environmentalism, something that would become prevalent throughout the

franchise, especially in movies containing Mothra. Not only does *Mothra vs. Godzilla* tackle environmentalism, it shows the effects of environmental damage and decay brought about by nuclear testing. This shows that, while Godzilla had started moving away from his nuclear origins, the franchise certainly had not forgotten about them.

The mid 1960s marked another drastic change for Godzilla, specifically his character. Beginning with *Ghidorah, the Three Headed Monster* (1964), Godzilla shifted from villain to hero. All five films made from 1964 to 1968 portray Godzilla not as an inherently evil kaiju, but as a defender of Earth with a dubious relationship with humanity. Indeed, while Godzilla was a hero now, he was more of a reluctant protagonist at this point in time. The main human cast of these films almost always initially reacted to Godzilla's presence with fear and apprehension. Instead, Godzilla, either alone or with a myriad of other kaiju, defended the Earth from increasingly extraterrestrial threats which were epitomized by the kaiju that would ultimately become Godzilla's iconic arch-rival, King Ghidorah. While the 1960s saw the continuation of certain themes, *Son of Godzilla* (1967) continues the trend of Godzilla movies dealing with environmentalism, this transformation of Godzilla's character in this era is its most important contribution to Godzilla's evolving meaning. *Invasion of Astro Monster* saw Godzilla dance at the site of King Ghidorah fleeing, while *Son of Godzilla* made Godzilla both a nuclear fueled kaiju and a model parent. In 1954, Godzilla had arrived on the scene as a portent of Japan's destruction, by the end of the 1960s Godzilla had transformed into the nation's reluctant protector. One of the driving forces behind these changes was a shift in the target audience. Toho increasingly focused its attention on children and the potential for merchandise that came along with them. Special effects director Teruyoshi Nakano

confirmed this in an interview, stating that, “We tried to make Godzilla fearsome... but he wasn’t so scary in the end. We all kept thinking about the children too much, we couldn’t get away from that” (Kalat, 2010, p. 145). While profit and a changing audience likely played a role in this significant change in meaning, changes in Japanese society also played a crucial role in the strange evolution of Godzilla. As the nation slowly moved on from the horrors of World War II, Godzilla moved along with it, becoming a protective figure for a nation that had reckoned with an uncertain future and survived.

The 1968 movie *Destroy All Monsters* was made as the intended end of the franchise, however Toho could not let sleeping Godzillas lie. Barely a year after his intended retirement, Godzilla was brought back into the spotlight with *All Monsters Attack* (1969). The subsequent films released throughout the 1970s marked a dramatic shift in Godzilla’s character. Godzilla’s time as a reluctant protagonist had come to an end, as he was thrust into the role of children's hero. This change in character also signaled a change in the meaning of the films and character. This is epitomized by the first two films of the late Showa era, the aforementioned *All Monsters Attack* and *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (1971). *All Monsters Attack* utilized Godzilla in a dramatically different way. Now, Godzilla was a fully anthropomorphized character. His son, Minilla, had a human voice actor, and Godzilla and the other kaiju, while not being voice acted, were given distinctly human characteristics and roles. Most notably, the film's primary antagonist, the monster Gabara, is a direct stand-in for school bullies. Less than two decades after Godzilla’s creation, the franchise had shifted from serious nuclear messaging, to anti-bullying. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* is another film about environmentalism, however with a more focused narrative detailing Japan’s pollution

crisis. Godzilla, angered by the destruction of the environment, comes to Japan to fight the physical embodiment of pollution, Hedorah. While the film tries to take itself seriously and delves into both political and social commentary, the film's tone is contrasted by the inherent silliness of Godzilla's new character, who suddenly receives the ability to fly in the last act of the film. Both films also contain child protagonists, showing the franchise's new target audience. The other 4 films in the 1970s also depict this drastic change in both tone and theming, however the themes themselves become more shallow as the franchise trudged along. Much more emphasis was put on the action and complex script writing and meaningful narratives took a back seat.

One of the main reasons for this thematic decline was consistently shrinking budgets. By the 1970s, the Japanese film industry was in dire straits. The success of the 1960s had been diluted by direct competition with the widespread proliferation of TV programming, leading to a collapse in the Japanese film industry. As stated by Kalat, "Between 1960 and 1970, 75 percent of the theater going audience disappeared. The mass audience was gone forever. Half of the studios in Japan went out of business altogether; those that remained were deracinated ruins all but obliged to abandon the movie business." (Kalat, 2010, p. 113). The Godzilla franchise proved to be successful enough to survive; however, by the end of the 1970s interest was quickly dying down and the franchise was becoming unprofitable (Kalat, 2010). Even the return of original director Ishiro Honda could not successfully sustain the franchise, with *Terror of MechaGodzilla* (1975) turning one of the worst box offices in the franchise's history. With Godzilla slowly bleeding money, Toho decided to shelve the King of the Monsters, patiently waiting for the right time to bring him back.

After nearly a decade in hibernation, Godzilla returned to cinema in 1984. The new film, simply titled *Godzilla* (1984), marked a return to the serious roots of the franchise. Godzilla was reestablished as a serious nuclear metaphor; however, this time his presence was influenced by the heightened Cold War tensions of the era. This focus on the Cold War successfully brought the nuclear imagery that had created the franchise back to the forefront. One of the most important scenes in the film shows the Japanese Prime Minister being pressured into dropping an atomic bomb on Tokyo to kill Godzilla by US and Soviet Russian ambassadors. Japan manages to remain defiant, and the Prime Minister's direct statement of Japan's three non-nuclear principles reminded audiences that the Godzilla franchise was firmly anti-nuclear and anti-war. *Godzilla* (1984), marked the beginning of the Heisei era of Godzilla, which would span from 1984 to 1995. Many of the themes that were commonly seen in the Showa era were brought back, however with Godzilla as the antagonist. *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989) and *Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1992) both tackle environmentalism as a theme, with *Biollante* specifically chronicling the development and potential dangers of biological weaponry. However, the Heisei era films rather quickly disregarded thematic depth in favor of profit. With *Godzilla vs. Biollante* being a box office disappointment, Toho decided to lean on Godzilla's past enemies, such as King Ghidorah and MechaGodzilla, to make the new era more accessible. While it initially worked, the stories of the films became less important overall. It's also important to note that by the mid 1990s, the conversation around nuclear weapons had shifted considerably since 1984. As stated by Godzilla historian Steve Ryfle, "By the end of the 20th century the Cold War was history, and nuclear weapons didn't seem so scary anymore. When Godzilla threatened to explode like an H-bomb in

1995's *Godzilla vs. Destroyah*, the world didn't exactly shudder in fear" (Ryfle, 2005, p. 63). Godzilla was once again fading out of the public eye, but instead of sending Godzilla off with a whimper, as they had in the Showa era, Toho decided to cleanly wrap up the story of the Heisei era with *Godzilla vs. Destoroyah* (1995). While Toho had intended to keep Godzilla hidden for some time, he would soon be reawakened to remind everyone who the King of the Monsters was.

After *Godzilla vs. Destroyah*, the next Godzilla movie would not be Japanese but instead would be America's first attempt at a wholly original Godzilla film. Ever since the start of the franchise the United States had sought to capitalize on the success of Godzilla. In 1956, the Americanized version of the original film, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!* (1956) was released. The film was heavily edited and did its best to downplay the anti-nuclear imagery in the film, as many Americans still approved of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Brothers, 2011). While many critics panned the film, with some citing the nuclear imagery despite the US attempts to cover it up, the film proved successful. This led to many English dubbed versions of the Japanese films that were commonly released on home video throughout the Showa Era. This had created interest in a potential standalone American project for both Toho and numerous other film studios throughout the decades, however, a project would not be completed until the late 1990s. Directed by Roland Emmerich and released by Sony, *Godzilla* (1998), was the United State's first attempt at translating Godzilla to the big screen. Despite an extensive advertising campaign, the film was panned by both critics and fans. The design of Godzilla was extensively altered, and the King of the Monsters was made much weaker than its Japanese counterpart. This is most notable when, at the climax of the film,

Godzilla is killed by American fighter jets. While Toho had hoped that America could keep Godzilla relevant while they retooled for future films, the dismal performance of the American film forced Toho to bring the real Godzilla out of retirement much earlier than they had planned.

The box office failure of the first American Godzilla film led to Toho quickly reviving the King of the Monsters only four years after they'd killed him off. The subsequent film, *Godzilla 2000: Millennium* (1999), marked the beginning of the Millennium Era. The new era was immediately defined by the use of new filmmaking techniques, most notably the introduction of CGI, that, while not used to their full potential in this era, would ultimately come to revolutionize the franchise over the next two decades. Indeed, one of the most notable aspects of the Millennium era is that it is the last era of traditional Godzilla filmmaking, as the long-worn practice of suit-mation, using men in detailed suits to portray the kaiju, would be phased out after its end. However, while the Millennium era is important historically for its special effects, and while *Godzilla: 2000* was a success that even received a theatrical release in the United States, it soon became apparent that Toho had brought Godzilla back into the spotlight sooner than they intended to. With no long term plan in place, Toho opted to reboot the character in *Godzilla vs. Megaguirus* (2000), which proved to be a commercial disappointment.

To bring much needed attention and innovation to the franchise, Toho turned to proven kaiju filmmaker Shusuke Kaneko to breathe life into the short lived era. Kaneko had recently revived the Gamera franchise. Gamera, a creation of the Daiei Film studio, was made to directly compete with Godzilla and cash in on the success of the wider kaiju

genre in the 1960s, however by the 1980s the franchise had effectively died out. In the late 1990s, Kaneko created a trio of Gamera films that brought both innovative storytelling and effects work to the long forgotten kaiju franchise. His first and only Godzilla film produced similar results. While the first two Millennium films had struggled to innovate both financially and thematically, *Godzilla, Mothra, and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All Out Attack* (2001), commonly abbreviated as simply *GMK*, managed to do both. The most notable aspect of the film is Kaneko's interpretation of Godzilla. Instead of a kaiju, Godzilla in this film is the physical embodiment of the souls of those that Japan made suffer during World War II. This marks one of the first and only times that Godzilla is portrayed as purely evil. While he'd been an antagonist before, he'd mostly been a force of nature or an embodiment of man's hubris. Kaneko had turned Godzilla into a purely vengeful force, whose sole mission was to make Japan suffer for forgetting the pain it caused during World War II. A conversation by two of the main characters in the film illuminates this portrayal, with the main character, Yuri, stating that, "The Asian people who lost their lives and the Americans and those who died in the nuclear bombing all became one"(GMK). One notable thing about this conversation is how it tackles the idea of Japanese nationalism. Godzilla is not just Japanese soldiers who feel their valor has been forgotten, the Americans and the numerous South Pacific nations that Japan committed numerous crimes against humanity towards are also involved in taking up arms against Japan. This shows that Godzilla in this film has an extremely significant political message: the Japanese people should not forget the mistakes of its past, or it will be doomed to repeat them. The extra spiritualism put into Godzilla's character is of course accompanied by

the traditional nuclear message, which is also prominently on display, with the Lucky Dragon Incident being referenced in the film. In the end, Kaneko, the savior of Gamera, had managed to push the franchise into a new direction. *GMK* showed that Godzilla could both thematically innovate while retaining its anti-nuclear message, and this was proven by the film's box office success.

However, the success of *GMK* would not last long, and as the second half of the Millennium era developed, Godzilla seemed to stagnate once again. When describing the film *Godzilla Against MechaGodzilla* (2002), Kalat states that it, "... lopes pointlessly around, never less than competent or more than derivative, contentedly wandering into total cultural irrelevance" (Kalat, 2010, p. 246). It is important to note that Kalat's harsh criticism of these films is deeply rooted in both an American cultural point of view, as well as subjective preference. Kalat specifically states that much of his frustration with the Millennium era of Godzilla comes from the film's lack of change in the wake of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks (Kalat 2010). While the 9/11 attacks did have world wide ramifications, it is important to note that Godzilla's home country of Japan would not have felt the same cultural or social impact as the United States, making some of Kalat's criticism distinctly from that of the Japanese filmmakers and audience. While judging the overall quality of these films is a subjective issue, there is no denying the fact that, as Kalat states, the Millennium Era of Godzilla was marred by the thematic stagnation of the franchise. Speaking later on *Godzilla: Tokyo SOS* (2003), Kalat states that, "As the saying goes, the definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result" (Kalat, 2010, p. 248). Despite the thematic innovation of Shusuke Kaneko's *GMK*, Godzilla was quickly fading into the background once again. A

lack of innovation, coupled with no clear cinematic direction (five of the six Millennium films rebooted the franchise), had stymied any potential longevity. By the time of *Godzilla Final Wars* (2004), interest had dried up, and the film's extremely disappointing box office, especially given the 50th anniversary of the franchise, led Toho to send Godzilla off into the sunset once more.

After 10 years Godzilla would return, however, it would be America, not Japan that would bring him out of retirement. The American *Godzilla* (2014) was quickly followed up with the Japanese *Shin Godzilla*, marking the first time that the American and Japanese Godzilla franchises had coincided. The fact that both American and Japanese Godzilla films were releasing at the same time revealed the different meanings that each nation put into Godzilla. One of the most interesting differences seen in the 2014 American film is how nuclear power is portrayed. Instead of being a symbol of nuclear weaponry, Godzilla is a naturalistic force that is combated by nuclear weapons. This is most prevalent when detailing the origins of this American Godzilla, as, instead of being awakened by nuclear testing, Godzilla is already a force in the world by 1954, and the Castle Bravo test, instead of awakening Godzilla, is America's attempt to kill him (Cho, 2019). Ideas of nuclear energy are still explored in the film, most notably through the MUTOs (Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Organisms), the kaiju that both Humanity and Godzilla fight against throughout the film, however it is a much more general interpretation of nuclear power and not an explicit condemnation of nuclear weaponry (Cho, 2019). The differences between the American and Japanese Godzilla's would only become more obvious with the release of the sequel to *Godzilla* (2014), *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019), and *Shin Godzilla*.

The differences between *Shin Godzilla* and *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019) reveal much about how each nation views Godzilla. *Shin Godzilla* is a film rooted in serious symbolism, anti-nuclear imagery, and political satire. It is the Godzilla film that most closely reflects the tone and feeling of the original. Like the original 1954 film, *Shin Godzilla* was also inspired by contemporary nuclear tragedy, with the 2011 Fukushima Nuclear Disaster being the main inspiration for the film's plot (Pelea, 2020). The film also tackles Japan's role in the modern world and how they are viewed by other nations. Like in *Godzilla* (1984), the United Nations' proposed solution to the issue involves dropping an atomic bomb on Tokyo, something that is absolutely unacceptable to the Japanese, who manage to defeat Godzilla on their own and put a stop to the nuclear countdown. The film asks the open ended question of: what is "post-war" Japan's place in the international world, and how long does "post-war" last? This shows that the constant struggle over Japanese nationalism and national identity still defines parts of the franchise, although *Shin Godzilla* takes a different perspective than *GMK*, with a subtle pro-national lens being seen throughout parts of the film (Pelea, 2020). Where *Shin Godzilla* tackled issues directly pertaining to modern Japanese cultural identity, *King of the Monsters* (2019) is a distinctly American film. The ideas of nuclear power and danger are played down, and there is even some subtle pro-nuclear imagery at times. This is most visible when the main human cast uses a nuclear weapon to revive Godzilla after he is defeated by King Ghidorah. It is important to note that Godzilla in *King of the Monsters* is presented as an ambiguous protagonist, and his revival is seen as necessary and something good for the planet, marking a stark contrast from the unmoving, antagonistic force in *Shin Godzilla*. Much more overt religious imagery is used in the

film, with the main antagonist, King Ghidorah, representing an existential, almost satanic threat to the world with some of the imagery in scenes focused on him. Most notably, *King of the Monsters* (2019) carries a significant message about climate change. Keeping nature in balance is a primary theme of the film, and King Ghidorah seeks to destroy the world's natural balance and create a new, alien world to live in (Pelea, 2020). While kaiju have always been used to represent issues regarding environmentalism, the modern understanding of global warming and rapid climate change makes it a much more prominent issue in *King of the Monsters* (2019). However, it is important to note that, while both films carry important themes, the overall meaning of *Godzilla* is ultimately defined by the depth of said themes. *Shin Godzilla* is a film steeped in thematic depth and cultural relevance, whereas *King of the Monsters* (2019) uses its themes as a backdrop for the monster action in the film. This shows that, while Japan had opted to push the franchise's themes into the modern day, America and Legendary Studios was content with thematically shallow films that, while trying to portray modern day societal concerns, ultimately focus more on action than meaning.

With so many different interpretations, themes and messages, it is fair to say that *Godzilla* has been a schizophrenic character over the course of nearly seven decades. Unpacking this tangled web of meaning has ultimately been left to the fans, specifically the "fan-historians" of the franchise. As defined by Charlotte Stevens and Nick Webber, "Fan-historians are the creators of archives and their users; interrogators and producers of fan and of fan works; fans of the past and fans of fandom's past; public historians for fan-publics; and present-minded workers (Jenkins 2003) who through their labor set fan culture into history."(Stevens, Webber, 2020). In a sense, fan-historians utilize their

knowledge of their fandom to create wholly original works that deal and engage with both the franchise and the wider fandom. Many of the authors referenced throughout this paper are good examples of fan historians, with David Kalat specifically stating that,

This underground community of scholars and fans connected the dots to tell a story that otherwise went largely unreported in the Western press, unknown to all but the true believers. They chronicled a pop cultural institution of global reach - one that, at the time I was writing in the mid-1990s, was still treated with ignorance and contempt by the American critical establishment. (Kalat, 2010, p. 1)

Kalat argues that Godzilla fans were the first ones responsible for unpacking the thematic depth of the franchise, which allowed it to proliferate and influence the public perception of Godzilla as a whole. However, the work of the “fan-historian” is not exclusively external. Notable Godzilla fan and author William Tsutsui once described this by stating that, “Understanding the appeal of Godzilla, when all is said and done, means understanding ourselves” (Tsutsui, 2004). Tsutsui himself is a good example of this very idea. Writing a decade later, he detailed the complex response that his book received. While it was called informative, especially by people outside of the great community, fan reaction was mixed because of different interpretations of the franchise. Tsutsui’s book detailed his numerous opinions on the meaning of Godzilla, which ultimately created a discourse surrounding his opinions (Tsutsui, 2013). This shows how fans take ownership over the specific meanings of Godzilla, as despite the overt subjectivity of Tsutsui’s book, it still managed to arouse significant feelings in the fandom regarding these subjective interpretations. This shows both how fans interact with the meanings of the franchise, as well as how they take ownership of these meanings.

From 1954 to 2023, over the course of more than 35 movies, the meaning of Godzilla had consistently evolved. While the specific changes brought up throughout the

years are easily visible through the franchise's history, a few important overarching trends deserve attention. One of the most important of these trends is how Godzilla often flips between the role of villain and hero throughout the traditional period of Godzilla. Notably, in all three of the original Godzilla eras, Godzilla starts out as a villain before eventually becoming a hero/anti-hero by the end of each era. This shows that Godzilla is not just seen as a vengeful force of nuclear power, but also as a victim of the atomic age. Godzilla's continued success is most likely attributable to how malleable his character has been. While the anti-nuclear undertones of the original have never been fully disregarded, Godzilla has been used as an outlet to explore the issues that defined the generations he influenced. Whether it be environmental catastrophe, Cold War Nuclear tensions, bullying in the Japanese school system, or the struggle of Japanese nationalism, Godzilla has always evolved to stand for something. While the thematic depth of the American films has been decidedly shallower than the Japanese films, the American Godzilla also reflects on the cultural concerns and interests of the United States, with issues concerning Environmentalism and the US's own view of nuclear power being prevalent in the American films. In the end, this thematic complexity allows fans to create their own meaning, defining who Godzilla is as a character for them personally, which in turn reflects back upon the franchise and its public image.

Framing Text

The following piece is a creative piece that I worked on alongside the research that I did on Godzilla. When I started my thesis, I knew that I wanted it to be a creative project, and this is where most of my effort went after my research was completed. When I met with my mentor Dr. Ashby at the beginning of the project, he proposed the idea of making a fanfiction piece to accompany my research and I enthusiastically agreed. Once my piece was finished, I decided that a “framing text” would be useful to help orient readers on the creative choices I made, my creative process, and how I feel my piece fits in with both the Godzilla fandom and the themes I explored in my scholarly research. Hopefully, this piece will give you the appropriate context that will make the following creative piece more understandable and enjoyable.

When I first started writing my creative piece, I had initially wanted to make a story that was closer to a Godzilla film. I imagined a story revolving around an ensemble cast of humans trying to stop Godzilla, not too unlike many of the Japanese Godzilla movies I grew up with. However, I quickly ran into writer's block when trying to write this piece, which effectively delayed my creative process for a while. As a writer, I'm much more comfortable writing from the non-human perspective, so instead of forcing myself to write a story I was uncomfortable with, I decided to turn to the wider fandom to get inspired. Instead of trying to write a conventional Godzilla story, I took inspiration from some of the YouTube fan projects I grew up with, most notably the series *Monster Island Buddies*, which portrayed Godzilla and the other monsters of the franchise in a human-esque environment tackling day to day and interpersonal issues. I quickly thought of a story after taking up this as inspiration, however, due to time restraints, I knew I

would not be able to finish an entire story. So, I decided to write a short three-chapter draft of a longer story. I chose a couple of my favorite kaiju, Kiryu and King Ghidorah, and finally got to write my story.

The one plot point that I immediately wanted to follow was the idea of what happens to the other monsters when Godzilla disappears. I thought this worked well with my scholarly research as, no matter what film, Godzilla always represented or meant something, so Godzilla would probably mean something to the other kaiju if they had a human-like society. I'd spent so long discussing what Godzilla meant to Japan and America, but now was my chance to be more personal and discuss what Godzilla could mean on a more personal level. As a lifelong fan, this allowed me to be more introspective at times and explore my own personal relationship with Godzilla over the years. That was the best aspect of this project from a fan-fiction perspective, as it allowed me to write a relatively introspective story, but one that did not take itself too seriously. In a sense, I followed in the footsteps of the fans who inspired me, using Godzilla both to entertain, but also to explore what Godzilla has meant to them over the years.

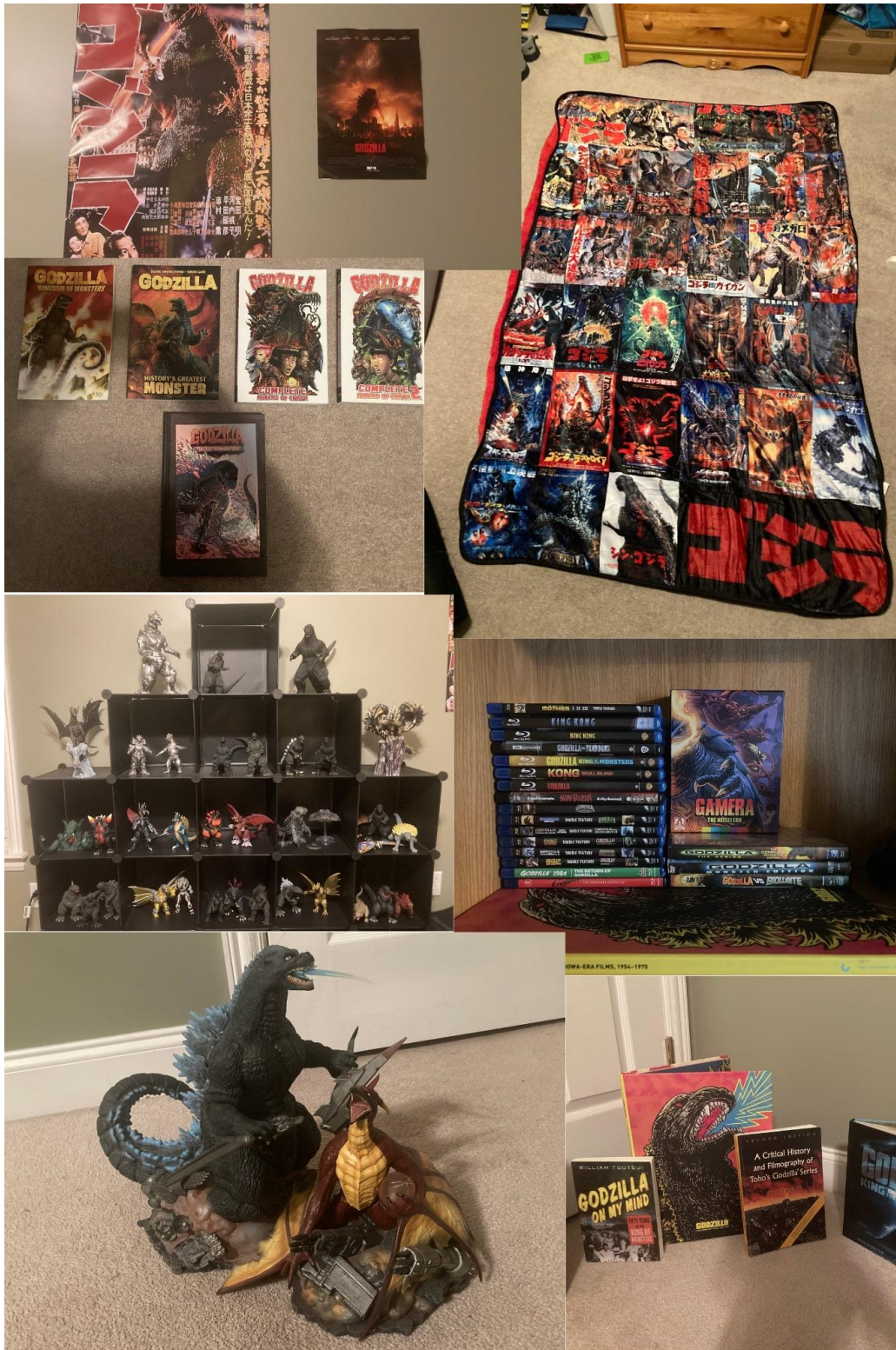


Figure 1: A collage of items and collectables from my personal Godzilla collection.

Creative Project

Chapter 1

Kiryu sat alone on the beach, listening to the slow churning of the waves, and watching the sunset under the horizon. The sensors on his armor detected a light breeze. It truly was a beautiful sight, but all he could think about was Godzilla. The King of the Monsters had been missing for approximately 370 days, 20 hours, 19 minutes, and 54 seconds. 55... 56... 57... 58...

Kiryu gazed down at the sand beneath his feet.

Where are you?

It was a question that had haunted Kiryu for months. At first, no one was worried about Godzilla's sudden absence. He often went on extended trips to random parts of the world, always seeking either rest or adventure. And then the days turned into weeks. Weeks into months. Months into one long, lonely year.

Years ago, Kiryu never would've thought that he would miss Godzilla. Then again, years ago Kiryu literally *couldn't think*. Humanity had never intended for Kiryu to be anything more than a weapons system, an empty vessel for them to use to kill Godzilla. His entire existence was predicated on an error, a miscalculation, an unforeseeable mistake that unintentionally resulted in something that should have been impossible. Ironically, it was Godzilla who would accidentally manufacture the severe glitch that made that impossibility a reality. After their heated battles, when humanity presumed Kiryu destroyed and Godzilla imprisoned at the bottom of the sea, the King of the Monsters dragged Kiryu back to Monster Island and gave him his first chance at real life.

Kiryu never really understood why Godzilla did what he did. The two had been mortal enemies and nearly killed each other on two separate occasions. Godzilla had always told him that he was just repaying the favor. That Kiryu had saved his life, so it was only natural to do the same with him. It made sense, but he couldn't shake the feeling that there was something Godzilla was hiding. Either way, it had made the two inseparable. Kiryu's first friend had also turned out to be his best friend. Godzilla just made him feel comfortable in a way that no other Kaiju had managed to replicate, and Godzilla actually seemed to legitimately care about him. He'd made adjusting to life just the slightest bit easier.

Life was a hard thing for Kiryu to try and comprehend. It was something that wasn't a part of his original programming. He'd managed to conjure up a vague understanding of sentient emotions and thought processes, but the answer of what to do with life eluded him. Kiryu remembered asking the other Kaiju about what they thought life was about, hoping that they could give him some kind of answer. But every answer he got seemed to contradict another. It was all so terribly confusing. Sometimes he wondered if the Kaiju he was asking had any idea what they were talking about. Some of them certainly seemed just as confused as Kiryu was. Eventually, he turned to his old friend Godzilla, asking him the same slew of questions he'd asked the others. He'd never forget how he responded. Instead of answering his questions, Godzilla chuckled and shook his head, before telling Kiryu,

“Life isn't an equation, it's what you make of it.”

Those were the last words Kiryu had heard from his friend Godzilla before he seemingly disappeared from the face of the Earth.

Kiryu turned off his visual sensors, leaving himself in darkness. He couldn't stand the beautiful sight anymore. He thought about leaving, but the sounds of the beach were too serene. And if he left, where would he go? Back home to wallow in nothing but darkness and pure silence. Even if his vision betrayed him, at least the sounds around him brought some scant comfort. As he listened to the sounds of the water crashing against the shore, Kiryu decided to shut himself down for a few moments. He'd let his mind wander for too long. As he slowly drifted off, he tried to push thoughts of Godzilla to the back of his mind.

A creature was marching through a sea of fire. As it marched through piles of burning rubble, its mind was a menagerie of emotions.

Rage.

Hatred.

Revenge.

Stress.

Concern.

Pain.

...

Fear.

The emotion that had come to dominate its mind was fear. And yet, the Kaiju couldn't understand why it was afraid. The sight of the human city being leveled initially had made it strangely happy. It had exacted its revenge on humanity. But something

about the haze of the smoke, the crushing glow of the flames, suffocated this fleeting pleasure. As the kaiju trudged through the wake of its own destruction, it suddenly felt incredibly alone. It had no family, no home. Its memories were hazy at best. It held an intense grudge against humanity, and yet it knew nothing about its origins. And then, one simple thought penetrated the creature's mind, shaking it to the core.

Why?

Why was it doing this?

No matter how much it thought, there was no answer. It was almost as if forces beyond its control had violently mutated its life and forced it along this path. The story of its life had begun with a blinding flash of light and feelings of pure agony. The next thing it remembered was destroying Tokyo, its dorsal plates flashing before it covered entire city blocks in nuclear-fueled destruction. Why was he here? How did he get here? These were questions the creature should have been able to answer, but simply couldn't.

At that moment, the kaiju decided that humanity had endured enough for one day. Perhaps one day, in the far future, he would return. A grim reminder on the horizon of crimes even the kaiju itself couldn't understand. But for now, it had done enough. And so it slowly waded back into the depths, away from the prying eyes of humanity... for now.

“Hey, Kiryu!”

The voice seemingly materialized from nowhere, shaking Kiryu back to reality. The visions slowly faded, but Kiryu's mind remained squarely fixed on them. It had been such a long time since he'd experienced them, that he'd almost forgotten what they felt

like. It was almost indescribable. Even if Kiryu could describe it, he was pretty sure no one would understand what it was like. Randomly experiencing memories that didn't belong to you, that you had no recollection of, that you had no business witnessing. It was terrifying, beautiful, fascinating, and debilitating all at the same time.

After taking a few moments to collect himself, Kiryu turned his eyes back on. As his vision returned, he looked over to where the voice had come from. He was met by the welcoming figure of one of his old friends, Anguirus, slowly walking towards him. Kiryu was glad to see his short, spikey friend. He couldn't remember the last time he'd met with one of the other kaiju. Well, he actually could, it was stored in his memory banks after all, he just preferred to ignore that considering how admittedly embarrassing it was.

Anguirus cheerily walked over to Kiryu, kicking up small patches of sand with his four legs while his tail left a curving trail through the beach. Once he was beside Kiryu he slowly spun around a few times, trying to find a comfortable spot, before suddenly plopping down on the sand below. The two kaiju sat in silence for a few moments, taking in their surroundings. Kiryu had to admit that he felt a lot better now that somebody was with him. Now that Anguirus was around, the world felt just a little bit brighter.

Eventually, a loud sigh broke the silence. Kiryu looked over at Anguirus and saw him longly gazing out to sea. Kiryu glanced down at the sand. Anguirus had been one of Godzilla's best friends for longer than Kiryu had existed. Godzilla's disappearance probably made him feel just as bad as Kiryu, if not worse. It was sad to see his once constantly jovial friend be so down, but Kiryu also took a strange comfort in it. It showed him that he wasn't the only one thinking about Godzilla, that he wasn't the only one questioning why he'd suddenly left. Kiryu had often asked himself if he did something to

drive Godzilla away. He could tell that Anguirus had probably asked himself the same questions. It made Kiryu realize how self-centered he'd been over the past few months. Isolating himself from the rest of the kaiju seemed like a good idea at the time. It would give him time to reflect on his own, like he'd always done. He hadn't interacted with many of the other Kaiju without Godzilla anyway, so he figured he wouldn't be missed. Seeing Anguirus destroyed that illusion. There were other Kaiju that cared about him, Kaiju that he'd probably worried with his own absence. He felt bad knowing that Anguirus, who was already dealing with the loss of his best friend, also had to worry about Kiryu over the past few months.

Kiryu decided to start up a conversation and break the silence. He hated seeing his friend so somber.

“So, how've you been doing?”

Anguirus shifted around for a few moments, before eventually answering.

“Fine, I guess,” he replied halfheartedly, his eyes still locked on the horizon.

Kiryu shook his head and immediately scolded himself. He could clearly see how Anguirus felt and he was pretty sure that his friend probably didn't need someone to point out how obviously bad he seemed.

Kiryu collected his thoughts and spoke up again.

“Hey, I'm sorry, that probably wasn't the best way for me to start.”

Anguirus slowly shook his head before finally turning to face Kiryu, his tail lightly tapping the sand behind him. To Kiryu's surprise, Anguirus gave him a small, warm smile.

“No, no, don’t apologize. If anything it’s my fault for vaulting over here, interrupting whatever you were doing, and then just... well ignoring you and brooding.”

Kiryu gave him a slight nod. Just when it seemed like another long silence was about to set in between them, Anguirus shook his head again, but much more rapidly this time. When he was done he looked back at Kiryu with a cheery expression. While Kiryu could tell that some of the enthusiasm was genuine, Anguirus was forcing himself to look extra happy.

“Either way, I didn’t just come to talk about... *him*...” Anguirus faulted for a moment before regaining his composure and continuing, “... I heard that you were out on the beach today and thought I’d come by and visit. It’s been waaaaay too long!”

When Anguirus was finished, he stared at Kiryu expectantly. Kiryu froze. How long had it been again? He almost instantly had his answer, the data coming up at lightning speed. 350 days, 14 hours, 35 minutes, and 17 seconds exactly.

Should I tell him? Kiryu thought to himself.

Anguirus was waiting for Kiryu to say something. He was pretty sure he wanted to know how long they’d been apart. Most Kaiju knew about Kiryu’s supercomputer memory, but he rarely liked showing it off. It had the potential to be rather embarrassing, especially in situations like these.

Kiryu shifted his tail uncomfortably before giving a clearly doubtful response.

“Uhhhhh... yea, it’s been quite a bit, hasn’t it.”

Anguirus rolled his eyes but clearly didn’t feel like pressing him too much. Instead, he decided to continue with the conversation.

“What’ve you been up to anyways? No one’s seen you in... well forever basically.”

Kiryu nervously rubbed the exposed wires on the front of his neck. What had he been doing these past few months? It felt weird, but his memory was pretty hazy. A lot of memories blended in with each other, some days had even been deleted for being so uninteresting. The main thing that stood out was the consistent gloominess of everything. No matter what Kiryu did, there was always a shadow cast over him by the fact that Godzilla wasn’t around to do anything with him, to guide him through life on Monster Island.

Kiryu shrugged. He could try to make something up to convince Angirus that he’d been somewhat productive, that his absence had been justified, but he knew that wouldn’t help.

“I haven’t really done much of anything. I’ve just been... thinking a lot if you know what I mean.”

Angirus closed his eyes and sighed.

“Yeah, I get that...” He replied gloomily.

“So much for not talking about him,” Kiryu said apologetically.

Angirus let out a sad, nervous laugh.

“It’s alright. I guess it’s kind of unavoidable at this point.”

Kiryu could only nod. He tried to think of something to say, but it was hard to put all his disparate thoughts together. Ironically, he’d spent so much time thinking about Godzilla that he had no idea what he actually *thought about Godzilla*.

The two sat there in silence. The sun had almost dipped below the waves and the faint outline of stars was starting to become visible in the sky. It was certainly beautiful.

Eventually, Anguirus spoke up again.

“How long has it been?” he asked shakily.

Kiryu flinched at the sudden request. He didn’t know how to react. Sure, he’d thought about how long Godzilla had been gone since his absence became noticeable, but actually saying it out loud was... different. It was as if saying it made it so much more real. It put weight behind the amorphous thoughts that spiraled through his circuits. Kiryu rapidly tapped the beach with one of his steel claws. It was the first time he’d felt truly nervous in an eternity. Eventually, after what seemed like an agonizingly long amount of time, Kiryu decided to respond. Even if it was hard, talking about it with someone might help.

“A little over a year,” he said half-heartedly.

Anguirus suddenly seemed annoyed.

“Exactly,” he responded assertively.

“Are you sure...”

Before Kiryu could finish, Anguirus cut him off. But instead of angry, his expression had visibly lightened. He gave Kiryu a reassuring nod.

“I’ll be fine Kiryu, please tell me.”

Kiryu hesitated. He wasn’t sure if it was his worry for Anguirus or himself that was making him so reluctant. Eventually, he worked up the courage to respond.

“Almost 371 days.”

At that moment, it seemed as if every sound trickled away. The tails patting on the beach, the claws coursing through the sand, even the wave crashing against the shore, all of it seemed to fade out into blank nothingness. Kiryu had known. He'd always known. But hearing it... hurt. Godzilla had been gone for an entire year, and no one had any idea where he was or how he was doing. The darkness of everything around Kiryu was accentuated at that moment, and it felt as if he was back in the vision he'd had. The images of a burning city, of a dark, smoke-filled night flashed before his eyes. Strangely enough, the feeling of abject loneliness he was feeling now felt uncannily familiar.

Anguirus's voice cut through the silence, dragging Kiryu back to the real world

"I remember seeing him. You know, on that last day. He was just walking out into the ocean like he always does. I wasn't worried, it was just... business as usual. I guess I'm not really all that worried now either. I know Goji can handle himself, it's just... I wish he would've at least said goodbye or something, you know..."

Kiryu thought about what Anguirus had said. In some ways, he felt the same. Godzilla hadn't told anyone his plans, and even if he knew Godzilla was the King of the Monsters, even the strongest of kings could be suddenly overthrown. But as he thought back to his last meeting with Godzilla, he couldn't help but feel something come over him. He tried to put his feelings into words as it came to him.

"I remember my last time seeing him. I had been so worried about what my life was about. I was... aimless. I'd asked around, seeing if anyone knew what I could do to live meaningfully, but each answer was as incomprehensible as the last. That day, we talked about it, and Godzilla left me with a piece of advice that I've constantly been mulling over. He never said goodbye, he never told me anything about leaving, but I have

to wonder if, in a way, that was his goodbye. If he was like, ‘I’ve given you what you need, now it’s your job to make do with it.’ Maybe I’m just overthinking things, but the more I think about it, the more I’m sure he was trying to tell me... something.”

Darkness had fallen by the point, and Kiryu had to turn on his night vision to make out Anguirus’s form. He could see his friend staring at him, clearly contemplating what he’d said. Kiryu honestly wasn’t even sure what he’d said himself or if he believed it. All he knew was that he wanted it to be true.

Anguirus responded after a few moments.

“Funnily enough, I’ve thought about that too. He didn’t say goodbye, but I remember we talked a lot that day. It was nothing important, just Godzilla being... well Godzilla. It was the first time we’d hung out in a bit. I feel like he might’ve been trying to tie some things up before he left. In a way, even if he didn’t want everyone to know what he was doing, he still wanted to give us some kind of send-off.”

The two looked out at the ocean as a crescent moon slowly crept up the night sky.

“Why do you think he left?”

Kiryu tilted his head. That was a surprisingly complicated question. All of the answers he’d tried to come up with had been radically different from one another. It was almost as if Godzilla could be doing anything and everything.

Eventually, he shrugged and simply said, “I’m not sure. Godzilla and his family are... complicated to say the least.”

Anguirus suddenly barked out a loud laugh.

“You’re telling me! I remember hearing about Godzilla’s dad from mine and I swear, that family is insane. In a good way mind you, although I’m not a big fan of Godzilla’s latest unpredictable maneuver...”

“Is anyone a fan of it?” Kiryu asked.

“Not really. Surprisingly, even all the villain kaiju have seemed out of it lately. Especially Ghidorah.”

“Ghidorah?”

“Yeah, those three just spend all day at the bar from what I hear. It’s kinda weird. I’d go ask them why, but, well... I’d rather not get on their bad side without Godzilla around.”

Kiryu didn’t know what to make of what Anguirus had said. Surprisingly, it seemed that Monster Island had gotten more peaceful now that Godzilla was gone. It didn’t seem possible, there was always action on Monster Island beforehand. But seeing as he’d effectively isolated himself and hadn’t heard anything important for months, he guessed it was the most logical explanation.

“Why’d you come here anyways, Anguirus?” Kiryu asked. No one other than Godzilla had ever sought him out before.

“Well, part of it was wanting to talk about Godzilla with someone. I felt like I’d badgered Rodan enough, so I thought I’d find someone else.”

Anguirus smiled at Kiryu before continuing.

“Then I realized that I didn’t really know much about you Kiryu. No one had seen you for a while, so I was worried. When Rodan told me he’d seen you on the beach I thought I’d try and catch up to get to know you a little better.”

Anguirus nervously laughed and shook his head

“But then I just ended up only talking about Godzilla! Sorry about that. Thanks for telling me the time by the way. I could tell it was hard for you.”

Kiryu shook his head slowly and waved Anguirus’s words away.

“No, it’s fine. It was something I needed to do. I think it helped a lot honestly.”

Anguirus sighed and smiled.

“Yeah, me too. I also thought you remembering that was really cool, even if I know you’re short-changing me...”

“What are you talking about!?” Kiryu loudly stammered. He hadn’t expected that last part.

“Come on, Kiryu, I know you can be more precise than that!” Anguirus replied, clearly holding back laughter.

“Well, at that point you’re just splitting scales!”

Anguirus rolled his eyes and smiled.

“Fine... But I’ll get you to tell me next time! You’re lucky it’s so late.”

Kiryu looked up and noticed that the moon was now high in the sky. He’d been out at the beach all day.

He looked back down at Anguirus, shook his head, and said, “Has it really been that long?”

“You’ve been out here longer than I have, but it has been a while.”

Kiryu wished he could have sighed. He knew he could probably replicate the noise, but it felt a bit too uncanny for his liking.

“Sorry, so much for you getting to know me...”

Anguirus suddenly jumped up.

“Hey, it’s no problem! If anything, I’m just glad to know you’re ok. We worry about you Kiryu... a lot.”

Kiryu let out a nervous laugh.

“Is it that bad?”

Anguirus shook his head before he looked Kiryu dead in the eyes and said.

“Kiryu, if most kaiju went 6 months without talking to someone, they would go insane.”

Anguirus sounded deadly serious. Kiryu could tell that what he was doing clearly wasn’t healthy in the eyes of the other Kaiju.

“All right, all right, point taken,” Kiryu replied, somewhat dejected.

Anguirus gave him a reassuring look.

“I’m just trying to look out for you.”

That was something Godzilla used to tell Kiryu all the time. Anguirus saying it too was surprisingly comforting. Godzilla may have been gone, but at least he wasn’t alone.

Kiryu got up and went over to Anguirus. He extended one of his arms and the two Kaiju shook hands.

“I appreciate it.”

The two stood there for a few moments, with Anguirus smiling up at Kiryu. Kiryu was glad that someone had ended his unsplendid isolation. It felt like part of a weight was slowly being lifted off his shoulders.

Anguirus eventually turned away.

“Well, it's been good talking but it's getting late and I should probably start heading home. Thanks for putting up with me for so long, Kiryu.”

Kiryu honestly wished he could've smiled. Instead, all he could do was go up and put Anguirus lightly on the back.

“Hey, I thought tonight was cool. Sorry that we didn't get to talk much about each other, but... maybe we could... uhhh... catch up sometime?” Kiryu said the last part slowly. While he felt better, he still wasn't used to hanging out with other Kaiju. Apparently, he said the right thing though, and Anguirus nodded excitedly and lightly hopped up.

“That would be great! I'm not sure when I'll have time, but we should definitely meet up! Until then, why don't you try and get around some? You might find a good new place to meet!”

Anguirus's enthusiasm at the idea surprised Kiryu and he wasn't exactly sure how to react, especially about the whole “getting out” thing.

“Uhhhh... yeah... No problem. See you... sometime then.”

Anguirus chuckled before responding.

“I better. Please take my advice seriously, ok?”

Kiryu gave a somewhat reluctant nod.

“You swear?” Anguirus asked.

Kiryu looked down at the sand. He was excited about meeting Anguirus again, but it still felt really weird knowing he'd have to leave home.

“If it'll get you out of my circuits...” Kiryu said reluctantly.

Anguirus rolled his eyes

“Kiryu...”

Kiryu shook his head. He didn't want to get into this argument, especially since he knew he would probably lose it. He decided it was best to relent.

“Don't worry, Anguirus, I'll... try to explore... I guess...”

Anguirus shook his head and sighed

“I guess that's the best I'm gonna get.”

Kiryu shrugged. He felt bad that he couldn't give Anguirus a better answer, but being social went against the core of his programming.

“Probably”

Anguirus briefly chuckled before turning around to leave.

“Sayonara, Kiryu.”

As Kiryu watched Anguirus slowly fade into the darkness, he thought about what he would end up doing. Anguirus was right, it probably was a good idea to get around. He'd barely explored Monster Island without Godzilla, and it would be good to get his bearings for any potential meeting. But where would he even start?

Kiryu walked back home, slowly mulling over his options. Nothing initially stood out to him until suddenly, something Anguirus said jumped back into his mind. Given what Anguirus had said earlier it was a *bad* idea. If he somehow messed things up, he wasn't sure what would happen. But he couldn't shake the thought. It may have been a bad idea, but what if it went right? As he reached the entrance to his small cave home, Kiryu started formulating a plan for meeting one of the most famous, yet potentially dangerous Kaiju of all time.

Chapter 2

Life should've been easier for Ghidorah now that Godzilla was gone. They'd spent their whole lives as rivals, constantly locked in a battle to defeat one another and gain the right to the title of "King of the Monsters". When Godzilla suddenly up and disappeared, it should've been cause for celebration, and it was for a moment. Something that had been nothing but a painful thorn in their side had just vanished. But something about it felt off to Ghidorah. Sure, the thorn was gone, but they never had the satisfaction of actually taking it out, of being able to see it, confront it, and then victoriously toss it aside. With Godzilla gone, Monster Island should've been there for the taking. No other Kaiju could've stood up to them. It would've been an easy victory for Ghidorah, but a thoroughly hollow one.

Instead, they found themselves alone in a bar on a Saturday night. Well, as alone as a dragon made up of three distinct individuals could be. The middle head, Ichi, the leader of the bunch, hated going to this place. It was so beneath them. But San, the left head, seemed to enjoy it, and Ni, the right head, had said that it was "a good opportunity to explore Monster Island now that the rivalry was on hold." Ichi assumed that what he really meant was "scout out Monster Island and its inhabitants so that when Godzilla did return, they would finally have some sort of an advantage over him.

If Godzilla returned...

Ichi shook his head. He honestly couldn't believe that he actually *wanted* him to come back. It stood in the face of everything he'd done over the past few decades. He'd always thought that things would be so much clearer when Godzilla was finally out of the way. It turns out that life was just a lot more confusing now.

What if he never came back? Did somebody else kill him? Would anyone claim the title of King ever again? How could they if he was gone?

One thing that Ichi could admit was that at least when he was at the bar, he could find something to distract himself with for a while. Speaking of which, it was time to do just that.

“Hey!” The middle head shouted to the Kaiju behind the bar.

The long, serpentine bartender hesitated before reluctantly turning around. Ichi had gotten used to the open fear and discontent they were treated with. After all, they’d been enemies with most of the Kaiju for years. He’d always imagined it would feel good when this moment came when he would bask in the fear that he wrought. Instead, it felt unearned and unfulfilling.

He recognized the Kaiju as Manda, one of the less involved inhabitants of the island. He could understand why he was probably so nervous, seeing as Manda was serving Godzilla’s arch-rival and the clear *de facto* King of the Monsters.

Do I really believe that? Ichi thought to himself. He knew he was probably lying. If he was king, he certainly wouldn’t be stuck at this empty dive drinking alone.

“Get me something to drink,” Ichi demanded.

Manda scratched the back of his head nervously, purposefully avoiding eye contact with any of Ghidorah's heads.

“Uh... what do you want?”

Ichi growled and flapped their wings indignantly.

“Does it look like I care?! Just bring me something already!”

Manda flinched at the harsh response. He silently nodded before he slithered away, trying to look as small as possible. He returned a few moments later, silently placing a drink on the table before quickly backing away.

Ichi stared down at the glass. He wasn't exactly sure what it was, but he didn't really care. It all tasted the same to him anyway. He reached down and swiftly gulped half of the drink through a thick straw.

"Hey," A calm voice called out from beside Ichi. He looked up and, to his surprise, found his brother Ni trying to get the bartender's attention. Typically, Ni was silent for most of the night, just observing the random habits of the other Kaiju as they came and went. Ichi guessed that, with no one around, Ni was getting bored.

Manda froze and slowly turned to face Ghidorah.

"Y-yes?"

Ni's tone was calm and cool. Ichi was always surprised with how collected he seemed, even with everything that had gone on in the past year.

"Would you mind putting on some music? It's a bit too quiet here."

Manda hesitated again before giving a slight, confused nod. He clearly hadn't expected Ni to be anything close to polite.

"Music? Really?" Ichi asked, both confused and slightly disappointed.

"Ichi, the bar is dead and I'd like to have something going on to make tonight at least marginally enjoyable."

"You could drink." Ichi offered.

"And end up like you? No thanks." Ni responded rather harshly.

“What’s that supposed to mean?!” Ichi asked, raising his voice, his tone accusatory, their tails lashing harshly on the ground.

Ni just shook his head, as if Ichi should’ve already known what he was talking about. He didn’t understand why his brother was so concerned. He did *not* have a problem. He just drank occasionally to make the night go by quicker. That may have *occasionally* resulted in the night going by a little too fast... but that wasn’t very often!

Ichi growled at the right head. He was preparing a biting response when he heard a commotion happening to his left.

Ni heard it too, and Ichi saw him roll his eyes as he glanced towards the noise.

Oh, brother.... Ichi thought to himself as he let out a frustrated sigh.

“What is it now?” Ichi asked.

“Not sure. Whatever it is they’re talking about.” Ni said, nodding his head towards the commotion.

Ichi swirled around and was met with San talking with another kaiju. Ichi guessed that they’d probably snuck in when he and Ni were bickering. He recognized the monster as Zilla. Ichi didn’t know her very well, but the sight of her filled him with an immense amount of disappointment. It was as if the world was teasing him at that moment. Instead of Godzilla, all he got was the smaller, weaker American step-sister. It wasn’t her fault that she reminded Ichi of Godzilla right when he’d been trying to forget about him, but Ichi didn’t care. At that moment, he couldn’t stand the sight of her.

Ichi tried his best to understand the conversation as it was happening.

“Ahhhh man... Are you sure??? Can’t you like, change your mind? Please?” San asked, pleading with the other Kaiju.

Ichi guessed that San had asked Zilla for something but, much to his surprise, she seemed to be standing her ground.

“I’m sorry but I really want to watch the news right now. It should be over in about an hour though. After that, you can have the TV, alright.”

San frowned and let out an overexaggerated huff.

“Fine...”

As San turned and saw Ichi looking at him he immediately perked up.

“Hey, Ichi! How’s it going? Are the drinks good this time?”

Ichi never knew how San had ended up so different from his other two brothers. San could still be ferocious when he needed to be, especially when Ghidorah was in the heat of battle, but for the most part, he was much more bright and positive than the other two heads. Sure, there were times when he could be a bit too happy and talkative for Ichi’s tastes, but Ichi honestly appreciated Sans’s distinctness. But tonight wasn’t one of those nights.

“Yeah, yeah, they’re fine... San, what was *that* all about?”

San shook his head as his smile faded.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I was just asking if we could change the channel on the TV to something more fun, you know? I mean the news is just so booooooooooooooring, especially since Godzilla’s been gone. I mean, what is there to talk about really?”

They should be talking about us becoming King of the Monsters, but instead, we’ve decided to lounge around here... Ichi bitterly thought to himself.

“Either way, Zilla said that I could have it in a bit. I guess that’s fine since we’ll be here for a while, but what a drag...”

Ichi was surprised about how clearly frustrated his brother sounded. He typically didn't let little things get under his scales, but he actually seemed bothered. It was... concerning. As annoying as San's overflowing positivity could be at times, the world didn't seem right without it. Ichi thought about trying to get San to open up, to try and find out if anything was bothering him, but he figured it was too soon. Now, the TV issue was a different question.

Ichi gave San a devious smile.

"Don't worry San, I'll handle it."

San tilted his head curiously as he silently watched Ichi.

Ichi cleared his throat before calling out to Zilla.

"It's Zilla, right?"

She slowly looked over at Ichi, only acknowledging him with a slight nod.

"Yeah?" She responded, clearly trying to hide her annoyance.

"I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with my brother here, and I think there may have been some kind of misunderstanding..."

Zilla's expression morphed into an irritated scowl before she abruptly cut Ichi off.

"Look, I already told him that he could have it when..."

Ichi's face contorted with rage. Zilla had made a massive mistake. If there was one thing Ichi hated more than anything, it was other Kaiju talking down to him.

"Give us that remote or *you are DEAD.*"

Ichi loudly growled out, splaying their wings out to make his figure as big and intimidating as possible.

Zilla's eyes went wide and she hastily slid the remote over to Ghidorah before her head practically snapped to her drink. Ichi turned to San and nodded toward the small device. He honestly wasn't sure how San planned on using it, but that wasn't his problem anymore. San closed his eyes and gave his brother a bright, cheery smile.

"Thanks, Ichi!" He said excitedly, before leaning down and trying to clumsily tap some of the buttons on the remote with the tip of his snout.

Ichi sighed and shook his head.

"San, how many times do I have to tell you, that if you want something, you really need to be *assertive*? A lot more kaiju would listen to you if you just put a little more force behind what you were saying."

"Mmmhmm, yea Ichi, assertive, got it..." San replied flippantly, clearly distracted by his new mission to try and navigate the remote without any hand.

Before Ichi could think of a more stern response, a loud voice echoed around the empty building.

"HEY, GET BACK HERE! YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR THAT!"

Ichi turned to see half of Mana's long body leaning over the bar and Zilla's seat conspicuously empty. Ichi guessed that he'd made her a bit uncomfortable. He felt Ni crane his neck over to look at what had happened before he gave Ichi a disappointed look.

"Well nice job 'Mr. Assertive'.", Ni said sarcastically.

"What's that supposed to mean?!" Ichi responded indignantly.

Ni shook his head and frowned.

"You really don't get it do you."

Ichi honestly had no idea what his brother was talking about. He'd noticed that Ni had been a little more quiet recently, but he didn't think it was anything to worry about. He would never have guessed that Ni had some kind of issue with him.

Ni called Manda over again.

"Sorry about that. We'll go ahead and pay for her drink if that's ok."

Ichi was completely stunned by Ni's offer.

"Go ahead and pay!?! What the hell do you think you're doing!" Ichi asked, his voice trembling with anger.

"I'm doing the right thing," Ni responded, his tone calm but his expression visibly frustrated.

"Wha... Ni, we're Godzilla's *arch-rival*. His most iconic villain. We don't do the right thing!"

Apparently, that was enough for Ni. He stopped any attempt at hiding his true emotions before laying into Ichi.

"Ichi, Godzilla's *gone*. He's been gone. It's time to move on! We've spent how many years constantly fighting him and the other kaiju? 50? 60? We finally have an opportunity to put all of that behind us and actually connect with the other's for once. Show them that we're not just a one-note villain. But you seem to have trouble understanding that."

Ichi was truly flabbergasted. The anger covering his face melted away and turned to pure confusion. Ni wanted to move on? How could that be possible? They'd only ever been Godzilla's enemy. It just didn't make sense to Ichi.

“Put everything behind us? Ni, I’m not sure... That can’t... That doesn’t...” Ichi tried to stammer out some kind of coherent response, but his words failed him. His mind was racing too fast to clearly think. There was only one thing that sprang to his mind.

“But I’m the one in charge...” Ichi responded weakly.

He instantly regretted what he said. Ni’s face quivered as he let out a threatening growl.

“Goddamnit Ichi, I don’t give a damn that you’re in “charge”! You might be the strongest head on this body, but it's still *our* body. Not yours. Maybe you should consider that every once in a while.”

Ichi felt like Godzilla had just blasted him square in the face with his atomic breath. He didn’t mean what he’d said... right? He’d never force his brothers to do something they didn’t agree to. But then he had to wonder how long Ni had felt like this. Did San also feel the same way? Had his quest for dominance over Godzilla been entirely selfish this whole time? When did things change?

The sound of someone loudly clearing their throat finally interrupted the argument. Ichi looked over and saw Manda waiting on them, visibly uncomfortable.

Ni angrily side-eyed his brother before turning his attention back to Manda.

“Sorry again.”

“It’s no problem. I accept your offer by the way. I always hate having to keep track of Kaiju who’ve left without paying, so it's a big help. The music you asked for should be starting soon by the way.”

Ni’s demeanor visibly relaxed when he heard that.

“Oh, thank you. I really appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem. I hope you enjoy.” Manda said before turning around and slithering away.

A few moments later, the sound of a piano shortly followed by a harmonica loudly played from the speakers.

Ni’s ears perked up and he nodded contentedly.

“Piano Man... nice.”

Ichi thought he recognized the song, but he was surprised that Ni knew the name.

“You... uh... you like this song?” Ichi asked, trying to break the tension between the two.

Ni cast a cold glance back at Ichi, clearly still mad at him.

“Yeah, I do.” He responded quickly before turning his attention back to the music.

Ichi cast his gaze down at the bar, staring blankly at his reflection in his drink.

Well, looks like I’ve royally fucked up today...

Ichi listened to the song as it played. It actually was pretty good. It was something he would love to talk with Ni about... if Ni didn’t hate his guts that is. Ichi looked back down and considered finishing the rest of his drink.

As soon as he had that thought he heard the vocalist sing, “Yes they’re sharing a drink they call loneliness, but it’s better than drinking alone!”

Ichi scanned the bar. With Zilla gone, Ghidorah was the only Kaiju present, and Ichi was the only one drinking. There was no one there to share his sorrow, no one he could share his thoughts with, not even his own two brothers. He was pretty sure he’d never felt more alone in his entire life. Ichi shook his head and pushed the drink away.

Chapter 3

As the song came to a close, the room was filled with the sound of the door opening followed by heavy footsteps crashing against the floor. The surprisingly loud noise made Ichi jump. He hadn't expected anyone else to come in seeing how dead it was, let alone make such a loud entrance. All three heads arched up to look at whoever had come in. They were shocked to find Kiryu walking up and sitting down where Zilla had previously been. The MechaGodzilla rarely left his tiny home, especially since Godzilla had left. But here he was.

"Didn't expect to see him here," Ichi said under his breath.

"That makes three of us," Ni said, responding for him and San, whose eyes were locked on the mechanical Kaiju.

This day just keeps getting better, doesn't it... Ichi sarcastically thought to himself. If Zilla wasn't bad enough, now he had to share a room with the mirror image of Godzilla. Ichi wanted to look away, or better yet leave, but it was a strangely intriguing sight.

"I wonder what he's doing here," Ichi said to himself, thinking out loud.

Manda slowly approached Kiryu clearly just as surprised as they were, but he seemed happy. The two had a short conversation that Ghidorah couldn't quite make out before Manda retreated and Kiryu sat there in silence.

Ichi's silent observation was interrupted by San lightly nudging him.

"Yes?"

"Why don't we ask him what he's doing here? He's, like, NEVER around! Oh, I wonder what a robot gets up to in their spare time... Can I Ichi, please?" San pleaded.

Ichi actually didn't hate the idea. Usually, he'd recoil at the thought of purposefully making small talk with the other Kaiju, but Kiryu was a bit of a mystery, and besides, what could go wrong?

"Sure, be my guest," Ichi said while nodding.

San's head whipped around, clearly eager to talk to the enigmatic Kaiju.

"Hey, you!" San said in a surprisingly loud voice that made Ichi flinch in surprise.

Kiryu's head slowly turned until his "eyes" met San's. Ichi suddenly felt rather uncomfortable. Something about the way Kiryu looked at them with his solid yellow, unblinking, mechanical eyes made him seem a little uncanny. San clearly didn't seem to notice as he spoke up again.

"Tell us what you're doing here right now or I'll... uhhhh... I swear I'll do something bad... I promise?"

Ichi's eyes went wide in response. He never in a million years expected San to say something like that.

"San!" Ichi exclaimed, trying to get his brother's attention.

San turned around and smiled, clearly oblivious about what he'd just said.

"Yeah?"

"Why did you ask like *that???*"

"You told me to be more assertive, right?" San replied innocently.

Ichi flinched at the response.

He heard Ni chime in from over his shoulder.

"Nice job, Ichi."

Ichi slowly shook his head and closed his eyes.

“That's... that's not what I meant.” He said, trying his best not to sound disappointed.

Ichi glanced over and saw Ni leaning forward to try and respond, but he quickly cut him off.

“Wait, don't worry about it. I'll... handle it.” Ichi said, trying his best not to sound reluctant. The whole situation was his fault, after all, so there was nobody to blame but himself.

Ni paused and gave him a skeptical look, but slowly backed away. He was still clearly angry at Ichi, but at least he was willing to give him a chance.

With his brothers reigned in for the moment, Ichi turned his attention back to Kiryu. Despite all the commotion, Kiryu's expression remained unchanged as he stared back at Ichi. The fact that Kiryu showed no physical emotions at all only made Ichi more uncomfortable. He tried to fight through his conflicted emotions the best he could and muster up a response.

“Hey... uh... sorry about that. I told him something earlier and it must've... um... gotten under his scales. He didn't mean it.”

The two Kaiju stood there in silence for a few moments. Every second made Ichi feel as if his scales were slowly falling off.

Finally, Kiryu opened his mouth and spoke up.

“It's no problem. I didn't take offense to it or anything.”

Kiryu's voice sounded relatively normal compared to how he looked. Ichi wasn't sure if that made him feel more or less comfortable given the circumstances.

Another awkward silence fell between the two. Ichi really wanted to end the conversation then and there, but he was still curious as to why Kiryu was there.

Just as Kiryu was about to turn away, Ichi spoke up.

“But, if you don’t mind me asking, why are you here Kiryu?”

“Why do you ask?” Kiryu responded quickly.

“Well, from what I can tell you aren’t the type of Kaiju who just decides to go to a bar on a whim. And besides, I’ve heard that you’ve been conspicuously absent from the rest of the Island for a while.”

“And what does a robot even do at a bar anyway?” San chimed in from behind Ichi.

Ichi cast a disapproving glance at his brother,

“San...”

“But Ichi...”

“Look, I told you I’d handle-”

Before he could finish reprimanding his brother, Ichi heard Kiryu speak up.

“Ichi, your brother’s no problem. I’d be more than happy to answer any questions you have.” The response was surprisingly warm. Ichi honestly hadn’t expected to hear that kind of emotion come out after Kiryu had seemed so lifeless.

“Told ya!” San said happily before beaming towards Kiryu.

Kiryu’s response had even managed to catch Ni’s attention, and all three heads were once again fixated on the MechaGodzilla.

“Well, I recently was talking with one of my old friends and he told me that I needed to get out more. You’re right, I haven’t been very present around Monster Island

lately, but I promised him I'd try and get out more. And San, to be honest, I have no idea what I'm doing here. It's my first time in a place like this."

"Really?" San asked, clearly a bit disappointed, before quickly adding, "Well... then why did you decide to come here?"

Ichi could tell that he'd expected a much more interesting answer.

"I figured that this was the place to go to try and catch up with people but..."

"It's a slow day, so you're stuck with us." Ichi abruptly cut in, finishing the sentence for him.

From the way Kiryu shuffled around, his tail slightly curling beneath his feet, Ichi could tell that his response had caught Kiryu off guard.

Ni glared at his brother, and Ichi regretted what he'd said. Even if he'd meant it, it wasn't the best idea to interrupt someone who wasn't naturally attuned to conversation and also hadn't spoken to more than one other Kaiju in the past few months.

Ichi started to apologize, but before he could Kiryu unexpectedly replied.

"I don't feel like I'm stuck with you."

Kiryu had managed to surprise Ichi again. Most other Kaiju could barely stand being near Ghidorah, yet Kiryu actually managed to tolerate them.

"You don't?"

"Not at all. I'm sure you'd be very interesting and have plenty of stories to tell. Besides, I think we have a lot more in common than you think."

Ichi couldn't help but laugh at the last statement.

"You and me? In common? You can't be serious."

"Of course I am. We're both some of Godzilla's toughest enemies after all."

Ichi was still skeptical. If there was one Kaiju he couldn't have felt more different than, it was Kiryu.

"Maybe, but afterward you two became all buddy-buddy. We've always been enemies and probably always will be." Ichi cast quick, concerned glances at Ni and San. Normally, he'd be fully confident with his answer. Of course, he'd stay Godzilla's enemy, it was only natural. But did they all feel that way, or was it only him? Did he even feel that way still? It was an unwanted question that gnawed at the back of Ichi's mind.

"I suppose that's true, but it doesn't discount the fact that Godzilla's been the focal point of both our lives for... well for as long as I can remember at least."

Ichi thought he heard a tinge of sadness in Kiryu's voice. He'd remembered hearing that the two were close. He guessed that Kiryu must've probably taken Godzilla's disappearance pretty hard.

Maybe you do have more in common than you realize... A voice in the back of Ichi's head nagged at him. He shook his head to try and dispel the intrusive thoughts.

"Speaking of Godzilla..."

Ichi turned to see Ni leaning forward to ask a question.

"Have you heard anything about him?"

San was clearly interested in Ni's line of thinking and asked a slew of questions before Kiryu could respond.

"Oooooohhhh, good question? What do you think Godzilla's up to anyway? Maybe he has some kind of secret plan or something! Did he tell you anything before he left?"

Kiryu shook his head slowly.

“I’m sorry, but I haven’t heard anything.” The response was surprisingly short. Ichi had expected Kiryu to say more, but it seemed like Godzilla was a bit of a rough spot for the mechanical Kaiju.

The three brothers exchanged uncomfortable glances as the conversation seemingly came to an abrupt end. But before they could get back to what they were doing before, Kiryu spoke again.

“I did talk to him before he left. He didn't say anything about what he was doing, but he told me something... that I needed to hear. I guess that’s why I’ve been alone more often than not lately. I’ve had... a lot to think about.”

San frantically nodded empathetically,

“Yeah, I’m sure. Sorry for asking.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Kiryu responded.

Ichi sighed.

“I will admit, things have been a lot more quiet around here without the big guy. Honestly, I’ve felt a bit...”

Empty? Aimless? Sad? Maybe even slightly depressed?

“Bored... Yeah, it’s been... uh... boring around here without him.” Ichi finished, trying to sound convincing. Even if he did feel any of the emotions he’d thought of, he certainly wouldn’t share them.

Kiryu looked down before quietly responding.

“Yeah, I’m sure it has been.”

It seemed like the conversation was winding down again before Ichi suddenly had an idea.

He suddenly smiled. Kiryu may have reminded him of Godzilla, but maybe that wasn't such a bad thing...

"I have an idea," Ichi said to Kiryu.

"Yes?" Kiryu asked

"Why don't we have a quick fight?"

San gasped and Ni growled. The two heads clearly hadn't expected that.

"WHAT?" San exclaimed.

"Ichi..." Ni hissed threateningly.

Ichi snapped at both of them before saying, "Come on, cut me some slack! We haven't fought with another Kaiju in ages! We're probably rusty and at least it's *something* to do. Besides, I don't want to kill him, I just want to have a friendly battle, that's all!"

The three brothers quickly devolved into incomprehensible bickering. Ichi knew that his brother might be surprised by the idea, but he hadn't expected the amount of resistance he'd gotten.

The three were suddenly interrupted by the sound of Kiryu laughing.

Ichi glared at Kiryu.

"What's so funny?" he said in a low growl.

Kiryu shook his head.

"We can't fight."

"Why not!?"

"Because you wouldn't stand a chance against me," Kiryu stated bluntly.

"What?!" Ichi hissed out.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you. Perhaps I could’ve phrased that better.” Kiryu responded, seemingly critiquing his involvement in the conversation as it went on. Ichi figured he was being genuine, but that didn’t make him any less angry.

“Explain yourself right now and I just might feel generous enough to not turn you into a heap of scrap metal.”

Kiryu shook his head and took a few moments before responding, clearly trying to make sure he didn’t make the situation any worse.

“What I meant to say is that I feel I would have a pretty clear advantage in any contest between us. I’ve analyzed a lot of your previous battles with Godzilla, so I know quite a bit about how they went. One particular point of interest is the fact that you’ve never actually defeated Godzilla in a battle. There have been tough contests for sure, but Godzilla has always found a way to defeat you rather soundly. In all honesty, every form of MechGodzilla, including myself, has gotten a lot closer to killing Godzilla than you have. You certainly are a capable fighter and worthy rival, but my experience against Godzilla shows that any confrontation between us would more than likely result in a sound victory for me.”

Ichi was dumbfounded. He could not believe what Kiryu had just said. He couldn’t be right... right? The statistics he was spewing out were clearly wrong or at least biased. But as Ichi went over the numerous contests against Godzilla in his head, he struggled to find a way to counter Kiryu’s argument. It was almost exactly like he said, the two had some tough battles, some certainly were close, but Godzilla had never truly been pushed to the brink by Ghidorah.

“Well... I... You see... that... that can't be... somethings wrong...” Ichi incoherently stammered. Even if he could privately accept that Kiryu may have been somewhat right, he could never bring himself to admit it in front of *anyone*. It would've destroyed the last small vestiges of pride he was hanging onto.

As Ichi struggled to form a cohesive response, he noticed San nodding slowly beside him, his eyes closed, expression contemplative.

“Well, he kinda has a point.”

Ichi froze when he heard San's reply. He guessed his brothers were a lot more willing to admit defeat than he was. At the very least, it broke Ichi out of his incoherent spell.

“No... he doesn't. San, just get back to... whatever it was you were doing.”

San frowned back at his brother but didn't say anything. He slowly leaned back down and continued his losing battle with the buttons on the TV remote.

Ni had remained conspicuously silent, and Ichi exchanged a glance with his brother. The anger was gone for the most part, but Ichi couldn't decipher what Ni was thinking. Was he like San? He clearly was tired of fighting, so he wouldn't be surprised if he believed what Kiryu was saying. But Ichi could tell that Ni was lost in thought. Even if he wanted to stop fighting, Ichi guessed that Ni was uncomfortable with the rather large blow to their ego they'd just received.

Ichi turned back to Kiryu but avoided his eyes. He'd felt so confident at the start of the night, but now he could barely reply to the Kaiju around him. Eventually, Ichi responded.

“Look, I don't know much about statistics, but I do know they don't tell you everything. Either way, you'll never really know if they're right until you put them to

use. You may have plenty of data about me and my fights against Godzilla, but you've never seen me fight in person, let alone actually go up against me. So, if you're that confident about beating me, why don't you put all that data to the test and prove me wrong?"

Kiryu tilted his head to the side, processing what Ichi had just said. He lightly tapped his metal talons on the bar as he thought. After a few moments, he seemed to have formed a response.

"You know what Ichi, you're right. It was unfair of me to judge you based on second-hand accounts and intangible data. I still struggle with being less... mechanical, for lack of a better word. I guess you could say that's why I'm here, to actually try and figure out what it means to live a real life."

Kiryu's response surprised Ichi. He'd somehow managed to give an answer coherent enough to change Kiryu's mind ever so slightly. But he also couldn't help but feel a little bad for Kiryu. It seemed like he hadn't actually meant to start any drama, he'd just... misjudged the conversation. He couldn't imagine how it must feel, trying to navigate complicated thoughts and emotions that aren't part of your original state of being.

"It's... no problem." Ichi slowly replied, before quickly adding, "But you still never answered my original question, do you want to fight or not?"

Kiryu looked up and shook his head.

"While I'm still confident in my abilities to stand up to you, I think I'm ok. Maybe some other time, but I'd just like to do something peaceful right now if that's ok."

Ichi silently nodded. He didn't feel like forcing the conversation along, so he turned back to his drink. To his surprise, Kiryu quickly spoke up again.

“Ghidorah, if you don't mind, I'd like to talk about some things with you.”

Ichi was shocked. He actually *wanted* to talk with them? No kaiju had ever approached them for a conversation before. Ichi didn't know how to respond. He turned to Kiryu and frowned.

“If you're looking for a peaceful night, you'd be better suited hanging out with someone else.”

“Why's that?” Kiryu asked.

“Look, it's nothing against you, it's just... we're Godzilla's rival. And...”, Ichi sighed before looking at his brother Ni before continuing, “... and not all of us are pleasant to be around.”

Ni's face remained expressionless, but Ichi could see his eyes widen ever so slightly. It wasn't exactly an apology, but Ichi wasn't sure if he was ready for that yet.

A loud thud interrupted the moment, and Ichi looked back over to see Kiryu taking a seat right next to them. He looked up at Ichi.

“You may be Godzilla's rival, but I'm not so sure about the last part.”

Ichi looked away.

“Maybe you'd be more sure if you saw how I treated the bartender and the last customer that was in here...”

Kiryu shook his head.

“We all have our moments, Ichi. I just had one with you, didn’t I? Kaiju mess things up all the time, but that doesn’t mean we can’t try and fix them. There’s always room to change.”

Ichi looked down and thought about what Kiryu said.

There’s always room to change...

It sounded a lot like what Ni was saying earlier. Maybe Kiryu and Ni were right. Godzilla was gone, and Ichi had no clue when he was coming back. He’d spent a year feeling like he had no purpose, assuming things would go back to the way they were. But the world had changed, and he realized that he couldn’t stay the same. Not if he wanted to keep him and his brothers happy.

Ichi looked back up at Kiryu and gave him a small sad smile.

“You think so?”

Kiryu paused for a moment before responding

“Ichi, I was literally seconds away from killing Godzilla and we’re best friends now, of course, I think kaiju can change.”

Ichi burst out laughing at the unexpectedly humorous reply he’d gotten.

San’s head shot up. He’d been distracted and clearly wanted to know what he’d missed out on.

“What? What was so funny?”

Ichi looked at his brother and smiled, shaking his head.

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll tell you later.”

He then turned his attention back to Kiryu.

“Thank you for that. I mean it. It’s been... well forever since someone around here has been legitimately interested in us. If you want to stick around and hang out, then please, be my guest.”

Kiryu nodded pleasantly. The uncanniness had seemingly vanished from his expression. Ichi could finally see the kaiju encased under the unmoving metal armor.

Kiryu slowly looked around the bar before adding,

“Well, seeing as no one else is here, I guess I’m stuck with you...”

The two kaiju filled the empty room with laughter.

“Very funny, wise guy. Aren't robots not supposed to have a sense of humor?”

Ichi responded sarcastically.

Kiryu shrugged, “I guess. But then again, robots aren’t supposed to feel anything, are they?”

“Fair point.”

Ichi noticed Ni watching his conversation intently. Something about his expression was different though. Ichi wasn’t exactly sure, but he seemed happy.

The sound of Kiryu’s voice dragged Ichi back away from his brother.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“Why do you care so much about Godzilla?”

All three heads froze and exchanged glances. Why did they care about Godzilla? Ichi had slaved over that question for months, trying to find out why life was so different without Godzilla. He’d never found a good answer. In the beginning, it seemed so simple. They arrived on Earth from outer space and wanted to take it over, and Godzilla stood in

their way. But as the years passed, and failures stacked up, Godzilla almost became an obsession for Ghidorah, especially for Ichi. Then the subject of that obsession vanished and Ichi was left with no resolution. He'd never bothered asking what his brothers felt though, and he was legitimately curious. Besides, what Ni had said earlier was right. They may have shared a body, but they were still completely unique individuals.

“That’s a... complicated topic,” Ichi replied slowly, “I think we all probably have different answers to that question.”

The three heads went silent before Ichi loudly cleared his throat and looked back and forth between Ni and San until they finally got the hint.

San spoke first. He was a lot slower and more contemplative than Ichi had ever seen him before.

“Well, at first, Godzilla was our enemy and that's all I really knew. Ichi, Ni, and I would go fight him every once in a while because we wanted to take over Earth. We fought a lot, so much in fact that I think I actually ended up kind of liking him! It’s funny, we became so connected through our encounters that I actually thought that Godzilla was... well he was kinda cool I guess...” San trailed off, clearly unsure of his answer, especially with his brothers silently watching him.

San’s response wasn’t that surprising to Ichi. His brother had always been easily distracted by the spectacle of their battles, so San finding Godzilla “cool” shouldn’t have been anything special. But hearing him say it out loud sounded surreal.

San looked over at Ichi, his expression still racked with confusion. Ichi gave him a small smile and nodded in acknowledgment. While he was still unsure of himself, San

smiled back at his brother before the two turned to Ni, who seemed much more confident with his answer.

“Ahhhh yes, Godzilla. We’ve been locked in a constant struggle with him for years. When the feud started, I was determined to destroy him. But as the years passed, I started to see our rivalry differently. We’d gotten settled on and around Earth. It had become somewhat of a home for us, and that felt... good. We’d spent our entire lives wandering the stars, destroying random planets, and now we’d found a place where we belonged. Strangely enough, Godzilla was the one to help us find that home. Eventually, I felt like the rivalry we had was preventing us from moving on with life. I’d thought about trying to stop the feud but... but I... uhhh...”

Ni looked down, clearly uncomfortable, before looking Ichi directly in the eyes, continuing with a sigh.

“I... I didn’t want to disappoint my brothers. I didn’t want them to feel like I’d let them down, or something...”

Ichi flinched at Ni’s response, eyes wide. That’s how Ni had felt this whole time? He’d been pressuring his brother onto a path he didn’t want to take? Ichi was forcing Ni to live a life he had grown tired of? What Ni said made him realize how little he knew about his brothers and, worse still, how little he’d cared. The feeling made his stomach churn.

Ichi’s eyes shot down to the table. He couldn’t bear to look his brother in the eyes.

“Ni, I’m...”

Ni rapidly shook his head and cut Ichi off.

“Ichi please, not now... We’ll... we can talk later. For now...” He finished by nodding back towards Kiryu.

Ichi faced Kiryu again. Time was up, and Ichi had to say something.

Ichi sighed before trying to coalesce his thoughts in real-time.

“I’ve... I’ve always seen Godzilla as our arch-nemesis. Ever since we arrived, he’s been a giant asteroid in the middle of our flight path, too big to fly around. It’s funny, looking back now I realize that after our first few fights, after Godzilla had driven us off, we could’ve moved on. It would’ve probably been easier to just cut our losses and move onto some other planet. But something about Godzilla made me want to stay here. We’d never been defeated before. Never been stopped. Maybe that’s why I was so determined to beat him. That’s how we became lifelong rivals. But Godzilla wasn’t just a rival to me. He was... an obsession. Defeat after defeat, draw after draw, after every battle my obsession grew and grew. Eventually, the losing didn’t even bother me anymore. I remember, after our last battle, as we retreated home, I couldn’t help but smile. And I could never understand why. The idea of defeat used to be revolting, now I barely minded it, so long as it was Godzilla. I just wanted to keep fighting until finally, one day, I gained the ultimate satisfaction of standing over Godzilla, victorious. But now Godzilla’s gone, and my obsession has no closure. It’s been gnawing at me for months, creating a deep dark pit in the center of my mind... But now... I’m somewhat thankful.”

Ichi took a deep breath and looked at each of his brothers before continuing.

“Godzilla’s disappearance made me realize something. My rivalry with Godzilla was not *our* rivalry. I’d never truly considered what my brothers thought about what we

were doing. In the end, maybe it's for the best that Godzilla left because it helped me realize that I wasn't the brother I should've been."

Ichi looked up at the ceiling, his heart pounding. It was hard, but he was glad he'd gotten that off his chest. He felt something slowly rub up against the base of his neck. He looked down to see San trying to get his attention. San warmly smiled at him.

"Thanks, Ichi, that was really sweet."

Ichi blushed and looked away.

"San, couldn't you have waited to say that until we weren't in public?"

"Ah come on, there's like no one here! You said it yourself earlier."

Ni laughed from over their shoulder and Ichi looked over at his other brother.

"What's so funny."

Ni smiled at him, and Ichi felt as if a massive ton of rocks had been lifted off his wings.

"Oh nothing, just the fact that you honestly think that what San said is somehow sappier and more embarrassing than the soliloquy you just went on."

The two of them laughed, and eventually noticed Kiryu doing the same. Ichi turned to the MechaGodzilla and asked, "So, did that answer your question?"

Kiryu shook his head slowly.

"I'm honestly not sure. But what I do know is you three seem like quite the combination."

Ichi smiled

"I guess you could say that."

Kiryu suddenly got up before saying.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Ichi asked, somewhat confused.

“Well, it is getting rather late and the bar will be closing soon. If you’d like, we can continue our conversation at my place. It’s a bit more idyllic than here.”

Ichi was not used to receiving other Kaiju’s hospitality. It was a strange feeling, but a good one.

“I think we’d enjoy that,” Ichi answered before smirking and adding, “And besides, I think it’s time that we interrogated you after all the questions you got to ask us!”

Kiryu nodded before making his way towards the exit.

“Of course... of course... I’d be happy to answer any questions you have.”

As Ichi handled the tab and bid farewell to Manda, he heard Ni ask Kiryu something.

“Do you have anything to drink?”

“Well, if you couldn’t tell I’m a robot, so I don’t have much, but so long as you’re not picky, I should be available to provide.”

Ni let out a short laugh as Ichi turned around and smiled at his brother.

“I thought you didn’t want to end up like me.”

Ni closed his eyes and smiled back.

“Well, there’s a time and place for everything.”

The two kaiju exited the bar, with Kiryu leading the way. Manda followed them soon after to lock up the bar.

Before he took off, Ichi turned around and spoke to Manda one last time.

“Hey, Manda.”

The long Kaiju froze again, before slowly turning around, still apprehensive from the previous encounter they'd had.

“If you don't mind, keep an eye out for any news about Godzilla. If anything happens and we're around, we want to know.”

Manda tilted his head curiously, their expression simultaneously surprised and suspicious. Ichi understood his reservations. Godzilla's enemy asking for information on his whereabouts didn't exactly sound like the most innocent thing in the world.

Ichi shook his head and did his best to hold his frustration in.

“Look, we don't want to kill the big guy, alright? Just... if you see him or know anything, let us know. I think it's time that we talk things out.”

Ichi could tell that Manda still wasn't totally convinced, but he gave Ichi a small nod. He supposed that was the best he was going to get.

Ghidorah then spread their wings and took off into the sky, following Kiryu back to his home, both kaiju silently hoping to find some hint as to Godzilla's fate.

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