

JFFS

JAPANESE FANTASY FILM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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GODZILLA, CHINESE STYLE? As was first reported in Vol. 2, No. 4 of the JFFS Newsletter in 1980, a Chinese Kung-fu film distributor had taken out ads in the film trade papers to announce a film titled STAR GODZILLA. At the right is a copy of that advertisement, depicting Godzilla (styled after SON OF GODZILLA), Angilas (barely discernable at Godzilla's feet), and a Di Laurentis style Kong. As far as can be determined, this film has never been made--if it was, it was without the knowledge and approval of Toho Studios. In light of the way in which Japan's other popular series monster, Gamera, made his return to the screen in recent times (see article within), perhaps it is for the best that Godzilla remains in retirement.

REIJI MATSUMOTO's latest tv series, QUEEN OF A THOUSAND YEARS, is going down in the ratings game with a big splat. This 'unprecedented space fantasy', as the publicity materials refer to it, concerns the exploits of another Maeter/Yuki look-alike as she

travels about time and space. This show exhibits many similarities

to GALAXY EXPRESS 999 in both characters and content, but seemingly lacks the appeal and drama of its predecessor. On the other hand, Matsumoto's SARABA GALAXY EXPRESS 999 feature film of the summer of 1981 did quite well. The film featured some striking animation, providing a fitting finish to the space fantasy series. Leaving Tatsuro behind, Maeter boards the Galaxy Express, never to see her little companion again.



Where the old world and the new world meet.....

STAR GODZILLA

First Distributors (UK) Ltd presents A Star Godzilla Production
Starring Joey Fann, Cheng Cheng, Charles Woo, Screenplay Chris Lee, Directed by Faten Hsu, Produced by Jay Hsu



Queen of a Thousand Years

The strongest in the universe!
Gamera returns again! A fantasy of space!



SHOCHIKU CO., LTD.

LOOK OUT, AMERICA! HERE COMES "SUPER MONSTER GAMMERA"!--No sooner had two of Toho's unreleased science fiction films of the 70's finally gained a foothold on American soil (WAR IN SPACE and CATASTROPHE: 1999) as reported in our last newsletter, when out of nowhere comes the 1980 Daiei film SUPER MONSTER! In a rather unusual and peculiar turn of events, SUPER MONSTER was aired with very little advance warning during October on Music TV, an entertainment channel offered around the country by many cable and pay-tv stations. Outside of the title song (which remained in Japanese instead of being dubbed), the film really has very little to offer from a musical standpoint, making it a bit of strange programming for Music TV to offer amidst its usual array of rock stars. Perhaps there is a closet Japanese sf fan working at Music TV. In any event, as with WAR IN SPACE and CATASTROPHE: 1999, SUPER MONSTER was dubbed by the same British outfit that also produced our versions of all the 70's Godzilla films except SMOG MONSTER.

SUPER MONSTER tells the story of a little boy named Kaichi who has a great fondness for turtles. He constantly visits the turtles at a nearby pet store until one day the woman who runs the store gives Kaichi a turtle of his own. This woman is actually Kilara, one of three Space Women assigned to protect the Earth from any dangers which it may face. And Earth is about to face the terrible threat of Zanon, the pirate spaceship and messenger of death throughout the universe. The aliens begin to let loose their army of monsters to destroy the Earth (curiously, they are all the same monsters which Gamera had previously fought). At the same time, Kaichi, at the urging of his mother, decides to let his turtle go free in the river by his home, wishing secretly that the turtle would transform into Gamera and drive away the evil monsters. Sure enough, Kaichi's wish comes true and Gamera arrives to systematically eliminate the alien monsters one by one (all through the use of stock footage from the previous Gamera films), with an occasional hand from the Space Women. With all their monsters destroyed, the aliens decide to attack Earth themselves in their indestructible Zanon ship (which looks suspiciously like an Imperail Star Destroyer). Gamera flies out into space to meet the aliens head on. In what must have been a spectacular collision (since it wasn't shown on film), Gamera apparently gives his life to destroy the Zanon ship and save mankind.

Unfortunately, SUPER MONSTER seems to typify the current state of the live action SF film industry in Japan. Operating under severe economic constraints and a shrinking acceptance of newer Japanese SF products, Japanese filmmakers have pretty much just made token offerings to the field, leaving the

marketplace almost entirely to foreign films. By trying to fool audiences into believing that this would be a new adventure for Gamera while merely using footage from older films, creativity seems to have been foresaken in favor of economic consider-

ations. SUPER MONSTER comes off as a rather weak, half-hearted attempt by Daiei and Shochiku to rekindle interest in giant monster SF, but

SUPER MONSTER

PRODUCED by DAIEI FILM DISTRIBUTION CO., LTD.

Directed by NORIAKI YUASA

Screenplay by NIISAN TAKAHASHI

its virtually non-existent production values seems to achieve the opposite result. SUPER MONSTER was snubbed even by the Japanese movie-goers during its 1980 release, playing second fiddle to a MIGHTY ATOM Roadshow feature with which it was co-billed at the time.

All but a few brief moments of special effects footage in the film are lifted from the previous Gamera films, a fact plainly obvious to even the most naive viewer. An expository sequence depicting the destructive exploits of the Zanon spaceship is rendered entirely with a couple production paintings instead of creating new special effects. When Gamera's opponents show up (at least in a different order than they appeared in their original films) to wage a little devastation before being repelled by our hero, we are treated to an assortment of old scenes. However, the editing of this stock footage is rather poorly done, as there is often no continuity from one moment to the next. The only plus that rises from all this is that this film offers a glimpse of footage from the only Gamera film not to be released in this country, GAMMERA VS. ZIGRA. The special effects in these scenes are fairly well executed. After slicing a ship in two with its razor-sharp head and back fins, Zigra enters into battle with Gamera. Zigra swiftly swims past Gamera a number of times, cutting away at Gamera's vulnerable underbelly with its fins. But eventually Gamera drags Zigra to land where the super turtle tosses a boulder that becomes impaled on Zigra's spiked head. Weighed down by the rock, the sea creature is helpless. After playing a little tune on Zigra's back fins, Gamera incinerates his foe with his fiery breath, much to the chagrin of the aliens. Gamera does have a brief encounter with Space Cruiser Yamato, flying past the animated battleship during one of Kaichi's dreams. Gamera also flies past the Galaxy Express 999 upon his return to Earth from battling Guiron on the alien's planet of monsters.

SUPER MONSTER's greatest weaknesses lie in its particularly inept screenplay and poor casting. Even the average small child towards whom this film is directed have an easy time pointing out its many faults. For instance, the Space Women who are assigned to protect Earth are not particularly super--they have no powers other than the ability to fly and they do not believe in using weaponry of any kind even for protection, rendering them virtually useless in their mission. The only device they have is an electric organ that allows them to watch Gamera in action whenever a tune is played on it. Kilara, leader of the Space Women, is played by Mach Fumiake, a professional woman wrestler who appears about as attractive as some of the residents of the pet shop in which she works. Ms. Fumiake displays some of her wrestling prowess in hand-to-hand combat with the alien agent assigned to Earth, providing the only original "action" scenes in the entire film.

All in all, SUPER MONSTER provides a dull thud for Gamera to make his farewell appearance in. Surely he deserved better than this. The old boy should have stayed in his shell instead.....

Still no change on the status of the return of Japan's other monster star, but Godzilla is making an appearance this winter in Japan. Each winter, selected theaters hold special Japanese SF movie festivals, and this year's festival covers the King of the Monsters. Each of the 15 Godzilla films is scheduled to be shown during the festival.

KAMEN RIDER FANS TAKE HEART--Yes, yet another new masked rider is about to make his debut from Ishimori Productions. The continued success of each of these series keeps its producers coming back with more. Soon to be unveiled, this new rider will be the 10th to date.....

NEWS FROM TSUBURAYA PRODUCTIONS--After a moderately successful appearance in

TSUBURAYA

PRODUCTION

theaters this summer, ANDROS on Japanese tv this fall. An Andros Melos originally saved He has fought mostly against monsters who have previous

MELOS became a weekly regular ally of the Ultra brothers, Ultraman Ace from Ace Killer.

aliens and appeared in Ultra series such as Zeton, Black King, and the Magma Alien.



ULTRAMAN

a silver and green costume. Andros Wolf, a silver and red weapons built into his bit more on optical effects of the typical wrestling & superhero shows. However, are doing poorly as the SF onslaught of animated

Andros Melos himself is similar in appearance to the Ultras, but with Recently, he has been joined by outfitted hero who has blade-like shoulders. This series depends a during battle sequences instead karate tactics employed in other this and other live-action shows field becomes dominated by the giant combination robots.

news for Tsuburaya Productions:

ULTRAMAN: HERO FROM THE STARS has been put on hold for at least a year due to a withdrawal by two of the film's backers. So, with merely a first draft screenplay completed, the film seems destined to be a long time in the coming, if indeed it is produced at all. In the meantime, Paul Scriebman, whom you may recall was responsible for the American version of GIGANTIS, THE FIRE MONSTER, is acting as U.S. representative for Tsuburaya and is trying to hawk their programs in the States. Among the shows which he is pushing is the animated Ultraman series, titled THE ADVENTURES OF ULTRAMAN for American release (released in Japan as THE ULTRAMAN--see our April/may 1980 newsletter). Schriebman was to have also served in some executive capacity on ULTRAMAN: HERO FROM THE STARS. One cannot help but wonder if all this negative news will further dampen the possibilities for a new Godzilla film this year for Toho's 50th Anniversary.

WHAT'S NEW IN '82?--Still in the planning stages is the final Yamato film, tentatively titled YAMATO TOWARDS ETERNITY.....also under production are a brand new IDEON animated feature.....a new adventure for the magical robot cat Doraemon....and GUNDAM III (alternately titled MUGURAI: SORA).....

RECENTLY ON TV IN JAPAN--The last quarter of 1981 saw the television premiers of the supernatural drama DEMON POND, the psychological horror story HOUSE, and the Samuari period ghost story APPARITION OF THE CAT.....

CLUB NEWS--Apologies to all who have ordered merchandise from the Izumiya Co. The order was sent in quite some time ago, but as of this writing we have not received our response, possibly due to the deluge of holiday mails at home and abroad. Please have patience and rest assured that as soon as your merchandise arrives, it will be promptly mailed out.

That about wraps up another newsletter...looking forward to a big year in 1982, which will include a special effects convention during August of 1982 to be held in Tokyo. JFFS representatives will be on hand to supply full coverage! Till next time, sayonara.....

GAMMERA

Gammera, the Invincible! Found within the ice in the North Polar Sea, Gammera was said to be the monster of the centuries from the continent Atlantis. He has a mean disposition, but has a fondness for children and is the ally of mankind. Gammera spits flames from his mouth and can fly by means of a revolving jet at mach 3.

Height: 60 meters
Weight: 80 tons

COAL ORGAN--Only coal is processed here for the production of heat energy.

HEAT ENERGY HEART

HEAT MUSCLES--Whenever heat is brought to bear on them, the muscles become harder than metal.

PETROLEUM ORGAN--Gammera likes to drink petroleum. It is processed here and sent to the High Temperature Furnace.

HIGH TEMPERATURE FURNACE--Gammera eats petroleum, coal, flames, missiles, atomic materials, uranium, and magma. All these are digested in this organ.

HEAT ENERGY BOWEL--Substances processed in the High Temperature Furnace are returned to heat energy here.

