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By Sean McQuaid

This Week: *Mothra*

Look, up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a giant moth!

Yup, a giant moth. And if you think that's hard to believe, pity the poor Tokyo natives (Tokyoans? That sounds like a yodeling club) who lived through a moth destroying their city, killing thousands, and upstaging them all in the process (not that the latter feat took much doing). That's *Mothra* in a nutshell (actually, *Mothra* does appear in something not unlike a nutshell towards the end of the film, but we'll get to that).

Mothra, a genuine "sci-fi classic", is the story of (surprise!) a giant moth who attacks Tokyo-- not because of peer pressure (even though all the other giant monsters ARE doing it), nor is it an example of "porch light" syndrome sparked by the well-lit Tokyo skyline (though one wonders why monster-heavy Tokyo doesn't attract more giant bugs that way); in fact, *Mothra* is that rarest of giant monsters who has a clear-cut and pseudological motivation for mass destruction: Barbie-napping.

Y'see, the Japanese (curious little monster-prone dickens that they are), stumble onto a remote island where the natives have been thriving despite atom bomb tests. On investigating, the explorers (led by a shady megalomaniac named Nelson) stumble onto a man-eating vampire plant (which they take pretty much in stride) and then find something which REALLY gets their attention: two tiny, Barbie-sized, twin girls. An atomic mutation? Remote island inbreeding? Doublemint Gum commercial casting experiment gone horribly wrong? Could be, but we never find out exactly why the women are so darn small. What's important is that the diminutive duo politely ask the Japanese men to leave them alone and stop testing those atom bomb thingies. The explorers agree but the nasty Nelson doubles back and snatches the girls (gunning down a few zillion full-size natives for good measure). Nelson then flees back to Japan, where he turns the tiny twosome into a singing nightclub attraction.

Now, before you think they should have called this film *Little Women* (ouch), this is where the plot thickens. When sympathetic parties (including our heroes, a distinguished scientist and a portly-but-scrappy jolly reporter) try to help the miniature maidens, the girls good-naturedly (and telepathically) report that they'll be rescued by *Mothra*. Sure enough, the surviving natives back on the remote island are conducting a mystic wake-up call for our boy *Mothra*, who emerges from a giant egg as a King-Kong-sized caterpillar. And darned if he ain't an aquatic caterpillar, since he swims to Tokyo under his own power

and sinks a boat en route for good measure.

Once in Japan, *Mothra* does what any good giant caterpillar would do and starts to trash the joint-- steamrolling tanks, flattening buildings, and stoically ignoring airstrikes. Finally, he gets knocked on his back and seems to be in "I've fallen and I can't get up" mode until the onlookers realize he's just building himself a cocoon (which looks kind of like a giant fuzzy peanut). The military then proceed to turn it into a roasted peanut with some handy gadgetry I call the Tanning Satellite Dishes of Doom (in stereo!). Our man *Mothra*, however, shrugs this off and busts out of his cocoon having transformed into-- say it with me-- a giant moth! Before the Japanese army can cobble together a giant butterfly net, *Mothra*'s in their face and flapping up a hurricane with his wings, sending scores of Japanese cars flying to their doom (hey-- maybe Ford sent him!). The rest of the movie consists of our heroes trying to get the doll girls back and stem *Mothra*'s wrath.

Acting (or lack thereof): The performances are mercifully forgettable. Let's face it, we paid to see the giant moth, not his badly dubbed supporting cast.

Not-so-special effects: 75% of the fun in this flick is the cheesy technical schlock, from the explorers' wacky radiation suits (which look kind of like they were designed for post-nuclear holocaust bee-keepers) to the main moth man himself (described by one viewer as looking like something you'd win in a carnival booth). Other unintentionally funny bits include the scenes which establish the doll girls' size, and the countless model buildings and cars demolished by *Mothra* (though *Mothra*'s flap-flap-flap shtick does get a little old after a while).

Stuff to Watch For: When Nelson's henchman grabs the doll girls in a clumsily executed early scene, sharp-eyed viewers will notice he's holding actual Barbie dolls (or the Japanese equivalent) whenever the camera isn't on the girls close-up. And of course, any scene with *Mothra* is a hoot (especially when he pokes his newly fuzzy noggin out of his cocoon for the first time). A giant moth destroying Tokyo-- it is to laugh.

Bottom Line: A beautifully absurd concept spoiled by the underutilization thereof. Or, in other words, TOO DARN MANY BAD JAPANESE ACTORS AND NOT ENOUGH MOTHRA! The funnest scenes (generally those containing *Mothra*) are few and far between, making this film a real snoozer (the first half or so is a total write-off). But those few, brief shining moments of mammoth moth mayhem almost redeem the whole sorry mess.

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