



Restored Special: International Premiere of 4K Restorations

# Gamera Trilogy

## Gamera

*Director:* Noriaki Yuasa  
*Production Company:* Daiei Film  
*Producers:* Masaichi Nagata, Hidemasa Nagata  
*Screenplay:* Niisan Takahashi  
*Director of Photography:* Nobuo Munegawa  
*Editor:* Tatsuji Nakashizu  
*Music:* Tadashi Yamanouchi  
*Cast:*  
Eiji Funakoshi  
Michiko Sugata  
Harumi Kiritachi  
Junichiro Yamashita  
Japan 1965  
79 mins  
Digital 4K (restoration)

## Gamera vs. Barugon

*Director:* Shigeo Tanaka  
*Production Company:* Daiei Film  
*Producers:* Masaichi Nagata, Hidemasa Nagata  
*Screenplay:* Niisan Takahashi  
*Director of Photography:* Michio Takahashi  
*Editor:* Tatsuji Nakashizu  
*Director of Special Effects:* Noriaki Yuasa  
*Music:* Chujii Kinoshita  
*Narrator:* Genzo Wakayama  
*Cast:*  
Kojiro Hongo  
Kyoko Enami  
Akira Natsuki  
Japan 1966  
101 mins  
Digital 4K (restoration)

## Gamera vs. Gyaos

*Director:* Noriaki Yuasa  
*Production Company:* Daiei Film  
*Producers:* Hidemasa Nagata, Kazumasa Nakano  
*Screenplay:* Niisan Takahashi  
*Director of Photography:* Akira Uehara  
*Editor:* Tatsuji Nakashizu  
*Director of Special Effects:* Noriaki Yuasa  
*Music:* Tadashi Yamanouchi  
*Cast:*  
Kojiro Hongo  
Kichijiro Ueda  
Naoyuki Abe  
Tatsuemon Kanamura  
Japan 1967  
87 mins  
Digital 4K (restoration)

The Showa Gamera films were restored by Kadokawa Corporation in 4K at IMAGICA Entertainment Media Services from the scanning of original 35mm negative films. IMAGICA Entertainment Media Services conducted colour grading under the supervision of Shinji Higuchi, who is the director known for *Shin Godzilla*, and Shunichi Ogura.

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It's the mid-1960s, and *kaiju* are in vogue. Screens across Japan are dominated by colossal creatures like Godzilla, Mothra, Rodan, King Ghidorah, Dogora, and even Frankenstein's monster, all of which hailed from the same studio. Up until 1965, Toho had a monopoly in the *kaiju* game ('*kaiju*' literally translating to 'strange beast', but more commonly used to denote 'Japanese giant monster'). That all changed, however, when Toho's chief rival Daiei Film decided to produce a *kaiju* picture of their own. Daiei was the studio largely responsible for introducing the world to Japanese cinema after the end of the Second World War, when Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* – which Daiei produced and released in 1951 – won the Golden Lion at the 12<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival and Best Foreign Language Film at the 24<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards. Notably, Daiei also produced Japan's first full-colour science fiction film in 1956 with *Warning from Space*, which was written by *Seven Samurai* co-scribe Hideo Oguni.

Eager to capitalise on Toho's monster-sized successes, Daiei president Masaichi Nagata set out to produce a rival *kaiju* picture. The initial attempt was the accursed *Giant Horde Beast Nezura*, which would have depicted an infestation of giant, mutated rats swarming and overwhelming Tokyo, partially inspired by Hitchcock's *The Birds*. *Nezura* went into production but was swiftly cancelled by Nagata after the disastrous staging of special effects sequences. Live sewer rats – allegedly captured across Tokyo by Daiei staff members – were utilised for these sequences, bringing with them germs, ticks, lice, fleas, and other health hazards which tore through Daiei's studios and the surrounding residential neighbourhoods. After this rat-astrophic failure and with a dedicated budget and resources in place, a new monster was needed.

The legend goes that, on a flight back to Japan from the US, Nagata was inspired by tortoise-shaped visions, catching sight of either a somewhat tortoise-esque island or a tortoise-shaped cloud formation. Inspired by these images, Nagata envisioned a colossal chelonian creature flying alongside his plane. Upon his return to Japan, Nagata set his staff – including his son, producer Hidemasa Nagata – to work on his giant turtle idea, resulting in a story treatment titled *Attack on Tokyo by Fire Breathing Turtle*. Upon the strength of this treatment, Nagata requested a full screenplay from writer Niisan Takahashi. The result: *Gamera, the Giant Monster*, or simply, *Gamera*.

The *Nezura* incident, however, left many of Daiei's more experienced directors wary of taking on a special effects picture, including *Nezura*'s own would-be director Mitsuo Murayama, who had previously helmed the science-fiction espionage picture *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly* in 1957. *Gamera* fell to the relatively inexperienced director and former child actor Noriaki Yuasa, the son of noted stage actor Hikaru Hoshi. Yuasa had filmmaking in his blood: he spent much of his childhood surrounded by actors, directors, and producers, having lived with his family in housing for film industry professionals. After he and his childhood friends appeared in several films as extras, Yuasa was eventually given the lead in a stage production near the end of the Second World War which, ultimately, never came to fruition due to air raid alerts. Throughout the war, Yuasa made his first credited theatrical appearances, including under the direction of his uncle Koji Shima in *Warning from Space*.

In the mid-1950s, Yuasa undertook a series of rigorous studio-mandated exercises to prove himself ready for a career behind the camera, as his impressive family lineage would suggest. Yuasa was eventually granted the role of assistant director and, some years later (and despite lacking a formal promotion to director), made his directorial debut with the musical comedy *If You're Happy, Clap Your Hands* in 1964, before being assigned to replace Murayama on *Gamera*.

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Despite the elder Nagata's enthusiasm for *Gamera*, the film was considered a risky venture and was cautiously produced as a Daiei B-picture. The film had a modest budget and limited resources, most of which were left over from *Nezura*. Undaunted, Yuasa and special effects director Yonesaburo Tsukiji weathered belittlement from colleagues and studio executives and completed the film utilising only the Daiei resources available to them, despite chatter of hiring legendary Toho special effects director Eiji Tsuburaya (of *Godzilla* and *Ultraman* fame) to complete the picture. Upon release (and despite its budgetary and production restraints), *Gamera* was a smash hit, far exceeding Daiei's expectations. The picture was even sold abroad, appearing in the US in 1966 in a heavily edited edition titled *Gammera the Invincible*, double-billed throughout its various releases with two films by Mario Bava: *Knives of the Avenger* and *The Road to Fort Alamo*.

With *Gamera*'s unexpected success, a sequel in the already-established Godzilla tradition was inevitable. In 1966, Gamera returned in *Gamera vs. Barugon*, a generously budgeted full-colour blockbuster, produced as a prestige Daiei A-picture after its predecessor's box office triumph. Yuasa, however – the man who had the tenacity and determination to make *Gamera* a success – was relegated to the director of special effects on *Barugon*, working under the supervision of the more experienced Shigeo Tanaka, who had previously directed Daiei's prestige historical epic *The Great Wall* in 1962, and would go on to helm several entries in the *Woman Gambler* series. Despite its many merits, *Gamera vs. Barugon* proved unpopular with children and younger viewers, who had so thrilled at the abundant monster sequences of *Gamera* only a year earlier. *Barugon*, on the other hand, was aimed at older audiences, featuring long sequences of dialogue devoid of monsters and action.

Thankfully, *Barugon* was successful enough to merit a sequel of its own, with Daiei set on winning back the younger audiences that had made *Gamera* such a smash hit. The result was *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, which saw Yuasa triumphantly return to the director's chair. *Gamera vs. Gyaos* established two foundations of the Gamera series. The first was Gyaos herself: a colossal, blood-drinking, Dracula-inspired vampire bat that would emerge as Gamera's arch-nemesis for decades to come. She would make regular subsequent appearances throughout the franchise, including as the primary antagonist in Shusuke Kaneko's genre-defining reboot *Gamera: Guardian of the Universe* in 1995, and most recently in Netflix's 2023 anime series *Gamera: Rebirth*.

The second was the underdog Noriaki Yuasa victoriously cemented in the dual roles of director and special effects director, positions he would maintain throughout the original run of Gamera pictures, which concluded in 1980 with *Gamera Super Monster*. *Gamera*, *Gamera vs. Barugon*, and *Gamera vs. Gyaos* comprise three foundational texts of the *kaiju* genre, proving Japanese giant monsters could prosper outside the established confines of the Toho stable. Following Daiei's example, other Japanese studios would produce their own *kaiju* pictures, resulting in the so-called 'Kaiju Boom' of the mid-to-late 1960s, which saw giant monsters explode across screens big and small from every one of Japan's major studios. Just as it introduced the world to the riches of Japanese cinema, Daiei laid the groundwork for the *kaiju* genre's longevity and continued prosperity today, all thanks to Masaichi Nagata's unique vision of a giant turtle soaring through the sky.

Steven Sloss, February 2026

**Steven Sloss** is a lifelong fan and scholar of kaiju cinema who has written and presented on the subject for the BFI, BBC, Arrow Films, Glasgow Film Festival, and more. He is the former co-host of the AV Club-featured Kaijusaurus Podcast and is currently writing a book on the original *Godzilla* (1954) for Bloomsbury Publishing and the BFI. Follow him on Instagram at [@steven\\_sloss](https://www.instagram.com/steven_sloss).