

The Big Guy

A play in one act
by Tom Moran

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Setting

Place: Tokyo, Japan
Time: Present day

Characters

GODZILLA - A 250-foot-tall irradiated mutant dinosaur. The costume should be based on the creature's traditional film appearance, but there is no need for anything overly elaborate.

(GODZILLA's roar comes from offstage left, followed by the sound of air-raid sirens and artillery. Lights up on stage, which is a crude scale model of downtown Tokyo. It is night and lighting should attempt to mimic "floodlights" pointing up from ground level.

(For simplified staging, one alternative is to use 2-D buildings that Godzilla can knock over, which can be righted by stagehands dressed in black and possibly in Noh masks. Stagehands can also manipulate aircraft ton strings.)

Loud footfalls approach offstage left, and GODZILLA enters. He lumbers through the city, flailing about angrily, stepping on cars and taking wild swings at the buildings. He's in no hurry. The sound of air raid sirens and artillery continues; smoke fills the air.

GODZILLA picks up a subway car and shakes it, then looks out at the audience, raises his arms and roars. He does it again, seemingly disappointed by the lack of a response. He looks around, lost, and dejectedly puts down the subway car. He looks around again, and sighs.)

GODZILLA

Tokyo. Why the hell am I back in Tokyo?

This town.

I could have gone to Kyoto or Hokkaido this time around. Hell, I could go pummel Paris or L.A for that

matter. But it's like some kind of magnet, luring me back here over and over again.

By now I could lead tours.

(GODZILLA points offstage left and imitates chirpy guide voice.)

And to your right, you'll see the National Diet Building, constructed in 1936 to house Japan's bicameral legislature and heavily damaged by allied bombing during World War Two. And also by me six or seven times, by Mothra twice, and once each by Rodan, Megalon and Zigra.

(He looks around and points offstage right.)

To your left is Tokyo Tower, first constructed in 1958 and since then destroyed by kaiju roughly every six to eighteen months.

Kaiju. That's what they call us. "Strange beasts."

And it is strange. Me. Here. Again, with the same damn question: Why? What am I here for? Should I destroy this place or defend it?

(He picks up subway car again and peers inside.)

You hear me in there? Whose side am I on?

(He puts the car down, on top of a building if possible.)

It's a wonder they even bother rebuilding the joint anymore. But every time I show up, here it is again, like new. You ever see that movie, Groundhog Day? 'Course you did, everybody saw that. Well, it's like that. No scaffolding or construction crews, everything just ... back. Born again. They wipe the slate clean in some misguided hope that this was the last of them, that whichever one of us took this place down to its foundations has been drowned or driven off and it's finally over, this inconstant half-century siege.

But it never is. We come back. We always come back.

(He freezes and cocks his head
offstage right, listening. He
points in that direction.)

Any of you hear something over there? (Pause. Shakes
head.) Huh.

Last time I came through must have been three, four
months ago. I'm laying waste to the place, which is
something I do, of course, when I start to feel
lethargic. Slow. I mean, I know, I'm pretty lumbering
to begin with. But I think they must have hit me with
some kind of gas. Whatever it was, it took all the
oomph right out of me.

So I lay back against a building, just to catch my
breath, right. And a bunch of soldiers file out onto a
roof across from me, at eye level, guns pointed. And
behind them walks a tiny guy in thick glasses and a
lab coat. He's got a megaphone, and he looks right at
me, he clears his throat, and he starts to talk.

(Pause. Godzilla stands. He
pretends to hold a megaphone and
speaks in a Japanese accent. It's
not mocking, just an attempt at
imitation.)

Tell me about your mother.

(Pause.)

Now, I've been electrocuted, dissolved, depth-charged,
shot at with all kinds of armor-piercing projectiles,
fired into space, flash-frozen, burnt, blown up,
asphyxiated, and garroted with high-tension wires. But
therapy. That was a new one.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary
megaphone)

Tell me about your mother.

It was all 200 million years ago, so you'll forgive me
if the memory's a bit fuzzy. Fact is, I barely

remember her. She's just an olive-drab mess of scales and spines that vanished into the jungle as soon as I could fend for myself. And my dad didn't even stick around that long.

My mom was - like me. I think. But not like me. Nobody was. There were triceratops and tyrannosaurs. Megalodons. Everyone was prickly, and mammoth, and menacing. Everyone always flexing their tails and claws and spikes. Just one big planetwide pissing contest.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary megaphone)

You must have fit right in.

And you'd think so, right? But it wasn't a place you just fit in. Too many enemies. I mean, you humans, you're on top of the food chain, no question about it. And who comes next? Dolphins? Chimps? They're not exactly threats to your continued dominance, are they? You guys have had a monopoly on this place for millenia.

But back then, we all shared the top. Bipeds and quadripeds. Therapods. Sauropods. And we all hated each other. It was species versus species, and those lines, they're pretty tough to cross.

But look at me. No one like me, before or since. Near as I can figure, I'm maybe some sort of mix of a T-Rex, Iguanodon and Stegosaurus. I guess Mom must have really gotten around.

All I know is, whatever I am, I'm it. And it was Godzilla versus the world. Everybody always wanted a piece of me. Fighting is all I ever learned how to do. You ever read *There are No Children Here*? You know, about the kids in Cabrini Green? Yeah, probably, you all look like educated, well-meaning liberal types. Well, that's what it was for me. Like being one of those poor kids in the projects, left to fend for yourself every time you walk out the door.

I read that Chicago finally knocked down Cabrini Green. Good for them. If they'd left it to me, it would have taken about 20 minutes.

(GODZILLA smashes his arms down on top of a building, inflicting considerable damage.)

Urban renewal. It's what I do best.

But. If you tangle as often as I have, eventually you're going to lose. It's not like I was invulnerable. Now, I was big in those days, sure, big enough to hold my own, but not like I am now. Not even close.

Anyway, it's just another Tuesday morning in Pangaea, right? I'm running through the ferns, I'm chasing after an allosaur - little stringy but great for a light lunch - when I break into a clearing and there they are. Three T-rex, just lying in wait. Brothers, all of them a few years older than me. Three biggest a-holes on the whole supercontinent, if you don't mind me saying, and you can forget about a fair fight. They just wanted to take me down.

So they all jump me at once. Now, I've got some moves, see.

(GODZILLA mimes the following fight moves, damaging buildings in the process.)

I kick them off. I throw some good hard punches, which isn't easy given the length of my arms. I drop an elbow, I knock one of them right off his feet with my tail, and get a good hard head-butt in there on the other. But it's three-on-one. One of 'em sneaks up from behind with something - a tree, I dunno - and conks me over the head. Blackout. Game over.

When I come to, it's still black. But it's also dense, viscous. And I'm sinking into it. I try to scream but my mouth fills up with the stuff. And the harder I fight to get out, the more stuck I get. The faster I go down. Then everything just winks out. And that's how I ended up at -

(He is interrupted by the sound of tank artillery. He grabs at the back of his neck as though he has an itch.)

Dammit.

(He addresses a tank at ground level.)

Hey, I'm trying to ... discourse here.

(He walks behind a building and picks up a toy tank. He turns the turret away from his head and addresses it.)

You guys don't give up, do you? You ever read your own constitution? Article nine: "The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." No belligerency! You know what that means? No army! No navy! And yet, every time I pop in, this is how you greet me.

(He tosses the tank aside and yells after it with bluster.)

All these guns and who is it that saves your (air quotes) "pacifist" butts every time a couple of pteradons or a UFO from the future shows up? Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Speaking of which...

(GODZILLA again cocks his ear offstage right. He turns in that direction and lumbers to the edge of the stage, listening.)

Yep, there's someone else out there. Somebody big. Cutting a swath of destruction, no doubt. They're coming.

(He turns his attention back to the audience.)

So I was in the dark. Did I dream? I don't think so. Was I dead? I guess not, because here I am. And one day, I woke up.

Whoever did it, they had a nuke, I guess, and they didn't have any problems with setting it off in the middle of the Pacific. It wasn't these guys. The Americans, I guess, or maybe the Russians. Or the French? Do they still do that?

But there's this sound, massive, piercing. And it's not black anymore. It's the opposite of black, like I'm standing inside of the sun. Everything is so intense, so loud, so strange. My mind is ringing. I don't know where or even who I am.

And I can feel myself growing. I'm changing. I shoot upwards. But I'm not just getting bigger. I'm born, again, changed into. This.

(He spins around, exhibiting himself.)

The big guy, they call me. Three hundred feet tall. Fifty thousand tons. I leave lethal levels of strontium-90 in my footprints. I breathe radiation. I burn up the world with it. I'm Chernobyl with legs.

Tell me about your mother. My mother? Look in the mirror.

Now the little guy looks nervous. Maybe he forgot about the whole strontium-90 thing. He drops the megaphone and runs back inside the building, followed by the soldiers.

I just shift my back, get more comfortable, and fall asleep. When I wake up, the shrink has come back, along with the soldiers, except now everyone's wearing full radiation suits.

Gotta hand it to them, they don't let a few hundred thousand loose rads spoil their plans for the afternoon. The guy picks up the megaphone again.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary megaphone)

The bomb was not our doing. We are a peaceful people.

Really! After all the crap they've done to me, he pulls that line.

I mean, I do understand where he's coming from. It wasn't their bomb. But it's not my problem. The atom is coming for them one way or the other, right? Aren't I just the messenger in all of this?

As they say: History shows, again and again, how nature points up the folly of men.

Nature. My nature, that's what's driving me. When I wade out of the Sea of Japan, there's no malice in what I do. No forethought. Understand that. Anger, it's what I know. It's what I was given. It consumes me as surely and completely as that hellfire that came to me in the Pacific. Put yourself in my shoes and see how you feel.

So I destroy. I leave my watery bed and march ashore, lumbering, howling like death incarnate, taking out my rage on everything in my way. Bridges, power plants, factories, skyscrapers. Tanks. Planes. Armies. I know I do this. I can't stop myself.

(GODZILLA punches a couple of buildings, imitating a boxer. He hums the opening bars of 'Eye of the Tiger.' He pauses, thoughtful.)

You know what's running through my head when I take down Tokyo? Nothing. Nada. Animal instinct. I'm living down to the level of my tiny reptilian brain pan.

But the little man in the radiation suit won't buy it.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary megaphone)

But you do not always destroy. You help us. You save us from enemies. You have done it before. Why?

Don't remind me.

What these people haven't picked up on is this. I destroy whatever gets in my way. That may be the Tokyo Dome or the NEC Supertower.

But it may just as easily be one of my "pals." Gigan or Rodan or whoever. What seems to be me rescuing Japan from some greater threat, throwing body slams and headlocks against a giant beetle or a three-headed dragon bent on carnage, is just blind rage, redirected. That's it. That's the nature of the world. Destruction is a blessing or a curse or both at once.

That's it. That's all.

(A noise from far offstage right - more artillery, another siren, a vague roar. GODZILLA stares off right, trying to make out what it is.)

Somebody's out there. Gunning for me.

That seems to happen a lot these days. Every time I wake up, just about. I guess I'm a lighter sleeper than I used to be, because stuff is waking me up all the time. Submarines, earthquakes, more H-bomb tests.

But there are also times when I just come to life. There's this twinge somewhere in my skull, calling me, almost like a command. And I think what it must be is I'm being summoned. By who, or by what - I don't know.

(He picks up a toy car and tosses it in his hand. He winds up like a baseball pitcher, and throws it offstage.)

I remember the first time it happened. As soon as I roll out of Tokyo Bay I get bodyslammed by this huge rubbery bulk. I get up and dust myself off, and I see this enormous bug, right, this insect, the size of me. But he's got a horn. And, for some reason, drill bits instead of hands. Megalon, they call him.

I'm pretty pissed off, as you can imagine, but I'm excited too. It's someone like me! Maybe I've found a

friend, someone to share my journey through this strange new world.

But before I even get a chance to say 'hey, we should hang out,' he gets me with the drill bits. And man, they hurt. A lot. I've got pretty tough skin, but they're drill bits! On his hands!

So what can I do? I take him down. I dust off some of my old Triassic moves - now, of course, nicely augmented with radioactive halitosis.

(GODZILLA mimes a few fighting moves.)

It's a pretty lethal barrage, if I do say so myself, and I've got him down on the mat within 15 minutes. (He raises arms like a triumphant prizefighter.) But I'm so wiped out I don't even make it the rest of the way into Tokyo, I just turn around and start to swim back home. Then I hear this noise, and I realize that people are lined up in the streets and leaning out of windows. They're cheering for me.

(In Japanese voice)

Go go, Godzilla!

Cheering? I just had to smack down my first chance at a buddy for twenty thousand millennia. There's nothing worth cheering about.

(More noise from offstage.
GODZILLA peers, and idly takes a few swipes at a building.)

Naw, it ain't him out there. It ain't Megalon this time. This one sounds different. It might be - I don't know, maybe Mechagodzilla? Great.

There's always another enemy. But there's only one of each of us. You notice that? One Megalon. One Rodan, one Mothra. One Godzilla. It's like we all disembarked from an ark piloted by a Noah who really didn't think things through.

(GODZILLA absentmindedly plucks a streetlight from the street and picks at it.)

Humans. I don't get you. You're all so desperate to be unique. Look at creationism. It's there because this belief in a divine progenitor, it's just a lot easier to take than being alone in the universe. Right?

(He holds the streetlight between two fingers and flicks it absently into the distance.)

But I *am* alone in the universe. And you know, I would give anything to be in your shoes. You've got uncles and second cousins all over the place. Orangutans. Alligators. Trilobites. That's not alone at all. You're all logical steps in a long continuum. A culmination, if you want to look at it that way. But what have I got? Where is my family? What's the point of me?

(Pause. GODZILLA paces, runs his fingers along a couple of buildings, then turns back to the audience.)

The guy keeps talking.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary megaphone)

You do not need to destroy. You can help us. Like our friend Mothra.

Now, I don't know why I'm still listening to this guy instead of, I dunno, flicking him off the ledge like a tabletop field goal. I guess it's probably the gas. But now he's hit a nerve.

Mothra. A colossal kiss-ass moth that shoots scales from her wings and answers to a pair of 6-inch tall voodoo priestesses. I really picked a winner with that one.

(Pause.)

I'm sorry. It's. It's personal.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary megaphone)

Please.

He says.

All right.

Mothra was my only real attempt at a friend. At more than a friend. My best shot, you could say. She - and I didn't even notice she was a she at first, because when you're busy laying waste to a major metropolis, you don't pick up on these things - she and I first met a while back when I took on Kong.

You guys remember that, I bet. The Big Guy versus the American superstar. Battle of the century, right? And it was a tough one. That ape doesn't fight fair. Gouging at my eyes, fishhooking.

(GODZILLA demonstrates a fishhook, putting a finger inside his mouth and pulling sideways.)

Damn dirty ape.

(GODZILLA mimes the following description.)

And he almost got the best of me. We're rampaging through the Shibuya district and I've just slammed his head into a couple of office buildings, bam!, bam!, when he squirrels out and before I know it he's got me in a monster headlock. So to speak. And he's just pummeling me with those hairy knuckles. No mercy.

Then there's this horrific shriek and the pressure on my neck eases up. I look up and Mothra's hovering there, wings beating furiously, snatching wild at Kong's hair. She grabs it and holds on tight. She's getting thrown all over the place, but she keeps a grip. So I brace myself and take aim. I yell for her to clear out. And I let loose with the fire breath.

And, wow. I mean, a 300-foot-pile of burning ape hair. It hurts just to think about it. As usual, they rebuilt Tokyo in like two months. But it took years to get the stank out.

Anyway, Kong ran away to dunk himself in Tokyo Bay. And Mothra, she and I started talking. And we sort of hit it off. Strange bedfellows in this business, I guess. But, really, she can be very charming when she's not shrieking. Generous and thoughtful, and funny. You know. Likable.

After that I would go to see her on Infant Island sometimes. She'd be so happy to see me, but things always felt a little off there. It was a bizarre setup, the way she answered to these little dwarf twins that talked in chorus.

Plus she would get called out to defend Tokyo all the time. She saw this place as being some sort of personal protectorate. She wanted to help the people here. I never understood why. I didn't really try to, at the time. As Updike put it, gods do not answer letters.

Anyway, despite the philosophical differences, we became friends. And we became, well, more than friends. Yeah, we made a pretty offbeat couple, but it's not like I had an extensive pool to choose from. She was lonely. I was lonely. These things happen.

So we tried to ...

(Sits down and crosses hands on lap.)

It was all going okay. All the parts looked to be compatible. I mean, we were both pretty nervous, but we just saw it as a first stumble-through, you know? And she was getting excited, and it was making me excited. We grunted, we roared, we shrieked. As one will. We could hear the seagulls clearing out from the island, like they knew what was coming.

We started breathing heavy. Both of us. Faster and faster, heavier and heavier, until, well, you know how

it works. You just lose all control. Except losing all control is dangerous when you're Godzilla.

(GODZILLA stands.)

When you've got radioactive fire breath.

That put the evening to an abrupt end.

(He paces.)

She healed, eventually, at least on the outside. Lucky for me, I don't think she can actually be killed - she's some kind of mystical creature, though I was never quite clear on the details there.

(More noise from offstage right.
GODZILLA peers in that direction.)

Hmm. Yeah. It's King Ghidorah over there. That's the three-headed dragon with no arms. I think he's from outer space, or maybe the future, or possibly from outer space in the future. He's tricky - he's no Kong, but he's usually got something up his sleeve. Or he would, if he had arms.

He'll probably spot me in a few minutes. But let me finish. So I've just spilled my guts about Mothra to little doctor man, who's not through with me yet.

(In Japanese accent with imaginary megaphone)

So you just wanted a friend, a companion. And you were sad when you made a mistake and ruined that.

(Pause)

Yeah.

(Pause. Back in Japanese voice.)

That's very human of you.

(In own voice.)

That's very human of you.

And I stare at him. He thinks he's got me into some sort of verbal trap. A deep pit full of thick, viscous logic. But what he doesn't realize is that I feel stronger. The gas is wearing off.

(GODZILLA mimes the following actions using a nearby building.)

I jump to my feet and take a couple of steps. I lean over to him, so close he can feel my breath, or he could if not for his plastic radiation footie.

Then ... I don't do anything. I stand there breathing heavy while the helicopters and tanks circle around. Because, dammit, the guy got me. That was human of me. And now, I'm immobile. I'm paralyzed by indecision. Which, I realize, is also human of me. Hell, it's downright neurotic.

So I just left. I stomped off through the streets, right back into the Sea of Japan. Where I've had all the time in the world to wrap my mind around our little talk.

And now.

For fifty years, I've debated what that nuclear blast did to me. I used to think it just triggered a random set of genetic mutations - which is certainly what you'd expect out of an H-bomb, right? Just entropy in action, accelerated a few million percent.

But maybe what really happened is, it sped up time. I mean, not literally. But it's like maybe I, evolved. Does that make sense? Maybe the bomb was a stand-in for 20 million years of natural selection, of lost history, occurring in an instant.

(The helicopter reappears, darting around the stage. GODZILLA takes a few swipes like it's a fly, but misses. He chases it off.)

But what does all that mean? It created a new me - I knew that already. I have a radioactive heart pumping radioactive blood. I don't even have to eat, so I

guess I must be fission-powered. I'm basically invulnerable.

This too too solid flesh, it appears, is incapable of melting. Alas.

And for a long time, I figured that was it. That was all that changed. But it's not. Because what's the surest sign of evolution? Intelligence. My brain. I guess it grew too.

And I think it's kept growing. Because the primal part of me, the part that gnaws at me until I've turned Tokyo into a heap of rubble. It's lost a step. In its place, there's something else, something tucked underneath all the rage. Something that makes me spare a little dweeb in a radiation suit to get on with his life.

(Another noise from offstage right, closer and louder.)

King Ghidorah's almost here. Damn, he looks pissed.

(Pause.)

I think that's why I've been waking up. My brain. I had figured some human had been behind it. Somebody with new technology or one of those precocious kids with latent ESP. Hell, I don't know.

But no. It was me. Some hidden part of me that knew, and that wanted to help, because in the long run it's the only thing that's really worth doing.

I can't go on being angry forever. It just took a long time for me to understand that.

So there you go.

(GODZILLA looks toward offstage right and starts to do some basic stretches.)

I went and saw her again. Not that long ago. She was angry. I could tell those freaky warrior twins had been giving her lots of dumb advice. You know, who

needs him anyway, men are from Mars. Probably some sort of yoga thing involved too.

But we talked. I apologized, which is not something I am prone to do. That's all. We left on good terms. Lukewarm. Not frosty. Or fiery, thank goodness. And I guess we'll try to start over. Slowly. I figure I can handle that - I've certainly started from scratch before.

But I have something to do first.

(Turns toward offstage right.)

Hey, Ghidorah! Japan may still be a monarchy, but that don't make you king! Yeah! (to audience) Burn.

(Shakes head and smiles.)

That therapist was a dirty trick.

I could ignore what he said, of course. I could go on destroying indiscriminately. I could live to fight and fight to live, just like I did before the atom lit my world on fire. I could revert. I could devolve.

But I won't.

(GODZILLA takes a couple of steps toward the approaching noises, then turns back to audience.)

'Cause I'm bigger than that.

(He raises his arms and howls, then slowly lumbers off stage right. End of play.)