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## IT'S BIG, ALL RIGHT - A BIG FLOP \ `GODZILLA' TAKES A STOMPING AT THE BOX OFFICE AND IN THE STORES

**Rose DeWolf**, Daily News Staff Writer

If ``Size Does Matter," as all those ads for the movie ``**Godzilla**" have been telling us for months, then the big beast has been a HUGE disappointment.

Neither the size of the crowds at the box office nor the size of sales figures for ``**Godzilla**"-related merchandise has measured up to expectations.

``**Godzilla**," made for \$125 million with another \$60 million thrown in for publicity, opened just before Memorial Day in a record number of theaters - but brought in only \$74 million that week.

That's not the \$93 million box office receipts reached by last year's Memorial Day blockbuster, ``Lost World: Jurassic Park."

In the two weeks since, ``**Godzilla**" has played more like Titanic the ship than ``Titanic," the movie. The second week's receipts were \$30 million, the third week's \$10 million.

The Wall Street Journal estimated that ``**Godzilla**" would have to bring in \$240 million in domestic ticket sales alone to be considered a success. That's clearly not going to happen.

Ed Mintz, president of CinemaScore, which tracks movie receipts, told the Associated Press: ``There's no repeat business. There's no word of mouth. It's going to drop . . . and be gone."

Before it opened, it would have been difficult to find anybody who wasn't predicting that ``**Godzilla**" was going to be a smashing success. Some 75 merchandisers - makers of toys, T-shirts, tacos and more - signed up to license the **Godzilla** image.

It was noted that ``**Godzilla**" was being made by producer Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich, who had made the enormously successful ``Independence Day" in 1997. Could they go wrong?

They could and did.

There are many theories on why ``**Godzilla**" hasn't been a hit. One obvious one is that the critics didn't like it. ``None of it . . . is any fun. Efforts to update `**Godzilla**' with realistic special effects backfire . . .," wrote Daily News movie critic Gary Thompson.

Another is that it was wrong to assume that fans of all the old, campy **Godzilla** movies made in Japan (in which the monster was played by a man in a rubber suit) would welcome a digitalized **Godzilla**.

Another is that the movie ``Deep Impact," which had opened just before ``**Godzilla**" had a . . . well . . . deep impact on ``**Godzilla**'s" box office. (It took in \$98.5 million in three weeks.)

Sony marketing chief Robert Levin complained in the Los Angeles Times that the press hurt ``**Godzilla**" by overplaying stories about the film's marketing campaign. ``What do you do when you have the man in the street discussing . . . how disappointed he was in the business `**Godzilla**' did rather than the movie?" Levin asked.

Meanwhile, business analysts were faulting the marketing campaign for hurting the merchandising tie-ins, saying the decision to hold back all ``**Godzilla**" merchandise until the movie opened was a big mistake.

The idea was to keep the monster's image a secret. But merchandisers were unable to take advantage of all the buzz generated by the advertising for ``**Godzilla**" and were let down by the poor box office after it opened.

Theater owners aren't happy. The stock price of one publicly owned chain, Carmike Cinemas Inc., lost 5.7 percent of value when the company admitted ``**Godzilla**" had crushed its profits in the second quarter. It didn't help that many competing movie-makers were holding back their most attractive releases figuring that ``**Godzilla**" would dominate well into June.

Harper Collins printed 400,000 copies of a novelization of the movie and sold one-third of them. A spokesman said the company was unhappy with those sales, and ``if the movie had been a sensational hit, we would have done better."

Kmart stocked all sorts of **Godzilla** merchandise from backpacks to action figures. A company spokesman said that, nationwide, the merchandise is selling - especially the movable action figure. But, in Philadelphia, ``sales are not as good as we'd hoped," said Terry Smith, manager of the Kmart at 8801 Torresdale Ave. Smith says the movable **Godzilla** is popular with little children, but she thinks that may be unrelated to the movie. ``My grandson likes it," she said, ``because he likes dinosaurs. And dinosaurs, like **Godzilla**, were great big lizards."

``**Godzilla's**" weak performance hurt Sony Pictures at more than the box office. Sony made a deal to sell TV rights to NBC with escalator clauses that increased the price \$1.5 million for every \$10 million gross above \$125 million. But now it looks like NBC will pay only about \$25 million.

Caption: PHOTO

**Godzilla** is popular with little ones like Billy Stewart of Torresdale (ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ/  
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