

New Godzilla video game steers clear of nuclear references

By Yuri Kageyama
AP Business Writer

TOKYO — Godzillas galore, including last year's Hollywood version, stomp on buildings, thrashing about and breathing fire, in a video game going on sale globally in mid-July. But don't expect any references to radiation, the mutant reptile's trademark affliction.

Simply named "Godzilla," it's the first video game devoted to the irradiated creature in a decade. It's also the first such game for the Sony Corp. PlayStation 4 home machine, ensuring dazzling digital graphics.

Shunsuke Fujita, the game's producer, is flush with excitement when he speaks about how he and his team are true Godzilla believers, having grown up on the movies. They were very careful to render what he calls its "totally cool" ferocity.

In the original 1954 movie, Toho Co. studios concocted the giant animal that arose as a mutation from nuclear testing in the Pacific. That had special resonance in Japan as the only nation to have been attacked with nuclear weapons.

Gareth Edwards, the director of the 2014 Hollywood *Godzilla*, also made a point to include backdrop references to atomic weapons and radiation.

But the game steers clear of the horror of both topics and Fujita is reluctant to explain why. What substitutes for radiation in the game is a reference to "energy," which Godzilla sucks up to gain strength.

"We realize radiation is something that can never be disassociated with Godzilla," is all Fujita would say on the topic.

Nuclear issues have become particularly contentious in Japan after the March 2011 tsunami set off three reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant and irradiated the surrounding area,



RADIATION REDACT. Shunsuke Fujita, the producer of the *Godzilla* video game for Bandai Namco Entertainment, speaks about the new *Godzilla* game for the Sony Corp. PlayStation 4 home machine in Tokyo. Godzillas galore, including last year's Hollywood version, stomp on buildings, thrashing about and breathing fire, in a video game going on sale globally in mid-July. But don't expect any references to radiation, the mutant reptile's trademark affliction. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

forcing thousands of residents to evacuate.

Fukushima people face latent prejudice in Japan because of fears, some unfounded, about radiation. Nuclear experts say the levels of exposure were not high or sustained enough to cause widespread health problems, but there are some risks, such as thyroid cancer in youngsters, which is being monitored.

Japan's 48 nuclear power reactors are now offline for a new regime of safety checks. The government wants to restart them but faces opposition from communities and others worried about radiation.

"We aimed for something that was as close to the original interpretations as possible," said Fujita, 29, proudly showing how the 1980s *Godzilla* can be pitted against the Hollywood *Godzilla* in a demonstration version of the game.

The fascination for the game developers lay in an arty duplication of the shapes and movements of the various Godzillas, and in re-creating the rival monsters in the films, such as the dragon-like King Ghidora,

Mothra — which resembles a moth — and the obscure Jet Jaguar, according to Fujita.

"Godzilla is not just a villain, it's also a hero everyone adores, and so this game allows the player to be *Godzilla* and control *Godzilla*," he said.

Toho Co. made 28 films in the *Godzilla* series, starting from the 1954 classic, until it pulled the plug in 2004. The new game allows players to manipulate the various kinds of Godzillas, including the robotic Mechagodzilla, first featured in the 1974 film.

Meanwhile, a resurgence of *Godzilla* worship has been increasingly visible in Japan, thanks to the Hollywood film. A new hotel in downtown Tokyo with a *Godzilla* head perched on it, for instance, is growing into a tourist attraction.

Man Izawa, 56, a sales clerk and *Godzilla* fan who believes *Godzilla* is "the biggest star to come out of Japan," wonders how the sensitive themes will get addressed when Toho releases a new *Godzilla* film next year.

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CARRIAGE CUTS. A family enjoys a ride on a horse-drawn carriage popularly known as a "Victoria carriage" in Mumbai, India. The single-horse carriages — festooned with bright, flashy lights, plastic hibiscus blooms, and tinsel ornaments — have long been a draw for visitors to India's cramped and cobblestoned financial capital, but in June 2016, they will be banned in Mumbai. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

Mumbai court bans joyriding in iconic horse-drawn carriages

MUMBAI, India (AP) — The blingy joyrides will soon end in Mumbai.

Tourists hoping to roll down the city's cacophonous streets in one of its famed horse-drawn carriages will have to do so before June 2016, when a court has ordered the carriages be banned, saying it's a form of animal cruelty.

The single-horse carriages — festooned with bright, flashy lights, plastic hibiscus blooms, and tinsel ornaments — have long been a draw for visitors to India's cramped and cobblestoned financial capital. Known as Victoria carriages, they were once popular with wealthy families in 19th-century England. They are recognizable for their large wheels and for allowing passengers to sit face-to-face.

But "the activity of using horse-driven carriages only for joyrides solely for human pleasure is an avoidable activity" and "illegal," the Mumbai High Court said in a ruling issued after a charity alleged cruelty to the blinkered beasts of burden, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

The court also demanded all stables within the city be closed and ordered Maharashtra's state government to come up with a plan for rehabilitating both the horses and the 700 or so families who depend on carriage driving for their livelihoods. That plan is due in December.

The court stopped short of banning carriages outside of Mumbai, however, noting that horses, as well as oxen and camels, are still used to pull work carts and carriages nationwide.

"But if it is noticed that carriages are used for joyrides, then that should be stopped by the concerned authority," the court ruling said.

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