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Godzilla and Kong are pictured in Warner Bros. Pictures and Legendary Pictures' "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire," a Warner Bros. Pictures release. (Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures)



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"The most dangerous thing you can pray for is courage." My spiritual mentor's tone was serious, her bright eyes narrowed. I tried not to laugh.

"When you pray for courage," she continued, "You ask God to place you in the path of difficulty." She concluded with an ominous "Be careful when you pray for courage."

My twentysomething self nodded along, mirroring my mentor's earnestness. I kept my eyes from rolling and my lips from smirking to assure her I appreciated this sacred wisdom.

Youthful naivete certainly played a role in my failing to take my mentor seriously, but there was something else. Her words made God sound a little ... scary. She spoke of praying for courage as if it could awaken an ancient, slumbering monster I would need to face. Praying to a God who answered prayers like that felt too frightening. I preferred a God whose most challenging requests involved three Hail Marys and an Our Father.

Over a decade later, however, the memory of my mentor's warning came roaring back as I took my seat for Easter weekend's most unexpected scripture, "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire."

The fifth installment of Legendary Studios' Monsterverse is everything I hoped it would be. It's a CGI-saturated spectacle about giant monsters fighting giant monsters. It's a movie that revels in the casual destruction of ancient and natural wonders (So long, great pyramids! Rest in pieces, Rock of Gibraltar!). Prominent storylines include, but are not limited to, Kong getting his tooth replaced, Godzilla upgrading to pink highlights and Kong receiving a bionic yellow arm (for punching things).

It's perfect.





Godzilla and Kong in "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire" (Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures)

"Godzilla x Kong" simply does away with all the self-importance of its predecessors. Yet, in doing so, the film provides a surprisingly pointed answer to the question at the heart of every Godzilla film: What if this were real?

I think there's a part of us that secretly wishes Godzilla, or a creature like him, were real. Terrifying as that may seem, it's the same part of us that wishes unicorns, laser swords, and magic wands could be real. The difference is that Godzilla isn't supposed to be a hero. When he first appeared on the silver screen in 1954, the answer to the question, "What if this were real?" was "We would run." We would do whatever we could to survive, and then, eventually, we'd find a way to fight back.

"Godzilla x Kong," however, presents its titular Titans as heroes, not villains. The film's human protagonists — along with the whole world, it seems — have accepted Godzilla and Kong as their saviors. Rather than running away or fighting back, Dr.



Ilene Andrews (played by Rebecca Hall), Jia (Kaylee Hottle), Trapper (Dan Stevens) and Bernie (Brian Tyree Henry) strive to help them. Whether it's replacing Kong's rotten tooth or powering up his punches, the film's human protagonists align their efforts with the Titans to help them save the world.

It's silly. Arrogant, even. But between the city-smashing and monster-fighting, I couldn't help but ask myself, would I do the same? Would I have the courage to align myself with these great and powerful forces so far beyond my ability to control?



Rebecca Hall as Dr. Ilene Andrews, left, and Brian Tyree Henry as Bernie in "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire" (Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures/Dan McFadden)

Despite playing the heroes, both monsters inflict a comical level of collateral damage (Rome and Rio will never be the same). Godzilla and Kong's destructive power can't be ignored. It's part of who they are, a consequence of their being so big and humans being so small, which is why the film doesn't portray their rampages as devastating or even sad. If anything, they're funny: After saving (read

"demolishing") most of ancient Rome, Godzilla curls up like a cat inside the Colosseum. We aren't meant to take their destruction seriously because neither Godzilla nor Kong actually exist. But God does, or so I claim to believe.

"Godzilla x Kong" does an excellent job not taking itself too seriously, and yet, it manages to remind me of a simple, profound truth: God is big. God is powerful.

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We believe God can reshape the world, not by destroying monuments or mountains, but by working in our hearts. God calls us into challenging spaces, to be in loving relationship with people, places and communities that experience suffering and injustice. God also calls us to step into places in our own hearts that might feel dangerous.

When we hear that call and imagine ourselves stepping into those spaces, our comfortable, non-Titan-containing world begins to quake. The monuments our egos have built start to crumble. A pit forms in our stomachs. Our hearts beat faster. The very thought of responding to the call frightens us. Our bodies react the way they might to Godzilla rising before us.

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We believe God's great power is here to protect us and, ultimately, to save us, but when we find ourselves in God's presence, sometimes it feels like we're about to be trampled. We ask ourselves, "Do I really want this to exist? Do I have the courage to endure the upheaval this call might bring to my physical and spiritual life?"

Most days I prefer to treat God's call the way humans treat monsters in other films: track it, contain it, study it or even push it away. All of those things are so much easier than acknowledging God actually exists in the world, much less that God needs my help.

"Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire" might be a two-hour escape from reality, but it leaves me wondering what I really have the courage to face. If I want to believe in an all-powerful God, a God who is present and active in the world, who calls to me to participate in the work of the resurrection, then I have to be willing to take that belief seriously. I have to be willing to accept God's call to step into difficulty.

And I have to be willing to pray for the courage to do so.

Trailer for "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire" (YouTube/Warner Bros. Pictures)