
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - More is Always Better!

Posted by Big Ross - 2009/06/24 17:58

This thread discusses the Content article: Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - More is Always Better!

Okay, my reaction to that one attempt at comedy that I described in my review as "going way over the line" may change after a repeated viewing (slated for Saturday). But, here's my initial reaction, as I wrote it immediately after getting home from the screening I attended. I am VERY interested to hear other opinions on this. Also,

SPOILER WARNING!

Two new Autobots, the Twins (as they call themselves) start out as halves of a beaten-down ice cream truck, then "upgrade" to individual, slick new hatchbacks. It became increasingly apparent that these transformers are intended to be seen as ethnic, and by ethnic I mean black. I don't mean to get all "apprehensive white guy not wanting to offend African Americans" on you, but I'll be honest. This made me uncomfortable. There were plenty of people laughing at this duo, so maybe I am over-reacting. But what bothered me is well, several things:

1. They speak like caricatures of stereotypical black men, or more accurately, they speak like how a white person whose only exposure to black people is rap/hip-hop music would imagine a black person speaks.
2. Their faces resemble monkeys. I'm serious, they're ape-like. Remember all the uproar over that cover with LeBron James and Giselle Bunchen where some people thought it looked like that old King Kong poster, which called to mind the old racial caricatures of black men as apes? I couldn't help but think of this whenever they were onscreen.
3. The black transformers are illiterate. Okay, I need to explain that. Sam has all these alien symbols in his head, he thinks they might be the language of the transformers, so he shows a couple of the symbols to the Twins and asks if they can read them. Instead of saying no, and offering some perfectly logical explanation like, "they're an ancient script that has been lost to our race" or some jargon like that we get the equivalent of (yes I'm paraphrasing, but I shit you not this is basically their reply): "Aww, maaann....ya know...we don't really do that readin' thang." Is this harmless, good-natured humor? Do I have a stick up my ass that needs to be removed ASAP? Please let me know, because in all honesty, I was aghast at this "joke".

Re:Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - More is Always Better!

Posted by Big Ross - 2009/06/24 19:41

Seems I'm not the only one who had a problem with this:

Bay Defends Transformers Twins

I'd still love to hear from other people on this.

Re:Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - More is Always Better!

Posted by Tony Lazlo - 2009/06/24 20:40

You're definitely not alone, Devin Faraci over at CHUD has a good rant about this one.

Re:Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - More is Always Better!

Posted by Big Ross - 2009/06/30 18:16

Heh, an EPIC review of Transformers 2 over at io9. A brief excerpt:

Transformers: ROTF is so long, you'll need to wear adult diapers to it. But the movie's pure celebration of the primal urge, and unfiltered living, will make you rejoice in your adult diapers. You'll relieve yourself in your seat with a savage joy, your barbaric yawp blending in with the crowd's screams of excitement.

Great stuff!:cheer:

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Re:Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - More is Always Better!

Posted by Tony Lazlo - 2009/07/11 18:10

OK, I finally caught this with Lance last night, and I had some random thoughts. SPOILERS to follow, of course.

The movie is "fuck you" long.

Glenn Morshower, who I adore, plays the stalwart agent Pierce on 24 and appears in TF2 as the general in charge of the military's joint operations with the Autobots. At some point in the movie, he's got (what feels like) a 45-second speech about re-establishing radio contact. Its inclusion baffles me and points toward Bay's inability to cut this movie down. At all. Whew!

The racist twins were even worse than I thought.

In the photos that appeared online of the much-maligned twin truck robots, I saw enough to make me wince – gold, buck teeth, huge simian ears, etc., but I somehow failed to notice that (like many of the transformers) they had lips.

Gigantic, FIST-SIZED LIPS.

Holy fucking Christ. When they spoke, their giant, racist, minstrel-show lips looked like two flapping fists set heel-to-heel. A disgrace. Jesus.

Creepy, creepy militarism.

Much hoopla has been made over how the president in TF2 is specifically named as Obama, and how he hands down an executive order calling for diplomacy with the Decepticons.

That's bad enough, but TF2 also includes a pompous government bureaucrat who stands in for the government, invokes civilian authority over the military – and gets pitched out the back of a plane. Don't worry – the army guys throw him overboard with a parachute, but the movie sends the unmistakable message: The military should be running things, not civilians.

Yeahhh ... civilian rule over the military is one of the bedrock foundations of our country. Fuck you, TF2.

OK, let's move on to the less offensive stuff:

The original movie vaguely followed the mythology laid down in the first season of the original cartoon, and in part 2 I could sense the shadow of the great 1986 animated movie.

It's not a remake, but TF2 hit enough points from the animated movie to make me notice this: Optimus Prime dies, Devastator makes an appearance, the Matrix of Leadership hangs in the balance, Megatron is resurrected and turns into a futuristic mortar cannon, Megatron continues his struggles with Starscream. Wheelie's in it. There are some Insecticons (which were pretty cool). There's no Unicron, of course, but the fate of the planet hangs in the balance, and there's even an oblique shout out to Rodimus Prime and Optimus Prime's later resurrection in the animated series.

Walk with me on this one, but late in Bay's movie, Sam has a vision where he sees all of the previous "Primes," the early leaders of the transformers, and they tell him some mumbo-jumbo like, "You had the Matrix inside you all along."

The scene reminded me first of Hot Rod's sudden transformation into Rodimus Prime at the end of the animated movie, as well as Optimus Prime's later voyage into the Matrix itself, where he met the previous autobot leaders, including his immediate predecessor, Alpha Trion:

{youtube}E3TmPX4Rnjo{/youtube}

No surprise here, but it's near-impossible to tell the Transformers apart, and the action scenes are cinematic gibberish.

Seriously, didn't anyone notice that Ironhide and Megatron look very much alike? I mean, shit – the twins were appalling, but at least they were two different neon colors that made them easy to spot in a battle scene.

The movie lurches to life at random and unexpected times.

I don't know how many Entourage fans we have out there, but watching TF2 felt like watching Vincent Chase's boondoggle biopic epic Medellin. I could sense a shorter and much more enjoyable movie somewhere inside.

The humor in Michael Bay movies typically relies on broad ethnic stereotypes and blunt edges. (There are dozens of examples to choose from.) But not surprisingly, his movies really come to life when they get – of all things – quirky.

Shia Lebeouf, for all of his leading-man-ness, is a great vehicle for quirkiness, and he's a part of my favorite verbal gag in TF2. Outside a frat house, his character (Sam), tries to explain the presence of Bumblebee to an irate frat douchebag and his toadie. The dialogue goes like this:

IRATE FRAT GUY: "Is that your car on my front lawn?!"

SAM: "No! No, this is ... my friend's car! He just ran out to ... get you a tighter shirt."

TOADIE (dead serious): "There isn't a tighter shirt. We checked."

Later in the movie, Sam is arguing with his girlfriend (Megan Fox), and he tells her, "I'm not talking to you for 10 seconds, starting now."

Unfortunately, there aren't many moments like this, and it's too bad, because they'd make for a pretty good college comedy and an even better Transformers movie. Seriously, I wish Bay and his creative team would simplify the design of the transformers and pump up the quirkiness among the human cast.

There's also some scattershot life among the Transformers – at least the ones I could distinguish. To wit:

Optimus Prime remains fun to watch and listen to, especially with the great Peter Cullen's voice.

Devastator was probably the most impressive creation of this movie. As in the toy line, a collection of construction vehicles made up his body, but instead of the lumbering humanoid seen in the cartoon, the movie's creative team turned him into a giant, howling dragon-robot. Truly terrifying, though I was disappointed that he never got into the battle, instead being relegated to tearing down one of the Pyramids of Giza.

Jetfire. Man, I really liked his schtick. I mean, it's ridiculous that alien robots have beards and use canes and speak with regional accents, but I really dug this character, and I liked how much of the animated series' mythology made it into the movie – specifically, Jetfire used to be a Decepticon and had been marooned on earth many, many years before. Good stuff!

Final thoughts

Finally, I'd like to add that I'm not sure I got all of the critical drubbing this movie got. I mean, Roger Ebert gave called the original movie "goofy fun" and gave it three stars, while he's suggested that anyone who likes part 2 needs their heads examined.

Ebert has also forcefully (and rightfully) responded to fans who accuse him of being a snob. Believe me – Ebert is well within the bounds of reason to slam a 2.5-hour movie that's basically one huge, animated explosion that's based on a line of action figures, but I guess I just don't see how TF2 is all that different from TF1. It's waaaaay too long, as I said, but I couldn't follow the action scenes in part 1 any better than I could in part 2. I liked them both about the same: They're both disposable, mindless, goofy nights at the theater. I found them both to be equally dumb.

To be sure, TF2 has more stuff in it that's outright offensive. I think that is it's biggest liability. Well, that and it's "fuck you" long-ness. I was pooped when I left the theater.

Anyway. Thoughts?

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