

Movie Review: 'Transformers'

by James Hebert

It's a Hasbro ad. It's a Chevy commercial. It's a pitch for Homeland Security. (A pretty ineffective one.)

'TRANSFORMERS' - 'Transformers,' with Shia LaBeouf, is only the latest incarnation of the popular 1980 toys. The concept has been a hit cartoon and even a 1986 movie. CNS Photo courtesy of DreamWorks. There's a whole lot of shape-shifting going on in "Transformers," and that's not even counting the movie's hulking robots.

Actually, the movie - "based on" the '80s toy line (the way a pit-bull attack is based on a flea) feels more like a commercial for its director, Michael Bay.

No surprise, maybe, since Bay was an ad wiz before moving to big, noisy feature films, from "Bad Boys" to "The Rock" to "Pearl Harbor."

In "Transformers," he even name-drops one of his former projects. A nerdy kid, rushing to check out a meteor impact, gushes: "This is easily 100 times cooler than 'Armageddon!'"

Maybe. It does feel as though Armageddon has transpired about 100 times over at the climax, by which time huge, battling 'bots have trashed every skyscraper in sight, not to mention each other.

Give Bay and company credit: The effects are amazing. The Transformers - they're robots from another planet, and beyond that it's not worth asking - morph from cars, trucks, planes and tanks into walking, stalking, lethal machines in a dizzying whirl of wheels and steel.

As they transform, they look a bit like the world's most complicated Rubik's Cubes. (Speaking of which, if we have to plunder '80s toys, where's "Rubik's Cube: The Movie"?) The movie starts out with a workable mix of humor and doom (Bay shows his fetish for metal with an opening military battle). And Shia LaBeouf has a deft touch as a gawky, awkward teen with one scary Camaro.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) By the end, though, the humans feel reduced to robots by the movie's crushing, numbing orgy of action. For the audience, the transforming gets lost in the translation.

Director: Michael Bay. Writers: Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman, John Rogers. Cast: Shia LaBeouf, Jon Voight, John Turturro, Megan Fox, Josh Duhamel, Tyrese Gibson, Rachael Taylor, Anthony Anderson. Running time: 2 hours, 24 minutes. Rated PG-13. 1 1/2 stars.

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