

Film Close-Up: Shia LaBeouf

by Joey_Berlin

Shia LaBeouf is the flesh-and-blood star of "Transformers," the summertime spectacular about rip-snorting alien robots-in-disguise battling for supremacy, and he carries the picture with ease.

SHIA LEBEOUF - Shia LeBeouf is a man caught between robot wars in the sci-fi thriller "Transformers." CNS Photo courtesy of Robert Zuckerman. In fact, "Transformers" Executive Producer Steven Spielberg was so impressed with the charismatic 21-year-old actor, he tapped LaBeouf for the next Indiana Jones movie, which is currently in production. Spielberg brings his storytelling know-how to "Transformers" and the film is directed by Michael Bay, the action-movie maestro who has buttered popcorn for brains.

But it is LaBeouf who anchors the adrenaline-charged movie, as the shape-shifting bots bash through a series of massive, chaotic action scenes. LaBeouf, whose name is pronounced "Shy-uh La-Buff," has recently experienced a near-instant rise to superstardom. His first big break was a starring role on the Disney TV show "Even Stevens" in 2000, and he later landed a string of sought-after film roles, including the lead in "Holes" and co-starring turns in "I, Robot" and "Constantine."

But 2007 is LaBeouf's big breakout year. His thriller "Disturbia" was a sleeper hit, he voiced the lead character in the splashy computer-animated comedy "Surf's Up," and "Transformers" takes his career to a whole new level.

Q: So here you are in the lead role of "Transformers," a Michael Bay action movie and one of biggest films of the summer. What kind of pressure is that?

A: Hey whatever, man! What am I going to do? You don't even know the magnitude of it when you get the part. It's just this hypothetical stuff. And now it's really something to deal with.

Q: In "Transformers," is it hard to maintain a sense of your character when you are in the middle of such a huge spectacle?

A: Maintaining character in the middle of a spectacle? Look, I'm not playing the Elephant Man. My big thing was understanding the objectives and maintaining neurosis, and keeping everything at 11, keeping everything amped. My character is amped. That's the key to him. You have to maintain that as your focus. You're in the middle of this ballet with these robots and all the movement, and he's just pure neurosis. It's tough, but not supremely hard.

Q: How do you psyche yourself into believing that you are really in a scene with a giant robot?

A: It's just play, dude. It's just playtime.

Q: Did you get hurt?

A: I got a scar on my ribs. One of these Navy Seals we had tore his ACL in his knee, and he still stayed at work all day. Everyone got injured.

Q: Your career is really starting to blow up right now. How are you handling all that?

A: Well, there are other things I started to focus on. Dating is really new to me, right now. That's a priority right now in my life. It's funny, but it's not funny to me.

Q: Actually a big part of "Transformers" is the boy-meets-girl story. How did you get along with your co-star, Megan Fox?

A: Dude, I'm totally into her. What do you want me to say? I was into her the whole time we were making the film. I had an immense attraction to her, and that comes across on camera. It's a good thing. It's for real. You don't have to conjure things up. You can keep that freshness. Seriously!

Q: You have just moved on to the long-awaited Indiana Jones sequel and you are doing some sort of "training" for it. What is the training?

A: I can't tell you anything about it. If I tell you anything about what kind of training I'm doing, you'll figure it all out.

Q: Are you getting in better shape for it?

A: I'm in the gym all the time. I'm fit, but I'm never going to get buff. I just don't eat enough. I'm cool with being cut, but I don't want to get big. If you're too big, you segregate half your roles.

Q: So, how is your dating going?

A: It's fun for me. I was in a relationship for a long time. It's wild to be 21, and it's a wild time to be single. I'm smooth. I get haiku poems all prepared.

Q: In "Transformers," your character puts a lot of emphasis on how his car should look in order to attract girls. Do you think girls really care about a guy's car?

A: I think that's a bunch of garbage. I don't think chicks really dig cars.

Q: It has got to be a cool thing to go out on a date now that you are a big movie star.

A: It can ruin a date. It changes the whole date. It makes things weird. You have to figure out the other person's intentions.

Q: So how is life in general, this year?

A: It's going great! My lifeline is steady. It's been fun for what it's been. This year's really been crazy, and if I don't get to make another movie ever again, it was all a lot of fun and I got to work with some cool people.

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