DVD Select: Kill bad robots, save the Earth and be back in class on time

by Robert_J_Hawkins

I'm not going to lie. I'm way too old and worldly to care about a movie like "Transformers" (Paramount/DreamWorks, 3 1/2 stars). I mean, I've been places, experienced stuff, lived in the real world. You know?

'TRANSFORMERS' - Bonecrusher goes on a destructive rampage in the sci-fi thriller 'Transformers.' CNS Photo courtesy of DreamWorks. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the $1 bin Cars and trucks that turn into robots? My kids played with that stuff when ... well ... when they were kids. They didn't collect them on neat little shelves. They smashed 'em while playing hard. And then they set the things of children aside and became beautiful, independent, functioning adults.

So why am I contemplating getting each of them a copy of "Transformers" for Christmas?

Because they need to know that you don't have to give up your childhood to become a full adult. And

because nobody - and I mean nobody - smashes up stuff and does movie explosions as good as Michael Bay.

He is insane. Watching "Transformers" is better than spending a whole Sunday watching those NFL pansies cry "Replay, coach! Make 'em do a replay! I was robbed!" Jeez, that man loves his explosives. I think somebody in the DVD extras says that about 200 vehicles (many of them waterlogged Katrina cars) were smashed apart, blown up or crashed into each other during the movie.

And - not like that isn't reason enough to watch a Michael Bay movie - there is actually a story in "Transformers." Make that four stories.

There's the story of Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf), boy dork who only wants two things out of life: a really hot car and a really hot girl. The former would be a beat up Camaro muscle car that is, in fact, point guard for the AutoBots - good guy robots en route to save Earth from the evil Decepticons. The latter would be Mikaela Banes (a sizzling hot Megan Fox).

Well, he gets the car.

And eventually the car gets him the girl. Now what kid wouldn't like a car like that? The car also gets Sam and Mikaela up to their necks in the adventure of a lifetime - killing bad robots, saving the Earth, be back in school on Monday. Cool life for teenagers.

A second story involves an Army special ops team in Qatar which encounters and nails the first of the Decepticons. They have to battle their way back to U.S. soil but fortunately they are lead by Capt. Lennox (Josh Duhamel) and Sgt. Epps (Tyrese Gibson). (Seeing what these guys go through, you can understand how Duhamel/Lennox returned from his tour to his regular gig as casino security guy Danny McCoy on the TV series "Las Vegas" more than a little messed up ... but that is another story.)

The third strand finds government geeks (hot geeks like Rachael Taylor) trying to decipher the robot transmissions for old warhorses like Secretary of Defense John Keller (that old war horse Jon Voight).

As the big showdown nears, these three strands, naturally, merge and entwine. The big confluence happens - wait, no spoilers here. Just think deep underground and the apocalyptic alien invasion movie "Fourth of July." It is either a homage or a rip off. You can never tell in Hollywood.

So then, yeah, more explosions. More crashes. People in peril. Stuff getting smashed. Gawd, incredible audio. More explosions. Flames. Weapons fire. Explosions. Buildings crumbling. The ground shaking.

And then an ending that almost tattoos "Sequel!" across your sweaty forehead.

Gimmie the popcorn and let's watch it again. Only this time we freeze frame when Megan Fox lifts the hood on the Camaro.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"My Best Friend (Mon Meilleur Ami)" (Genius Products, 3 stars) Daniel Auteuil can be a real weasel. Recently, in the romantic comedy "The Valet (La Doublure)" Auteuil was a philandering titan of industry who paid a parking attendant to pose as his supermodel-girlfriend's live-in boyfriend in order to head his wife off from divorce. The same character is back, more or less, as Francois a self-absorbed dealer of high-end antiques in "My Best Friend." The truth is, Francois hasn't a single friend, despite his proclamations otherwise, and when his business partner Catherine (the dreamy Julie Gayet) bets him a pricy Greek vase that he can't produce a best friend in 10 days, Francois takes up the challenge. To say the least, Francois is more than a little taken aback at how difficult this best friend business can be. (Leave it to the French to concoct one melancholy comedy.) Francois latches onto a gregarious cabbie/trivia buff named Bruno (the delightful Dany Boone, who had a minor but memorable role in "The Valet") and plumbs him for pointers. Bruno is too naive

to realize he's being used but when he does, he's devastated. Francois learns at a pretty hefty price that you don't trifle with friendship. Patrice Leconte ("The Man on the Train") directed and had a hand in writing the script. He strikes a delightful balance between humor, reflection and pathos in this sophisticated and thoughtful comedy. Look for the Americanized version in 2009.

Summer is over and the movies are coming out with a vengeance. Here are some more top shelf movies making their DVD debut his week:

- "A Mighty Heart" (Paramount, 3 stars) Angelina Jolie's haunting labor of love in which she plays Mariane Pearl, wife of the kidnapped and brutally murdered Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl (Dan Futterman).

- "The Invisible" (Buena Vista, 2 1/2 stars) In this supernatural thriller, Nick Powell (Justin Chatwin) is brutally beaten and left dying. Stuck between life and death, Nick's only hope is to break through and communicate his location from beyond the grave. DVD contains 13 minutes of unseen footage, two music videos and a commentary track.

- "The Hoax" (Buena Vista, 3 stars) Based on incredible but true circumstances, Richard Gere is author Clifford Irving who, in desperation and the 1970s (which may be redundant), convinces his publisher that he can help reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes write his autobiography. With the help of his friend Dick Susskind (Alfred Molina). He pulled it off for the longest time, too. DVD includes a making-of feature, 13 minutes of deleted scenes, Mike Wallace on his interviews with Irving for "60 Minutes," audio commentary with director Lasse Hallstrom and more.

- "Planet Terror" (Genius products, 2 1/2 stars) This is Robert Rodriguez's contribution to the Grindhouse films concocted with auteur buddy Quentin Tarantino ("Death Proof"). Rose McGowan is a dancer, retrofitted with a machine gun for a leg. The better to fight the zombie-like minions out there. In the dark. The film also includes Bruce Willis, Freddy Rodriguez, Marley Shelton, Michael Biehn, Josh Brolin, and Stacy Ferguson (of Black Eye Peas). DVD extras include: commentary track, "10 Minute Film School," short films on stunts, babes and dudes.

Documentaries worth checking out: In "Girl 27" (Red Envelope) In the 1930s MGM summoned 125 actresses and dancers to a casting call which turned out to be a stag party for studio salesmen. One dancer, Patricia Douglas tied to flee and was brutally raped. She went public and the powerful studio silenced both her and the case - until biographer David Stenn stumbled upon the story in 1993.

"Crazy Love" (Magnolia) Saying that Burt and Linda Pugach have had a tempestuous relationship since they first started dating in the 1950s is an understatement. It was he who had lye poured over her young and beautiful face when she broke off their relationship. It was she who was waiting when he finally got out of jail. And it gets stranger.

Just for the horror of it all: Hilary Swank in the supernatural "The Reaping"; psychological terror in "Believers" (from "Blair Witch" co-creator Daniel Myrick); the RSVP you don't want to accept "Murder Party"; and mutated arachnids star in "Ice Spiders."

Cool box set: Warren Miller's action sport films set the standard. We get three in recent snow films in the box "No Boundaries" (Shout! Factory): "Impact" (2004), "Higher Ground" (2005) and "Off the Grid" (2006) - plus the bonus disc "Behind the Scenes of Warren Miller's Higher Ground." All for less that 50 bucks.

IT CAME FROM TV

Season two of wheelchair-bound sleuther "Ironside"; season three of "Medium"; season one of "Studio 60 on Sunset Strip"; season seven of "That '70s Show." From BBC Worldwide comes "Absolutely Fabulous: White Box" a previously unseen 2004 special featuring Patsy (Joanna Lumley) and Edina (Jennifer Saunders) with a guest appearance from Nathan Lane.

FROM THE VAULTS

Set free from the archives this week:

- A director's cut of "Hollow Man," starring Kevin Bacon, Elisabeth Shue and Josh Brolin.

- Sony's "Icon of Horror" box tribute to B-movie maker Sam Katzman, filled with "The Giant Claw," "Zombies of Mora Tou," "Creature with the Atom Brain" and "The Werewolf."

- 80th anniversary edition of "The Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson - the original talkie.

- The MGM Holiday Collection: A box holding "The Bishop's Wife" (1947), "March of the Wooden Soldiers" (1934) and "Pocketful of Miracles" (1961).

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