

Three robot steps forward, two human steps back: Transformers 3

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We live in a modern, fast-paced, ethereal world. A world where there are very few true certainties: death, taxes and bad movie sequels. This was exactly the case with Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, the second of director Michael Bay's on-screen adaptations of the classic 80's toys and cartoons about giant alien shape-shifting robots waging a secret war on earth while taking the forms of various land, sea and air vehicles.



The first movie surprised a lot of people - myself included - with how enjoyable it was. It seemed that Bay's normally bombastic directorial style had finally found a subject matter to match its seizure-inducing symphony of light and sound. Coupled with executive producer Steven Spielberg's guiding hand, it was a blockbuster spectacle that showcased unparalleled CGI brilliance, made more money than a Tiger Woods divorce settlement, and also rocketed its two main stars, Shia Lebeouf and Megan Fox, into the Hollywood stratosphere.

An acute case of sequelitis

But alas, its follow-up came down with an acute case of sequelitis (it must have been a bug going around that year, hey Wolverine?) and despite still raking it in at the box office, it was still almost universally panned for its recipe of poor scripting (So the robots can turn into hot co-eds anytime they want and just blend in, but they prefer to rather look like dump trucks?), toilet humour (Really, Michael Bay? We're doing robot fart jokes now?) and even a healthy dose of stereotypical racism (I'm not even going to go there).

The movie was so badly received that a few months after its release, Shia LeBeouf and more recently Michael Bay both came out and publicly apologised for how poor it was, and promised the fans that they would do better for the third and possibly final instalment in the franchise.

And honestly, Bay and LeBeouf weren't lying, Transformers 3: Dark of the Moon ***title-induced cringe*** really is much better than the second film, although not as good as the first as it's not without its faults.

Firstly, clocking in at 157 mins, it is simply way too long. The first 90 mins is nearly excruciating, as the movie seems intent on sidelining the robots and rather concentrating on wanting to be a sitcom about the down-on-his-luck, secret-world-saving-hero Sam Witwicky and how he has to walk the awkward tightrope of love, family and finding a job where he can still retain a modicum of sanity. But, all of this fails horribly, mainly due to these so-called funny scenes being so grievously unfunny. Even cameos by generally funny actors like John Malkovich and Ken Jeong cannot rescue Ehren Kruger's script, which simply tries too hard, and instead of being funny just comes across as messy.

There are brief interludes of giant robot awesomeness, but everything in between is just a chore to get through. Just like in Transformers 2, every single scene with Sam's parents could and should have been cut, as they added absolutely zero value to the movie, but a lot to the already long running time.

Megan Fox's maligned presence, sorely missed

And I can't believe that I'm actually going to say this, but Megan Fox's once maligned presence - complete with her infamous toe-thumb - is sorely missed. Fired from the movie after she threw an internet hissy fit about Michael Bay's



alleged draconian nature on set, she was replaced by underwear model, Rosie Huntington-Whitely.

And although incredibly easy on the eyes, Rosie is about as emotionally expressive as the store window mannequin she so strongly resembles. She pouts her pork banger lips through every scene, lowering the on-screen IQ with a single duck-faced glance. In comparison, she makes Fox's acting look like that of Dame Judi Dench.

Lebeouf's Sam still comes across as the witty love-child of Alice in Wonderland's March Hare and a lifelong meth-head. He seems to always be two seconds removed from a manic breakdown, and is perpetual motion personified as he runs, and in one strange scene, parkours his way from explosion to explosion at breakneck speed. Josh Duhamel, Tyrese Gibson and John Turturro's respective gung-ho marines and neurotic ex-government agent sidekicks are back and are still as gung-ho and neurotic as ever. But whereas Duhamel and Gibsons' character just feels very two-dimensional and pedestrian, Turturro's outstays his welcome almost immediately as his gratuitously ridiculous nature fails to entertain at almost every turn.

Pure action and visual effects

The real star of this movie though is Optimus Prime. Which is, quite frankly, as it damn well should be. He just seems so much more badass than in his previous outings and leaves no doubt as to who is definitely the big man in charge. And once the film reaches the final hour-long battle for Chicago, Optimus and his fellow robots go into awesomeness overdrive and as a result drags the film into better grounds with them, despite the script trying its utmost best to hobble the film with unnecessary character arcs (Hey, Patrick Dempsey, c'mon on down!) and plot-holes aplenty.



From a pure action and visual effects standpoint, the final hour-long barrage truly is the highlight of the film, and is simply amazing to behold. But damn, it sure could have done with a bit better editing and pacing as the effect of having so much giant robot badassery thrown into your face scene-after-scene,-after scene, for nearly a full 60 minutes, is that the moments that are supposed to stand out almost get lost in the visual noise. There's just not enough time to catch your breath and think "OMFG, that was amazing, I just peed myself" because you're already being confronted by the next CGI battle royale. But man, oh man, what a

battle it was.

You just cannot fault Bay for his action set pieces. There are some jaw-dropping moments, with the collapsing skyscraper seen in all the trailers being the most complex and visually amazing sequence of them all. Yes, Bay is a talented but very lazy filmmaker that resorts to the same colour palette, scene structuring and cinematography in nearly all his movies, but you'll be forgiven for overlooking all of that, due to your eyeballs melting in their sockets in amazement at the level of visual and aural magic on display.

A celluloid equivalent of Fox

I saw the film in 3D, despite my rapidly increasing vitriol for movies of the third dimension but I have to say, it looks simply gorgeous in the format. Just like James Cameron did in Avatar, Bay does not make use of the cheap gimmickry of just throwing things at the camera, which is what a lot of lesser directors have resorted to. Instead, the extra depth of field is used to make the images quite literally just pop off the screen. The closest field of the viewer's vision is often filled with smoke, dust and flying debris, with battles raging away in the close background. And occasionally, when the scene requires it, Bay will have a particular person or element break through these fields, but not so much to make you bob and weave in your seat. It certainly is a deft touch, but it works amazingly to draw you into the on-screen action.

In short, the movie is the celluloid equivalent of Megan Fox: gorgeous looks aided by some high tech wizardry, except for those horrible distractions (Damn you toe-thumbs!) that you wish could just go away so you can get back to the good parts. When it tries to be something that it's not, like witty or intelligent, it falls horribly short. But once it gets back to doing what it

does best - looking flashy - it really manages to hold your attention and - at risk of turning this metaphor dirty - gives you a very wild and explosive ride.

All in all, I'd give it a 6/10.

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