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Is it any good? Obviously, it has to be extremely entertaining to get this much business, and it appears to be the type of movie that studios love; one that will entice the main target audience of males aged 13 – 25 to return again and again. It certainly has all the hooks needed for that demographic; sensational special effects, huge explosions, manly men battling impossible odds, plucky teens showing incredible bravery, sly humor throughout the film, and a really, really hot girl as the main sidekick to the hero. What's not to love?

At this point, you may have noticed that I have yet to make any commentary regarding my opinion of the movie itself. And I will get to that momentarily, but in truth my opinion, or the opinion of any other critic, does not matter in the slightest. This movie is totally critic-proof, and nothing any of us stuffed shirt snobs say

will alter that fact in the slightest.

But enough hedging. My opinion is that I enjoyed the movie immensely. Like last week's “Live Free or Die Hard” , this is one of those movies that is perfect for the summer; unadulterated popcorn entertainment. However, it certainly isn't anything close to the best picture of the summer due to the fact that Michael Bay is still one of the worst directors on the planet. The fact that this film is so much better than his last three duds; "The Island", "Bad Boys II", and "Pearl Harbor" probably is a direct result of having Steven Spielberg onboard as one of the executive producers.

Had their roles been reversed, one could imagine a much different film with Spielberg in the director's chair, a difference that would have been noticed immediately. Where Spielberg loves to set things in motion slowly, allowing characters to develop and plot to enfold, Bay has no time for such minutia. After a 60 second prologue, we get right to the mayhem with an evil helicopter landing at an Army base in Qatar, and then transforming into a mechanical killing machine, wiping out the entire base with the exception of one squadron that had been briefly shown earlier, led by Josh Duhamel as Captain Lennox. You know Lennox must get home safely as he talks to the rest of his squadron about needing to get home to see his baby daughter who was born while he was deployed.

The robot action doesn't let up as a boom box on Air Force One turns into a smaller, spider-like irritant of a robot who gets into the bowels of the plane to complete the work of the first Decepticon (the bad robots) and download all national defense data. Why did the little bugger need to be on Air Force One, as opposed to the Pentagon, or any other high priority location? Don't ask such questions, as they'll only lead to other pesky questions such as "why are Secret Service agents shooting so many bullets so randomly in a pressurized airplane?"

Meanwhile, back in Disturbia, a teenaged boy (Shia LaBeouf) named Sam

Witwicky is trying to hock a bunch of stuff from his great-grandfather to finance the purchase of his first car. It seems gramps was this important, albeit wacky, Artic explorer, which will certainly come into play later on. Securing the money, Sam and his father go to a fifth-rate used car lot, ran by Bernie Mac in a hilarious cameo, where Sam ends up with a beat up 1976 yellow Camaro. The car seems to have a mind of its own, however, although that fact does end up allowing Sam to meet-cute with the hottest babe in school, the jock loving bad-girl Mikaela, played by the gorgeous Megan Fox.

Things start getting a bit hairy when the Camaro decides to run off on its own, and when Sam and Mikaela give chase, they are caught up in a battle as they are confronted with what appears to be a Ford Mustang police car sired by Christine. But no demons here, it's just another robot, and suddenly the stunned teens are watching both cars change into robots so they can start kicking each other's robotic butts around a junk yard.

This sets up the introduction of all the good robots, who are called Autobots, led by the massive Optimus Prime, who shape shifts into a bad-assed 18 wheeler with outlaw flames on his custom paint job. It seems they have been in an ongoing battle with the Decepticons over a mysterious cube that gives power and life to technological devices. If the Decepticons get it, they will use it to destroy humanity, and repopulate Earth with robots. So it's up to Optimus and his crew to find the cube first, and destroy it if all else fails.

Naturally, this all leads up to the only point of the movie, watching robots battle humans and each other. As someone who was not familiar with the toys, nor the cartoon version of "Transformers" that ran for so many years back in the 80s, it was all pretty confusing. I suppose I was most confused on why it was that the Autobots made such a strategic error as to only assume the shape of cars and trucks, putting them at what seems to be a huge disadvantage to the Decepticons, many of whom assumed the shapes of things that could fly. But I guess that made it better for General Motors, as this whole thing was one mammoth GM commercial as you had Autobots in the form of Pontiacs, Hummers, and Chevys.

As noted, the special effects were dazzling, even if it was sometimes difficult to tell the good robots from the bad ones during the battle scenes. Michael Bay had no such problems when it came to distinguishing the people, as almost none of them had enough material to work with to give them anything close to three dimensions. Sam is the central character, and LaBeouf does an excellent job in making him someone everyone can get behind. Not quite a dork, but just the type of outsider striving to fit in that most people can identify with, and LaBeouf can handle the misfit side of Sam while still making his growth into a brave hero totally believable. Mikaela makes quite the impression as Sam's "perfect girl", especially when it turns out that she has some issues of her own. Megan Fox also excels in her role, showing vulnerability, fortitude, and compassion in a role that could easily have just been passed off as the proverbial "eye candy in distress" often seen in this type of film.

Unfortunately, no other actor gets an opportunity to show anything close to a "range". Duhamel and Jon Voight get a great deal of screen time as Capt. Lennox and Defense Secretary Keller, but there is very little they can do other than fire guns and act uber-masculine in two dimensional roles as the main supporting heroes. But they do come off much better than the rest of the supporting cast, many of whom are totally wasted as "types" to offer fill-in to cover the lulls between the Big Action sequences. Worst on this list were John Turturrow as a ridiculous "Men In Black" type covert government agent, and Bill Dunn and Julie White as Sam's moronic parents. All three figured prominently in an excruciatingly long and embarrassingly stupid twenty minute period where the Autobots hovered around Sam's house while Sam and Mikaela look for an important object, with the robots continually breaking things around the yard and destroying Sam's father's gardening effort, muttering "my bad" each time. The subsequent arrival of Turturrow and his bumbling crew only made things worse.

But this movie is not about plot, logic, or character development (luckily for all of us), it's about action, and "Transformers" deliver that in spades. It's simply amazing to watch all that can be brought to life onscreen with the available technology, and Bay's true talent in life seems to be creating this type of "did you see THAT?!?" moments. In that regard, the film is a triumph, as Bay seems better equipped to deal with the inanimate objects than the flesh and blood ones.

In this case, there is a lot to be said for the inanimate objects, especially the noble Optimus Prime, voiced by Peter Cullen, who used his James Earl Jones level baritone in the cartoons for the same character. It played off well with his Doppelganger Megatron, the evil leader of the evil Decepticons, also wonderfully voiced by none other than Hugo Weaving (Mr. Smith in “Matrix” and Elrond in “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy).

This is only the beginning, as sequels will surely follow. But for now, I’m just going to appreciate it as an original work that has brought some pure fun to the box office.

My Rating: Bill Nelsen (2 ½ Footballs). Good film. Well worth seeing at the theater.