

I actually kind of appreciate the Transformers movies.

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Part 11: "The needs of the many... Outweigh the needs of the few."

Part 12: "Welcome to the desert of the real. "

Part 13...

Part 14: "Every frame is so dense, it has SO MUCH going on!"

Part 15: *incomprehensible Cybertronian chittering*

Fin: "Was it all worth it?"

Why are all these robots so damn ugly?

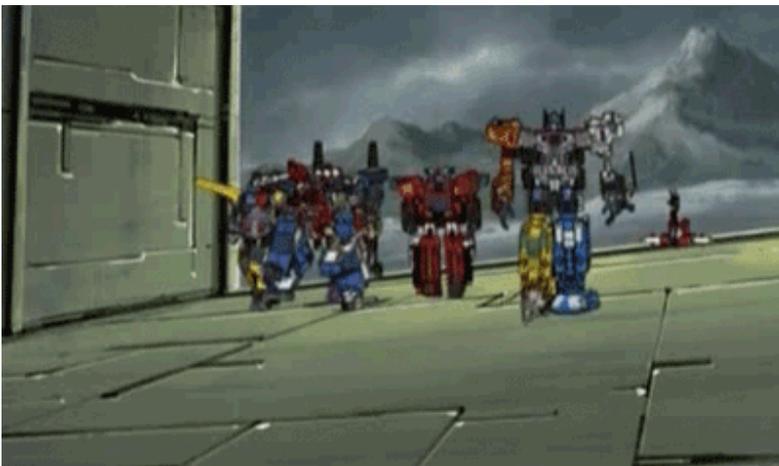
Conclusions, or really just ramblings

Prologue

Franchises.

I hate franchises.

The Transformers franchise is a bit of an odd one. Originally a Japanese toy line that Hasbro bought the rights for in 1984 and randomly decided to run a comic- and TV-series for, Transformers became a notable part of popular culture and names like “Optimus Prime” widely known, grew and spawned multiple other cartoons, comic books and a very silly movie, and then, somewhere around 2000, kind of... died.



Gee, I wonder why.

I mean, it wasn't dead, really. They kept making new series and toy lines, and the 2004–2005 Energon and Cybertron toy lines are some of my personal favorites, but it just didn't have the same kind of impact on pop culture, and here in Europe it really did virtually disappear completely (Hasbro still only sells a fraction of the toys they release elsewhere here). Loss of public word meant loss of revenue, and they needed to come up with something new to make the franchise known again.

A giant high-budget CGI Hollywood blockbuster murderfest directed by notorious frat boy Michael Bay might just do it.

And so, *Transformers (2007)* was made. And then a sequel, and another. And they accomplished what Hasbro wanted... If perhaps not the way they wanted it. The word *Transformers* is once again part of the public dictionary; When someone says that a movie reminds them of Transformers, you know exactly what they mean: Very unkind things.

All three Transformers titles were massively critically panned. *Revenge of the Fallen (2009)* sits at 20% on the tomatometer, *legendarily* low for a Hollywood action spectacle of its scale. It's a pretty well defined kind of bad too: *Transformers* has become synonymous with “Bland, shallow populist parade of explosions with no thought put into it that falls apart at the slightest hint of critical reasoning, also: Racism, misogyny.”

But here's the thing.

I'm not so convinced that's what these movies actually are.

I originally watched *Transformers (2007)* to get a bit more of an idea of it as a cultural phenomenon - because good or not, *Transformers* is an *important movie* - when I noticed some strange details popping up. Off-handed remarks, tiny inconsistencies and the occasional bit of strange imagery seemed to imply there was more going on; It was simply too consistent to merely be bad filmmaking. But for the life of me, I could not actually figure out what the movie was actually trying to say.

So I watched the sequels.

And suddenly, everything fell into place.

Turns out, perhaps they have more interesting things to say than we initially figured.

I tried to sum up my reading in the format of a regular essay, but I found it impossible to do so. There is a *lot* going on in these movies, and a simple essay would miss out on the unusual way they piece-feed you information. So instead, I thought I'd try to do what Kyle Hyde recently did for the much better received *American Psycho (2000)* and do a bit of a running commentary on the entire trilogy.

Wish me luck.

Oh, and correct me if I get something wrong or miss something, since I know enough about film criticism to know that I know nothing about film criticism. Do note however that I will not be considering prior canon or expanded universe stuff at all, only the films themselves - toy bios and such have a habit of completely contradicting what's on the screen, so I prefer to ignore them.

TRANSFORMERS

Part 1: Before time began, there was the Cube.

The first thing you need to know about *Transformers* is that it hates you.

No matter how much you hate it, it will always hate you more. And as such, it has no interest in your enjoyment, or your understanding, or how you feel about the movie at all. Where other movies will try to begin by involving the viewer emotionally, *Transformers* starts by... Laying ground rules, I guess?

We open to some narration by real-life sentient truck Peter Cullen about our grand Macguffin: The Allspark, some kind of fractal cuboid structure with the ability to create life. He also tells us about the great war that's currently going on between the good Autobots and the bad Decepticons who want to use the life-giving artifact for evil (?). It's all very cliff notes, but those who actually paid attention during the sequels (the two or three of you) will notice that our narrator outright lies to us at one point. But we'll get to that. In short, life cube is on earth, bad guys were there first, trouble is afoot.



Oh god, two hours of you.

Our viewpoint then shifts into a video game cutscene.

I mean, here's another thing you need to know about the first and second Transformers: It's a video game. It's shot like a video game, it operates on video game logic and now it starts in a helicopter from which our American grizzled stubbly middle-aged brown-haired white protagonist (second from the left), his black sidekick, the nerd and the comic relief foreign guy are going to drop into the tutorial level. The only one missing is the Smurfette, really. Surprisingly, the helicopter is actually kind enough to not explode until after they have arrived at their destination. They talk about stuff and just like in a video game intro it's all terrible filler. A few weird establishing shots, and then the actual movie starts for real.



Unidentified aircraft, we will escort you
to US SOCCENT airbase.



If you do not comply,
we will use deadly force.

Not pictured: A whole bunch of strange military jargon.

An unidentified “infiltrator” casually strolls into the base’s airspace, and the editing begins to make harsh cuts between the dimly lit, crowded human base and the bleak expanse of the desert with the single strange helicopter sitting right in the centre. After the pretty rote filler in the beginning, this harsh intercutting of contrasting images suddenly creates a very unusual effect.

Spoilers, but the “bogey” is our first on-screen Transformer, named simply Blackout. The way he’s shot here is very interesting: Surrounded by flat desert, just being this small thing in the dead centre of the screen with no real points of reference, he looks tiny, almost more like the toy he represents rather than the giant piece of military equipment he “is” in the movie’s continuity, and it further makes him look really... Alone. It’s an enormous contrast to the military scenes, which are crowded and dense, with people constantly fussing about and doing stuff in the background which creates a real impression of an ant hive. One of the interesting things about the military in this movie is that military personnel is never portrayed as individuals - there’s almost always an enormous busy hive of human-shaped insects busily trying to adjust to the changing situation. Right now, multiple jets are leaving the base to confront the bogey, and the movie goes out of its way never to show only one of them in a given frame for more than a second.



Blackout crunch little human constructs.

It further goes out of its way to remove any human element from the scene - the “leading voice” of the humans is monotone and spouts unintelligible military gibberish; Seems less like a person and more like a “voice of the swarm”. Even when one of his lackey mentions having lost a friend in battle it sounds sterile and inhuman. Both individual scenes - the hive and the loner in the desert in his foreboding silence - are fundamentally built to alienate the audience, they both represent an *Other* in their own way. Humans are involved, but the movie doesn’t expect us to take their side or even care for them, and attempting to do so is one of the biggest mistakes you can do when watching this movie, and one of the big reasons why many consider it dissatisfying. It’s not the alien Transformers vs. Our human military; it’s the Transformers vs. The Zerg. Sometimes the way these movies are shot reminds me more of a nature documentary, impartially showing us the things happening somewhere, quietly observing a hunter tear into its prey.

Oh wait, there’s someone it expects us to care about, our video game protagonist Captain Lennox (Josh Duhamel). He has a baby you see. And that’s pretty much the totality of his character.

One other nice bit of cinema is that *Blackout*’s approach to the base is accompanied by the sun going down, and his arrival coincides with nightfall. I mentioned the word “Other” before and I’ll do so a whole bunch during these reviews, because our fear of the foreign plays a pretty huge part in these movies. Here, the arrival of the alien creature plays on our fear of the dark: Remember that it is not the darkness itself we’re afraid of, but the unspeakable creatures that might lurk within. This bit of aliens arriving from the darkness (of space, night, shadows etc...) will be a big theme in this movie (less so in the later ones).



Notice the first thing he does is robbing the people of their vision - because we fear what we can't see.



*He's also faceless; Another factor painting him as being foreign to us.
The silly moustache probably doesn't help.*

The camera then lovingly pans over as Blackout transforms - little bits shift from place to place, the rotor flips back, and the whole thing collapses and unfolds into its robot mode in a gorgeous display of CGI. I don't know if you guys share my opinion on this, but I think the animation in this movie and the following ones is absolutely fantastic. It's just always over too fast. 🤔



Pictured: Beauty?

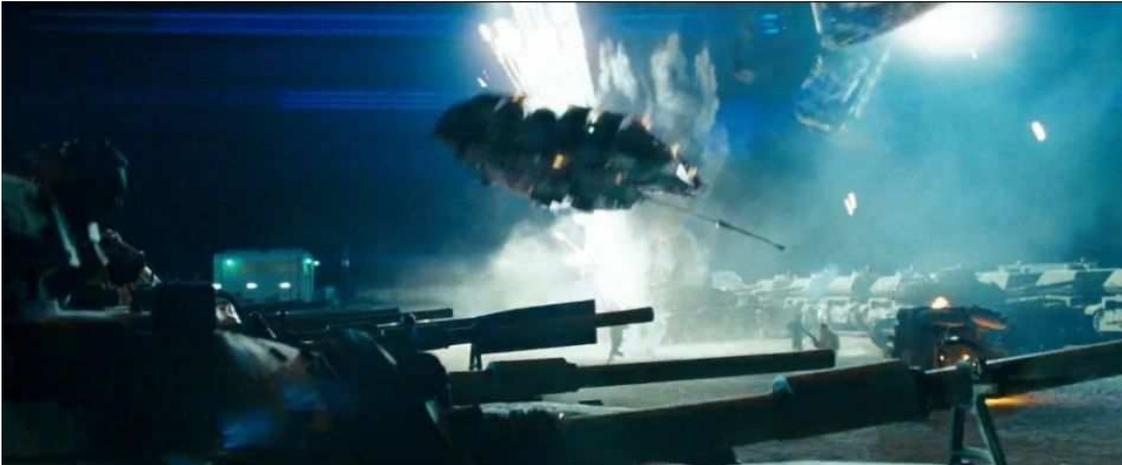
We never get an actual close look of Blackout's robot mode, it's always obscured by light or objects or explosions as he begins rampaging around the base, destroying everything in sight in a Godzilla-worthy display of giant violence.



Now there's what these movies are famous for.

After finding an internet silo(?) Blackout begins to hack the pentagon(??) for some files while we get our first look at the movies' military incompetence, as they don't actually have the keys to their own very servers. Yup.

See, one of the traits I see most often misattributed to these movies is military worship. Sure, there's a lot of overlong shots focused on various military hardware and it does play an unusually large part in these movies, but the actual institution is never actually portrayed as anything but a completely overwrought, hilariously inept pile of buffoons who only succeed because of one protagonist and an overinflated budget for war toys.



But let's forget about that because EXPLOSIONS!!

Black sidekick manages to snap a picture of Blackout, which he seems to consider an issue, so he uses his lv. 3 hero ability "*summon mecha-scorpion*" to deal with the guy while he buggers off, his attempt to HACK THE INTERNET foiled by a random fire axe. Cut.

There is a lot of stuff in this opening scene that doesn't make a terrible lot of sense yet, but will fit more and more into the grander context of the movies as we go on.

Part 2: Please buy our toys?



I'd like to have seen their expressions reversed here.

In this next scene we're introduced to our protagonist: Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf), the most audience insertest audience insert who ever audience inserted. (what?). He's just a regular ol' white college dude whose main priorities in life are studying, getting a girlfriend and buying a car, though he may be playing loose on that "studying" part oh hoh hoh that's just like you isn't it, because you were terrible at school, right audience!?! (you probably were). He even gets picked on by a jock, and probably collects overpriced toys from Japan (see, that one's more like me 🎮🏠🧸).



He's even fairly unattractive by Hollywood standards, but they missed out not making him fat. Like you. Because you are fat, audience!

In this particular scene, he's fawning over his great-great-granddad who was one of the first people to explore the arctic (admittedly, early arctic explorers were pretty 🧊) while awkwardly trying to peddle his stuff for money, and I have to say, LaBeouf plays the part brilliantly. He's not what one would consider a traditionally good actor, but I think he does the whole "awkward late teens/early 20s kid trying to find a place in the world" thing with an unparalleled naturalism. Just look at his poor face trying not to stammer awkwardly in front of the class, it's great.

On the other hand, the funny thing about Sam is that as much of a distilled “regular guy” he is and as hard as LaBeouf tries to make him human, we’re never actually invited to sympathize with him. The film holds a mirror in front of us, but keeps it just out of reach. His character never really *takes shape* - as Prof. Clumsy complained about the Transformers themselves, character is partly formed by interaction, but while Sam does interact with other characters, it’s almost always awkward or unwilling, and in the end he makes a very isolated impression - both in the sense of a certain loneliness, and in being kept distant from us. That is, of course, because we’re not actually *supposed* to sympathize with him; The movie invites us to observe him from a distance, and, by proxy, observe ourselves.

Anyway, he and his dad then go on to buy a car, but are followed by... Huh?



And what would that be...?

And then there’s racism.



Hoo boy.

Every black character we meet in this movie is an enormous stereotype, usually talking with a thick accent. I’ll admit I’m not that well versed in US race relations, but the Othering (there’s that word again!) is so thick here you could cut it with a knife (like the stabby ones those no-good gangsta kids use). I don’t know how to defend this, not that I’d want to, but there is a

reason behind this.

In some ways, the Transformers trilogy is a satire of the kind of modern action- or more specifically superhero-escapist-movie it claims to represent. Satire is an incredibly difficult thing, and even more so if you're trying to satirize a genre as commonly loathsome as this one. If you make a satirical work based on hatred of the thing, it's just going to end up nasty and dishonest (see: The _____ *Movie* franchise). But is doing what good satirists should do and learn to love the subject even possible when it is so full of terrible, regressive social values in general?

"Yes", the makers of this movie said.

Awful subtextual implications of nationalism, sexism and xenophobia are unfortunately commonplace in action movies even nowadays, and *Transformers* handles this by... Well, eradicating the "subtextual" and "implications" parts and just straight up shoving all these things in your face like it was no thing. Quite intentionally, the film expands all these terrible phenomena to the far reaches of lurid excess, making it impossible to miss or try to explain away what you are seeing. Sometimes it can get actively uncomfortable to watch, particularly in *Revenge of the Fallen*. Oh, that one will be fun.

But why make a racist movie, right? It'll just make people realize you're a horrible person. What were they actually trying to *accomplish* with this? Well, here comes the clever bit, and one of the reasons for me realizing that *Transformers* is more than meets the eye (OH OH OH OH OH) when I first watched it.

The movie *confronts* you with these squalid qualities. It doesn't play around implying silly nonsense about gender roles (though there'll be plenty of that later) or winking at the audience and going "man, Hollywood movies sure are racially insensitive, right?", it just rubs your face all over the social pavement and expects you to deal with it. It *makes* you go, "welp, there's no avoiding it, this thing I'm watching, *this is pretty fucking regressive and awful.*"

I find it hard to explain why I think this is a big thing, so I think I'll just quote SubG from the General chat thread, because the way he put it is bloody lyrical:

SubG posted:

Yeah. I've gone on about this before. All of the racism in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is disturbing not because it's as over-the-top as the racism in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), it's disturbing because it *isn't* and it nevertheless preserves essentially all the messages that we find objectionable in the former. I mean how could you not worry when the same message that you excoriate in one instance is presented as utopian progressivism in another? Objecting to one but not the other suggests that you're not in fact objecting to the *content* (e.g. the racism) but rather the only *aesthetics*. Put in slightly different terms, you find yourself objecting to *The Birth of a Nation* more than *Star Trek* because the former is less effective racist propaganda than the latter. Which, stated that way, looks almost ridiculous, but there it is.

While I would not describe in my wildest dreams *Transformers* 1-3 as progressive movies, I think it's fairly respectable* that they don't ignore or skim over this issue, but basically tell you black-on-white what the issue is and how you're supposed to feel about it. It sticks in your head and makes you more wary of other big action blockbusters, subconsciously making you look for other instances of such regressiveness.

Except then the internet missed the point completely and widely claimed that there is no racism in the *Transformers* movies.

Fuck nerds forever.

*I mean, I guess it would be more respectable if they just made a movie that's *not racist*, but oh well.

We'll get back to this in the second movie, where *explicit unpleasantness* and *false propaganda* may as well be the names of the main characters. Right now, we're just buying a car.



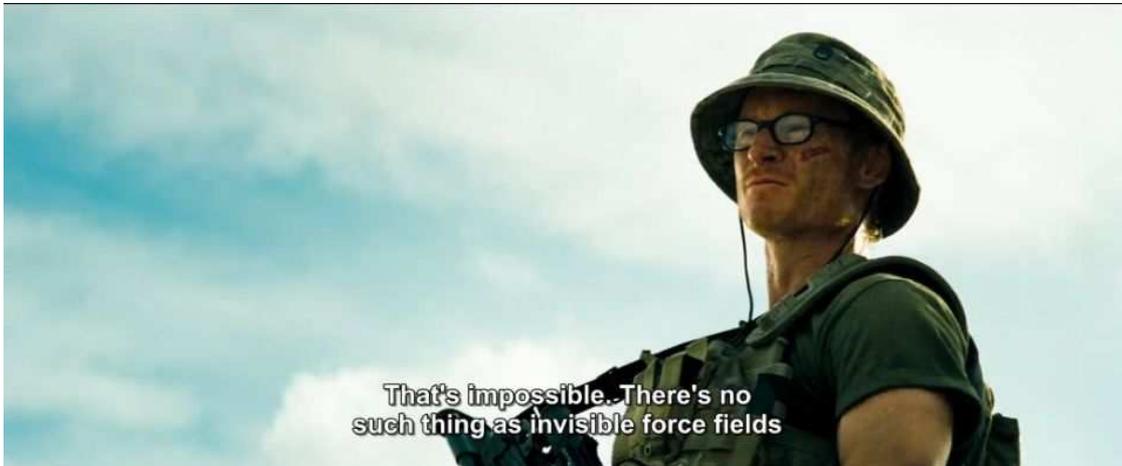
Right. Sam's car. He buys the one that moves on its own and makes all the other cars' windows explode, because that's what any of us would do in that situation.



Scene shift to Washington D.C., where we are confronted with more ant hive imagery. The secretary of defense (oooooh) recaps the beginning of the movie for us, then plays a sound bite of the "hacking". We're also introduced to Maggie Madsen (Rachael Taylor), a character who simultaneously gets a lot of screen time yet manages to only play a miniscule part in the proceedings. Except suffice to say, she's really important. In the third movie. Where she's not actually present. Yup.

Scene shift, Sam's house. He put his ancestor's glasses up on eBay, where they hold little interest... FROM HUMANS THAT IS (dun dun dunnn). Then there's a whole bunch of filler involving Sam's family. See, here's one of the film's (the entire trilogy's, really) major flaws: The editing on the script is *atrocious*. Whoever's job it was to say "this gag is dumb and lame, it's just going to make the audience go 'get on with it!'" did a terrible job. So instead of moving along with the story we have crack head dogs and bumblebee peeing on guys, whoops spoilers. So that's why this update sucked.

Part 3: BOSS FIGHT!



"...except in, like, comic book stuff, right?"

Surprise! Lennox' team made it away from the giant heli killer robot somehow and are now wandering the desert looking for a place to call their guys and tell them there's a giant heli killer robot around, but it seems the mecha scorpion's summon duration hasn't quite run out yet...

Cut to more Sam shenanigans, in which the jock makes fun of him again.

The movie plays a little trick to us here: In portraying Sam's (i.e. the audience's) struggles as mundane and frankly silly, the movie makes us want to identify more with Cpt. Lennox and his actual sense of danger while knowing that we much more resemble Sam, thereby highlighting in our consciousness the movie's nature as escapist entertainment. Eeeeexcept this doesn't actually pay off in any real way until the third movie. Oh how I wish the trilogy was just one movie with all the excess cut off, but I guess that would've been too much stuff to cover.

He then offers his grand ol' crush Mikaela (Megan Fox) a ride home. I didn't mention her until now because so far she was little more than an accessory to the male characters. Now though? Well.



See it's funny because it's a double entendre urgh kill me now.

Remember how I mentioned misogyny? Well, we see the movie through Sam's eyes. Sam objectifies Mikaela. Ergo, Mikaela becomes little more than a lust-object for him, i.e. the audience.

Alright. See, Hollywood has a bit of an odd relationship with women in action films. While feminism is progressing and outright objectification and "putting women in their place" is considered old-fashioned (sadly rarely outright derided though), if you pay attention there's still a lot of smaller issues to be found in how women are portrayed today, usually still being subtly second-rate to the male protagonists.

So I get what Transformers is trying to do here. It's trying to portray its female characters (both Mikaela and Maggie Madsen(Rachael Taylor), whom we've met in the Pentagon scene and who's notably not objectified at all) as incredibly skilled and far too competent at what they're doing to play second fiddle to the menfolk while still ultimately having to sit back because Sam (the audience) is still subject to sexist stereotypes and wills it so. Problem is, they miss that note completely and instead Mikaela just falls into a different sexist stereotype of the Beatonesque "Strong Female Character" who can do everything and totally does not need no man except she does because she's still the designated love interest. It's so bad.



It's a real shame because you can clearly tell Megan Fox is trying her best to do more with the character - notice the perfect dead-eyed "what am I doing with my life?"-stare above - and it just falls flat.

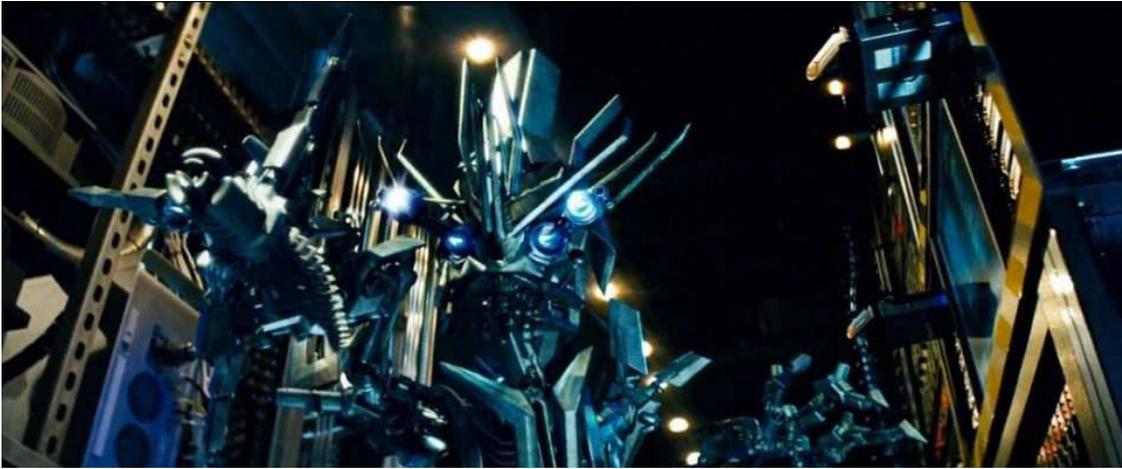
Yonic Symbolism posted:

Mikaela Banes (say it out loud, then say Michael Bay)

I like to remind people of that.

Back at the pentagon, some dudes are trying to blame Iran and Chinese for the mysterious hacking. Dohoho political commentary. Scene shift! We're on Air Force One now. Where, out of the shadow(!), just behind the corner of your eye, something is moving... It's a little compact transformer. What's notable about its bizarre trip through the plane that really reminds me of a video game stealth section is the noises the little guy makes - it's like some sort of strange proto-language a meaningless muttering and chattering to itself that people don't seem to hear. In fact, all Decepticons make these kinds of strange noises that seem to substitute proper language. I note this because it plays into the whole "Other" thing, which language is a big part of. Note also Bumblebee (spoilers, the car is a transformer) approximating human language by playing

songs on the radio. I swear this will all pay off at some point (in two movies' time, yeah).



The creature then begins to HACK AIR FORCE ONE, looking for something called “Project Iceman” that Archibald Witwicky was apparently involved in. Wonder what that could be! Then it uploads a virus. There’s a brief scene in which the thing offhandedly kills some security guards, then hides away. Note how it only kills people who have actually seen and attacked it, clearly trying to minimize casualties, in spite of calling the humans “insects” - this will be important. Via the magic of THE INTERNET, he then finds Sam Witwicky and the glasses he sells. The Decepticons want those glasses, and they’re not going to lawfully bid for them... DUN DUN DUNNN.

Payndz posted:

One odd thing about the scene of Frenzy sneaking around Air Force One is that it's played almost as if we should be rooting for him. Will he be seen? Will he get caught? How will he get out of there? Will he find the data he's after before the human drones cut him off? 🤖 This isn't the case with Reedman in TF2, where his intrusion is shown as very definitely A Bad Thing.

Back at Sam’s, it’s night, so Bumblebee decides to take a little trip. Sam follows.



Plot twist! Didn't see that one coming.

Then the police takes him into custody for some reason.

Back at the pentagon, the military fails to deal with the virus and ignores Maggie, who clearly has it pretty much figured out.



"...shows North Korea doubling its naval activity."

"Um, maybe it's a precaution, because isn't that what we're doing?"

"Feh."

Please do try to tell me that the film is pro-military.

Meanwhile, Sam undergoes some casual police abuse. Could this movie please stop shifting between meaningless scenes?

Nope. We're in Qatar again and WHOA GIANT MECHA SCORPION ATTACK!!



BOOM clang KRR-CATCHING HuuuAAGH T-TTRR TRRRLOOKOUTRRRRRRR TRRRRR

We're then treated to another very bizarre video-gamey scene wherein rather than using its ability of boundless movement to kill the soldiers with no resistance, it stands in place and half-heartedly shoots at them. This goes on for a while until the

military starts sending in its own toys to deal with the enemy toy. There's a big ant hive scene again, then the toys start rolling out.

There's an odd sequence here where the military sends out a team of gunships which begin to fire progressively more destructive weaponry to no effect until they bring in the single, individual (!) really big toy firing the really big rounds. This is what I mean when I say the movie operates on video game logic: Standard rounds can't penetrate its defense, but then they switch for the more expensive ammo with bigger stats, and suddenly they can start tearing away at its HP. By the way, this is a 105mm round, which is what they use to kill it:



It's also not fired with a sabot but blah blah whatever military nerd stuff. In spite of taking that kind of shell to the face, the scorpion survives, but loses its tail and runs off to be a reoccurring mid-boss. And that's our first act, everybody! It was two parts filler and one part weirdness, but don't worry, it's easily the weakest stretch of the trilogy, more is yet to come.

Part 4: Meet the Autobots



I won't even bother narrating this scene. Skipping ahead, Maggie Madsen and her new sidekick Glen find out the soundbite is actually the Decepticon language(a-ha!) and decode enough to see "project Iceman". Then, the police arrives! More casual police brutality, and we shift to Sam again. Now he's the one being chased by his car! It's all very comical I assure you. Then, the police arrives! Again!



Except it's actually the Decepticon Barricade, driven by a holographic Tom Selleck (actually Brian Reece). Did I mention the police are literally bad guys in this movie? Yep. Very right-wing movie, certainly.



Are you username LadiesMan217?

You haven't replied to any of my inquiries about your article for two weeks!

Summing up action scenes isn't terribly interesting when they have little to offer thematically, so in short, Bumblebee rescues him and Mikaela (oh hi Mikaela, you're here too!), and there's a big ol' car chase as night falls(!), when Bumblebee can finally assume his true form and fight the dissatisfied bidder. And well, here's the weird thing.

You know how people always say *Transformers* is a great big ol' action spectacle about robots punching each other? Yeah well, the first movie kind of... Doesn't actually show a lot of robots punching. It builds up to this big fight between Bumblebee and Barricade, and then just kind of... Skips over it, preferring to show how Mikaela beheads the little Decepticon from Air Force One, and then pans over a shot of the defeated Barricade. Is the movie actually refusing to show the kind of combat it promised?

Milky Moor posted:

It's just like how you don't see the monsters in a monster film beyond quick cuts and shadowy glimpses. Even in that awesome clip [of the Autobots arriving], we don't get a good idea of what we're looking at. It also relates back to the point that we are seeing the film through Sam's eyes - and he's not watching the fight. This comes up again, in the climax of the film, where Bay basically skips around the climatic battle between Optimus and Megatron.

Or did it never actually promise real action in the first place?



Deep shit, man.

But once again, note how the Decepticons don't actually try to kill Sam.

And how the characters keep trying to connect these strange alien phenomena to being plot of "rival" countries to the US.

Because they're all the Other, you see.

The movie keeps plodding along quietly until...



The cavalry arrives.

Under swelling music, the meteors come crashing down, causing thousands of dollars worth of property damage, "birthing" from their ovoid shape the various Autobots. Then there's this very odd bit where after standing up right in front of Sam and Mikaela's eyes, rather than communicating with them directly, one of them (probably Optimus Prime, no less) looks around awkwardly and runs off, almost as if he's ashamed to be there without having scanned a vehicle first... Almost as if he's naked. And he is, in a way. And I swear to god, this will actually be a major theme in these movies, we'll even get to it in this one.

They finally meet the Big O (not that Big O, also not to be confused with The O) for real in an alley and he and the other Autobots transform in a scene I can only describe as positively grandiose. After a full hour of pretty half-hearted filmmaking, this scene is where the movie finally kicks into gear. Pictures wouldn't do it justice, so here's a YouTube link. [Seriously, watch the first 4 minutes of this video.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j69RFCSP3Uo9) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j69RFCSP3Uo9>)

It's like... Suddenly it throws all these strange conflicting images at us, and trying to get a handle on it all just makes my brain short out. This is the one scene in this movie I really cannot get a handle on, because it is just plain *so cinematically dense*.

Out of curiosity though, does this scene reference *Cloverfield (2008)* in any way? I'm mainly wondering because of the guy holding a camera and running around talking about Armageddon, it sort of feels like a moment from a found footage disaster movie "seen from the outside".



He asks this in the same cadence as Barricade, just less urgent. But see how the tilted camera makes them look more even, rather than the robot overpowering Sam? The movie immediately makes clear how much more sympathetic Sam is toward the Autobots than the Decepticons. After all, Optimus Prime is everyone's childhood hero! Except... There's some problems with this we'll see soon. For now, the Autobots, who actually learned English on the internet ! Just like me!



- The big guy and grand leader, Optimus Prime! He'll get a much better toy for the next movie!



- The Cool Black Guy caricature, Jazz! Spoilers, he dies! But still gets a toy for the third film!



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- The weapons guy, Ironhide! Has got a shitton of toys since, none of which have screen-accurate guns! Or quote Dirty Harry for no reason.



- The Medic, Ratchet! Spoilers, he practices no actual medicine at any point!



- And last but not least, Bumblebee! Who sucks and is dumb and has way too many goddamn toys devoted to him in general and I hate him.

Only two of these will actually end up mattering. No prizes for guessing who.

The interesting thing is that Optimus and Bumblebee practically seem to have jumped out of Sam's imagination - one of the things the cringe worthy "Sam's shoddy life" scenes earlier demonstrated that he doesn't have a real close friend who isn't an idiot, and he has a fairly distant relationship with his parents, whom he finds little common ground with. And suddenly comes Bumblebee, who has a sense of humor, is caring, helpful and basically the perfect buddy, and Optimus, who is basically the archetypal father figure, authoritative, protective and always caring about freedom and justice. I mean, just listen to his voice. Except... Movie Optimus isn't cartoon Optimus, and can actually be a bit of a dubious figure. For one thing, he basically lies and bullshits his way through the entire trilogy's narration, and considering we get nearly all our exposition from him, that gets

a bit problematic. Indeed, here's some exposition right now!

Apparently at one point, their planet Cybertron was peaceful (probably not true) until the Autobots were betrayed by Megatron (lie), who's the leader of the Decepticons (ok that one's true... Mostly).



(Probably not true)

The war also destroyed Cybertron completely (not quite true) and the Allspark cube was lost in space (true, though we're never actually told exactly why), so Megatron followed it (true) and was eventually found by Archibald Witwicky (true).



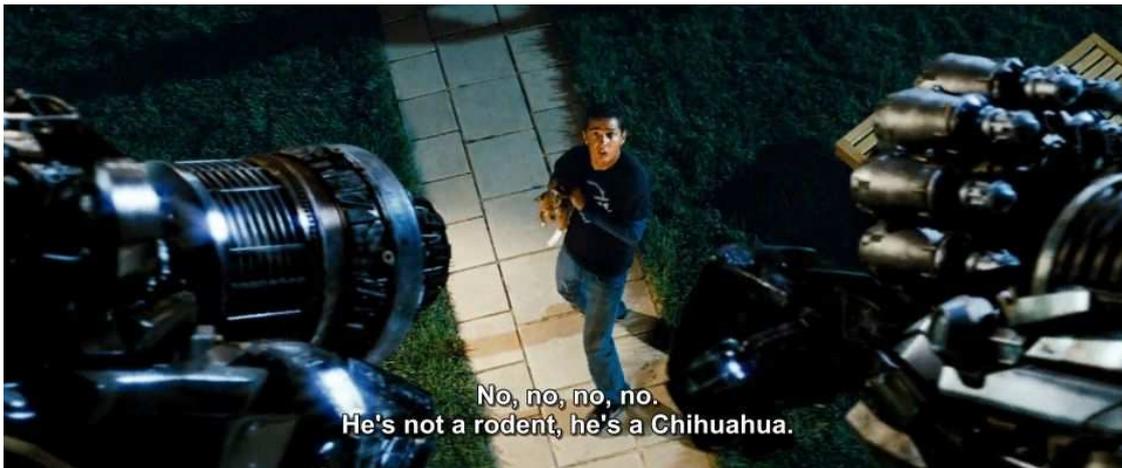
Remember this image. Yes, this will be important.

Archibald accidentally activated Megatron's Satnav(lie), which then imprinted the Cube's coordinates on his glasses (true). And now, if the Decepticons find the cube, they will launch their evil plot to transform earth's machines into an army with which they will **EXTINGUISH THE HUMAN RACE!!** (total, utter, bold-faced lie. I'll elaborate on all of these once I get to talk about Megatron in more detail. So the third movie. Yup.)

Part 5: This part is short because the next one is long.



There's some stuff involving Meg and Glen. Really, this shot says everything.



Sam tries to get the glasses. The big obstacle of Act 2: Sam's parents. Yup. These scenes are very silly, and I wish I found something to say about them.

What's of note here is that trampling around Sam's house, the Autobots cause all kinds of destruction just by stepping on things, and Ironhide nearly kills Sam's dog. This is not just bad comic relief, it actually matters.



I have no explanation for this, though.

Following this, men in suits suddenly start filling the house, calling themselves Sector Seven. SS (uuuugh) is some kind of bizarrely over-the-top parody of government agencies, proceeding to tear up Sam's house even further on shaky reasoning. Following this, we find out that the Autobots are *radioactive* and have left Sam generating no less than 0.14 Gy worth of neurons shooting through the air. Now, this is just hokey Hollywood science and I know little about radiation, but I'll try to put this in perspective (feel free to skip this bit):

Now, radiation doesn't "stick" to you the way water or mud might, since it's mainly particles and waves travelling along the air at pretty fast speeds, usually either stopping completely when they hit matter or passing clean through. The only way I could see a Geiger counter (which measures in counts and not rads, by the way) detect radiation on Sam after the fact when any radiation he received had long time to dissipate would be if the Autobots emitted some kind of radioactive particle that Sam had breathed in. Now this means that not only do they destroy everything they touch, they also constantly emit illicit and likely extremely dangerous to humans radioactive gases - over the two days Sam spent with Bumblebee, he absorbed enough robot farts to be constantly generating 0,14 Gy (per second? Per minute? No idea), and then there's the actual radiation the robots generate directly. For reference, 5-6 Gy is the "you're pretty much dead" dose, and illness and other bad things settle in much much earlier. It's a wonder Sam still has his hair by the third movie.

Anyway they drive off with Sam and Mikaela, and their representative, one Agent Simmons (John Turturro) interrogates them about aliens and generally is a huge butt. Then their car crashes into Optimus Prime.

This is another one of those toy-scenes. Simmons holds dominance over Sam by showing him his badge-toy, until Sam brings in his bigger, badder robot-toy, at which point he becomes the dominant one. And I know "Bumblebee symbolizes a penis!" is a silly cliché of movie analysis, but Bumblebee actually proceeds to pee on the Agent in a display of male dominance.



No, really.

Note also: Mikaela telling Sam he's never had to sacrifice anything in his perfect little life, which makes him look noticeably distraught - considering the motto of his family is "no victory without sacrifice". This is more setup for the third movie.

The agents end up alerting the entire MIB of the robots' shenanigans, and a grand multiple car/helicopter-chase ensues, ending in more couple thousand dollars of property damage and the capture of Bumblebee, Sam and Mikaela, and the glasses in Optimus' hands.



Do robots even feel pain?

Back at the pentagon, the military is almost done escalating things into a full-out war with China for no reason, when the Decepticon virus saves the earth by shutting down their systems. Uh. Yeah. Except now *all the world's communications* are down. The implications of this are never mentioned.

Then it turns out S7 (much better) is part of an 80 years old conspiracy to keep the existence of robots on mars secret from humanity, or something. It's all very vague, and not important until the third movie anyway. And act 2 ends with a montage of all characters we met so far mobilizing and finally being escorted to one place: A... Dam somewhere?

Part 6: Revelations



The remaining Autobots wobble on for a bit about how humans are savage and violent and they are enlightened and have evolved past ever harming a sentient being. Oh god, don't get me started on Autobot morality. The entire second movie practically revolves around it. We also hear their grand plan: Destroy the life cube by ramming it into Optimus' soul (not joking).

Milky Moor posted:

Hmm. There's a few interesting things about this scene.

One, Ratchet's line: "I sense the Decepticons are getting ready to mobilize."

How? Why? Sense is an interesting way of putting it, it means that – on some level – Ratchet knows on a level beyond touch, sight or hearing. He doesn't believe or feel they are preparing, he senses it. Hell, they haven't even met any Decepticons yet.

Two, Jazz seemingly knowing that Bumblebee is going to die and be dissected. This isn't so bad, one could assume that pretty normally. It's what Optimus says which should raise a few eyebrows. See, Optimus is willing to let this happen providing they can retrieve the AllSpark. There are even shots of Bumblebee being frozen and shocked like some sort of experiment (tortured, even?) – Optimus even states that "This is what he would want".

No. For some reason, I don't think Bumblebee wants that at all. He certainly seems to feel pain or fear, given the sounds he's making as this is going on. Optimus would just abandon Bumblebee, Sam's guardian and friend, to get the AllSpark? How does that gel with his high-minded morality?

It doesn't. This leads me to my third point.

Three, Optimus believes that destroying the Cube is the only way to end the war. Why he believes this instead of acknowledging that just destroying the Decepticons would also end it, without killing their sole source of creation, is unknown. Further, destroying the Cube would, in no way, prevent the Decepticons from terrorising Humanity.

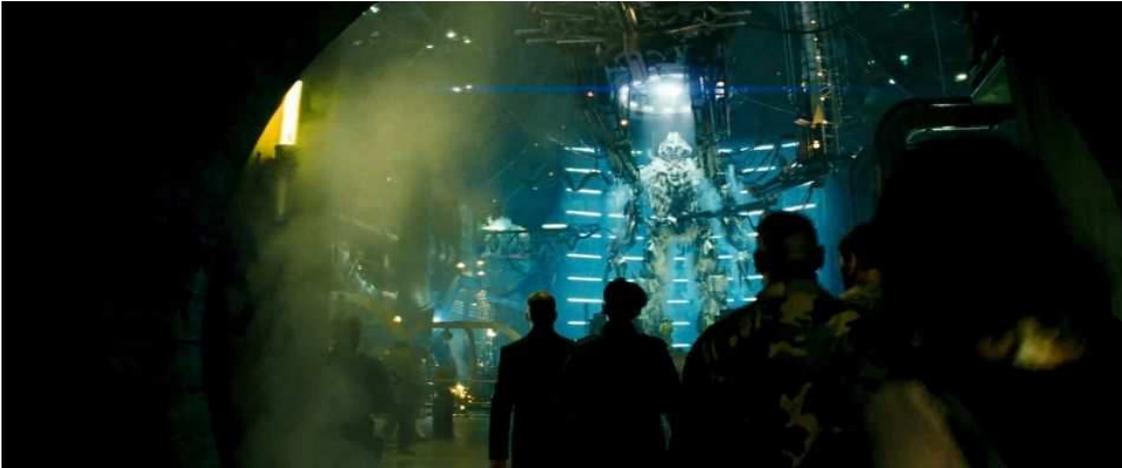
A very interesting thing here is that when Optimus mentions that he would destroy the Cube by plunging it into the spark in his

Milky Moor cont...

chest, Ratchet immediately decries it as suicide, that it would destroy them both. So – does that mean that Optimus merging the AllSpark with himself isn't necessarily a death sentence? Could Optimus' plan to 'end the war' then be construed as a ploy in order to grant himself the power of creation itself?

After all, there has to be a reason why he won't just plunge the AllSpark into Megatron's chest – or the chest of any other Decepticon.

In exchange for Bumblebee, Sam agrees to tell the military everything he knows. And so, they lead him and everyone else...



Well hello there.

NBE-1, they call him - called him all those years, and are not too keen to start calling him “Megatron” because a kid said so. And then they say something surprising and very important: Megatron is the father of modern technology, as practically everything we use today has been reverse-engineered from him. Damn, I'm so giddy to start talking about Megatron, because he's the best character in the entire trilogy. No, really. But that's for the third movie.

And what's more, Megatron is not the only thing they have stashed away under there.



Except the little Decepticon was with them all along, and now has reported the location of the cube. Whoops! And so, the Decepticons mobilize!



- Starscream! Good lord, he's *hideous*! Also incompetent, but important.



- Barricade! ...Wait, wasn't he dead? Guess not!



- Devastator! Except his name is actually Brawl! He's a tank, but he's just as useless as the others.



- Bonecrusher! I guess his gimmick is supposed to be that he hates everything, but that's dumb so I'll have a bit more to say about him!



- And Blackout, the only one who's not as stupid as the others! But still as useless anyway.

So yeah. Megatron didn't exactly draw the lucky cards.



We are then given a demonstration of what the Cube actually *does*. He asks for a phone, places it in the Aperture Science Living Mechanical Device Containment Field (Warning - containment beams may give you cancer) and activates the Cube, making the phone do... This.



“Kind of like the itty-bitty Energizer bunny from hell, huh?”

Um. The little thing goes completely berserk, attacking everything around it with the machine guns it has randomly grown before Simmons has to kill it.

And there it is.

This is the first film’s biggest moment.

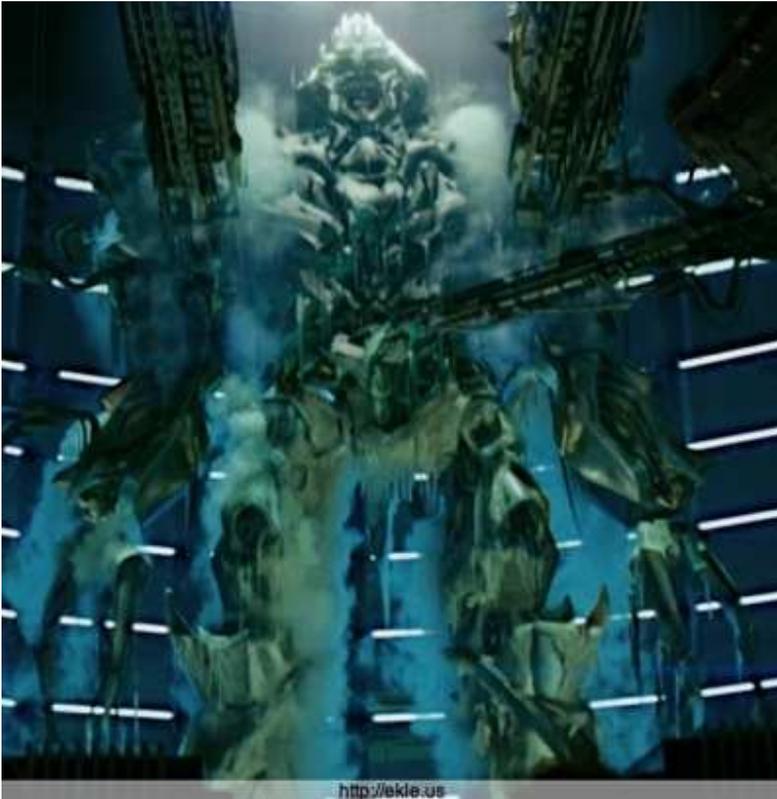
The *Transformers* trilogy can best be likened to a puzzle. It gradually hands you tiny pieces, until at some point you have enough to actually start putting them together. And now, it has handed us the first corner piece.

Disclaimer: This is all so far still on somewhat shaky evidence, but that’s why the first movie alone fails to convey it - it will become more clear and better supported as the movies go on.

When I first learned English, I started to wonder why “Autobots” was the “good” name and “Decepticons” the “evil” one. After all, the transformers’ central tenet, disguising themselves as everyday vehicles, is *inherently* an act of deception. In giving the word a negative moral note, are they not calling the Autobots immoral as well? Or is there a difference between good, moral “deceivers” and evil, immoral “Decepticons”? What, then, is the *fundamental difference* in their perception of the world and the nature of their deception? Well, it seems the creators of this movie had the same thought.

We see the just-born baby Transformer flip out and attack as its very first act in *Life*. When talking about human aggression, Optimus cites our youth as a species as the reason - we’ll grow, he says, we’ll grow and become as moral as the Autobots. So is it immaturity? Are the Decepticons simply unwilling to grow up, toys stuck in a toy mindset? Well, no. Amorality from immaturity is the Decepticons’ greatest anathema, as we will see throughout the movies. It’s the difference between *amorality* and *immorality*: Acting without thinking about morality vs. Acting specifically *against* one’s moral framework. So the Decepticons are immoral then, right?

Let me switch gear for a bit, and talk again about their physical form. Take another look at Megatron.



Megatron is an example of a cybertronian Transformer, i.e. one who hasn't scanned a disguise for himself. Notice the fractured, bone-like protrusions of metal, the wide, unchanging, humorless grin of a skull. I posted the picture of the caveman in ice, Ötzi, because that's who Megatron reminds me of. He looks nearly starved, and *naked*. I told you this would be a theme. Look above at the pictures of the Decepticons (or back in update 4 for the Autobots) once again. Notice the way bits of the disguised mode seem to drape over the inner robot-y bits like futuristic armor. Because that's what scanned alternate forms are: Armor, clothing, costumes. The Decepticons use them to hide until they're needed, at which point the clothes shift aside and reveal the robot underneath. Nakedness symbolizes many things in fiction, but in many cases it symbolizes *truthfulness* - as Blackout partially takes off/transforms away his metal shell, his true nature is revealed ("more than meets the eye"). Megatron needs no disguise, so he doesn't even bother scanning anything even once he wakes - the leader of the Decepticons deceives no one at any point, and doesn't seem to mind being seen naked. But what about the Autobots?

The Autobots don't even attempt to stay disguised, or hide. Bumblebee happily putters along without a driver and calls all sorts of attention to himself (notably he lacks the "mask", the false Brian Reece face that completes the disguise), only remaining unnoticed because humans are thick. Optimus Prime just walks over the street like it was no thing. They deceive no one. *And yet they insist on having earth-altmodes*. We see Optimus awkwardly stumble off from his first meeting with Sam and Mikaela, as if embarrassed. So it seems cybertronian forms are nakedness in more than one sense - Optimus considers it awkward, impolite, *not moral* to converse with a planet's denizens without a disguise. So why?

Well, how do morals develop? Actually that's a pretty complex question, but I'm going to lie-for-children the answer for the purpose of this commentary: Person does thing, thing hurts us or is otherwise detrimental to us, we teach children that thing bad, children don't do thing even if they no longer would have a reason to. The Transformers learned that being a giant robot and trampling about where everyone can see is generally a bad idea, so they started to disguise themselves. Except at some

point the Autobots seem to have forgotten this and now are trampling around where everyone can see again. Wuh? And it gets even better when you consider Kohlberg's stages of moral development. The Autobots base their morality on predefined social norms (conventional – they *claim* it's universal ethic principles, but their behavior consistently contradicts this; Again, important fact!), whereas the Decepticons, as a group (not so much individually) base their actions on rational basis, depending on how much it serves their personal goals based on their own ethics (post-conventional), so this model makes... The Autobots the immature ones?

But how can I claim the Decepticons are more morally more mature when they call sapient beings insects and murder them indiscriminately? Well. Here's the funny thing. Nearly all non-moral acts we see the Decepticons commit in this movie are done in full knowledge of the nature of the act. To some degree, they *admit* that Humans are sapient beings whose life is valuable. They kill to achieve their goals, but, Bonecrusher aside (he's a... Special case), they only kill as many as they *have to* to achieve their goal. They only fight active resistance and military targets, and even though they get in touching distance of Sam multiple times throughout, they at worst roughhouse him slightly (probably not entirely aware of how fragile humans are). So they act immorally. They *know* they act immorally, actively. Their "natural", immature, childish form attacks everything indiscriminately, but they deny this immaturity, because their attacks are not just uncaring aggression – they know what they're doing is wrong. But they feel they have to. Why, then? For what reason would they disregard their morals like that, at what point do they become the "evil" Decepticons? Psyche! Watch the next movie to find out. But, here's the funny contrast.

Think back to how I keep pointing out how dangerous the Autobots are. They're huge, careless things brimming with radiation, and at least one of them constantly jumps at the chance to murder something. Just their very *presence* causes massive damage, and it's only luck that they have yet to actually murder anyone. In the next movie, they will actively revel in savage bloodlust. Yet they keep talking about how upstanding and moral they are, and later how important it is they stay with humanity. What gives? Well, I'll loop around again to their appearance. Nakedness, and thus the transformers' robot forms, symbolize openness, but also savagery, as the next movie will be kind enough to point out for us. Megatron acts like a monster and talks like a monster, and if you pay attention during certain scenes, when the transformers shift into their robot modes, as their robot bits are revealed their movement becomes less "smooth ride" and more "beast running on all four legs". Point is, as much as people complain about the way the Transformers are designed in these movies, there's a reason why they are that way. When a transformer scans a vehicle, he takes on parts of its design, but in robot mode, they just kind of store away on random parts of his body; Almost looking as if someone who has never seen a vehicle in their life was trying to assemble it from pieces. Bumblebee saw how a car looks, but doesn't seem to understand how cars are supposed to *behave*. In robot mode, the car-suit is ill-fitting and fails to conceal the cybertronian robot beneath, and after seeing the Bumblebee wave around his giant arm cannon and then *tear a robot's spine out* (no, really), the cute yellow bits of Camaro and friendly name start feeling like a sweater on a pit-bull – you can try as you want, but you're just not going to get that dog looking civilized. And just like that, the Autobot "enlightened philosophy" ultimately fails to cover up their aggression and brutality. They ignore their inner aggressive childlikeness, pretending that their ethics are stronger, but their actions tell otherwise.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

I think it's important to underline this point, and how it's related to the Transformers' choice of 'clothes'.

The Autobots don symbols of humanitarianism (the ambulance), blue-collar work (the trucks) and libertarian freedom (the sportscars). But Terry rightly points out how these things don't fit – how the ambulance performs no medicine, for example. Optimus is not a blue-collar worker but a military commander. Optimus and the Autobots constantly disavow their cause and try to ingratiate themselves with the humans – saying, basically, that they're fighting for America and 'American values'.

By contrast, the Decepticons wear utilitarian 'military' clothing that accurately reflects their goals. They are militant, and as unashamed of that fact as Megatron is of his nakedness.

This is why the whole story centers on 'a boy purchasing his first car to go on a grown-up adventure'. Like the Autobots' clothes, Sam's whole conventional, family-friendly teen-problems narrative is a thin shell over the 'real narrative' of abstract and incomprehensible cosmic warfare. The film itself is a Transformer.



And so Transformers begins to look like *They Live*, with the sunglasses revealing ideological 'robots in disguise'. When you buy a car, says Bay, you're actually buying into neoliberal capitalism and its ills.

And that's the trick with the names, at least as far as the movieverse is concerned – the Decepticons may deceive you and screw you over, but paradoxically, they are honest about it, even adopting their inherent, necessary dishonesty as their designation. Whereas the Autobots are the *true* deceivers, because they pretend to *not* be liars, and because their biggest trick is the most dangerous of them all – they deceive not just us, but themselves, and honestly believe every lie they churn out.

Do not trust any bit of exposition that comes out of an Autobot's mouth, *doubly* so if the Decepticons are concerned.

That was a whole lot of words about something that will only really be demonstrated in the next movie, but I think it's important to know for when you watch *Revenge of the Fallen*. Morality is probably the biggest theme and central issue of all

three movies, and the third will actually relate the abstract “Autobots” and “Decepticons” to real world groups. But before then, we’ll have to watch some robots punch each other. 🤖, I know.

Part 7: Megatron!



Seriously, I just can't get enough of this shot.

The Decepticons attack the dam and shut off the main power! Now Megatron is going to thaw, and that's a problem.

Sam wants to see Bumblebee, but Simmons isn't so fond of the idea until Captain Lennox, in a display of full-on burning vigilante justice, straight-up assaults him and pushes a gun into his chest. That's just how things are done around here. (I'll expand on it later.)

BB is pretty pissed and nearly *murders everyone*, but Sam successfully talks him down.



Convenient shrinking MacGuffin.

Lennox makes the completely brilliant decision to take the cube into the middle of a populated city. I don't... What? But what do I know, he's the leader now. Then...



"I AM MEGATRON."

Megatron is not in a good mood. He's actually somewhat cross. Which is to say, a little angry. Just a little. Or maybe not so little. Or maybe it's just the burning, senseless fury of a thousand dying universes exploding out of his blackened heart of dark matter, swallowing up all around into an enormous zone of death, fuelled by the incomprehensible rage and suffering of a god's thousand-year captivity.

These movies can be *delightfully* subtle when the situation calls for it. Megatron's first words are in *clean English*. Meaning, he had time to learn the language. Meaning, he was *conscious the entire time*. And since the humans kept him artificially frozen, they knew he was still alive. So why is the first thing he says reaffirming his identity, and why is he so unstable and violent? Well, you really have to put yourself in Megatron's situation to properly understand his character.

Imagine you just had the worst day of your life.

Well, it wasn't really a day. Hours and days have no meaning for you. You have lived far too long to follow such microscopic temporal distinctions. You built an empire, and lived to see it dying. What can a day matter? A year?

How about a thousand?

Your planet was dying. Your species was dying. What can a king do, when his children are dying because there is nothing to eat? You knew the answer: The Allspark. You hung onto that fairy tale even as your followers declared it absurd, taking off immediately, all alone, as soon as there was a sign of it. No delays; Without the Allspark, everything you ever knew and loved would slowly wither away and die. And all you needed to do was move to a completely insignificant planet it found itself drawn to and pick it up. You would be more than a leader, you would be a hero, a savior. There would be no more need for war, no more fear of death and hunger, and no more dying younglings.

And then everything went wrong.

The moment still constantly plays before your eyes. You break into the planet's atmosphere, and it nearly destroys your sensors. That vivid feeling of total disorientation, the hard, sudden impact, and the cold darkness that closed around you as the cavern froze around your unmoving body. You weren't ready to die. You thought back to your planet, your people - you still had to save them. Had to. What would they do without you? The people saw their leader off, promising them to bring back utopia. Knowing you wouldn't return would shatter their morale completely.

The years start piling on. You try to move, try to melt the ice, try to do anything, but the world only seems to become colder

around you. Ten years. Fifty years. Five hundred years. Unable to move, with only your own thoughts and worries to give you company. Your mind can't take it, and your sanity falls apart. Everything you thought and wished for slowly shatters into pieces, leaving only hate and chaos behind. Eight hundred years. Thousand years. After a while, you simply stop counting.

Then you hear a crash from the ceiling.

Through your delusional fever dreams, you aren't sure if it is real or not, or what is truly happening. A tiny creature descends upon you, clearly primitive, shouting in rough, poorly-coordinated language, but perhaps not too dissimilar to you. You failed to bring the cube to your people - but maybe, maybe there is some slight chance that he can. So you tell him where he can find it, the only way you can right now. You rest a bit more easy. Perhaps it is time to rest after all.

But, more small creatures start filling your cavern. They begin chopping away at the ice that binds you, clumsily, but surely. They want to free you. For the first time in millennia, you feel just that little bit more warm - finally you will be able to return, to not be a useless statue, but the great hero you were destined to be. Your silent cheer fills your own head as the humans, as they call themselves, with great difficulty, raise you out of the cavern and put you onto a transport.

They seem bewildered with you. Curious. A little too curious, perhaps. As grateful as you are, you have a mission to attend to, and they will only get in the way. You are defrosted enough to stand up.

Panicked shouting erupts among the small ones. It seems they hadn't expected you to still be alive. You notice too late the all-too-familiar cold creeping up your body, and suddenly you cannot move again. They froze you!

Burning rage fills your heart. What do they think they're doing!? They lock you underground again, and, to your horror, begin to force parts of your body open, dissecting you alive.

You start picking up on their language, and slowly begin to understand what they're saying. They're just using you to expand their technology. These primitive insects have attached themselves to you like filthy parasites, using your suffering to create for themselves more meaningless conveniences. You should be their god. You wanted to save your own kind, but instead, you are treated like a chunk of garbage. And as a final injustice, the insult to the injury, they did not even treat you to a proper name.

Needless to say, as soon as you are free, someone will pay.

Well this was a bit fanfiction-y, but I really can't underestimate what a massive bum deal Megatron got before the movie even started, because it's going to be a pretty big deal from now on. It's really interesting how the movie doesn't really show or tell you any of this stuff, but just lets a few loose ends hang (Megatron's understanding of the language, his imprinting on the glasses, his change in location, the reverse-engineering, peeps keeping him artificially frozen) and relies on you to follow them backwards until they come together to form a coherent narrative to understand the antagonist's actual motivation. That's a pretty bizarre thing of a movie to demand when it ostensibly wants you to watch with your brain turned off, is it not?

Psalmanazar posted:

The two "arms" [in the first shot of this part] are really odd. The shot's framing here makes it look like the audience is trapped in a mechanical cage. It's comparing us to Megatron, saying we're as unable to move as he was. The comparison is saying that we're lesser than Megatron. The basic analysis would be that Megatron's a big scary dude and stronger than us, but considering what you've said, Megatron is positioned as the moral superior. He's even illuminated by a halo of light and has clouds coming of him.



While Team Heroes (minus Simmons, the Secretary of Defense, Maggie and Glen) takes off toward Mission City, Megatron goes on a total rampage, then meets up with Starscream, who reports that he did not manage to stop the humans from leaving, and Megatron notes (with remarkable politeness) that Starscream is completely useless. And he really is: it's practically a drinking game in these movies, because whenever Starscream tries anything, he is bound to fail hilariously.

Hewlett posted:

I do wish to point out that, in the movies at least, Starscream has taken the form of an F22, which is notoriously prone to failure, is in need of costly maintenance on a constant basis, and has proven to be one of the US Air Force's most significant recent failures.

Part 8: I'm bored now, can we start ROTF already?



The four random side characters who were left behind have found some pre-Megatron technology with which they want to contact the air force (since digital communications are down), but they have no microphones! OH NO!!! Their attempts to MacGyver a solution to this problem come across as bizarrely cartoonish in ways I can't really describe. It just feels so... Abstract after the drama of Megatron. It gets even stranger when the tiny Decepticon busts in, and we are treated to an extended scene of them trying to not get killed. They can't do anything against the alien menace, and in the end it dies by its own poorly aimed blade.

Team Heroes meets up with the other Autobots, but oh no!!! The Decepticons are in pursuit.



Bonecrusher suffers from a particularly bad case of ROOAAAD RAAAAAAAAAAGE and so in an impressive display of CGI Optimus Prime decides to solve the poor guy's anger issues by punching him in the throat, then *ripping his head off*. Yeeesh.

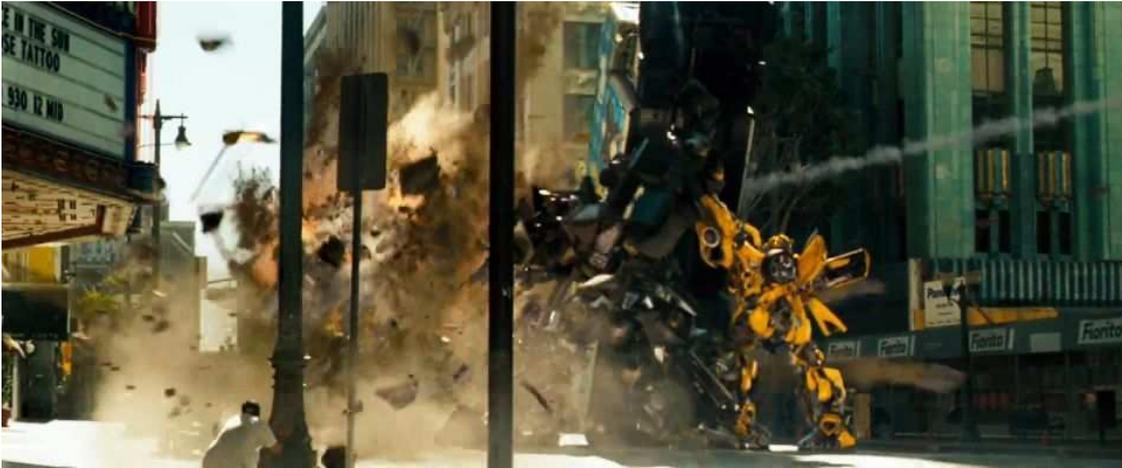
Bonecrusher himself is a bit of a special case, too. After a whole movie of Decepticons being careful and concerned with morality (if a bit bumbling and clueless) suddenly this guy pops up and just goes on a complete rampage. While in terms of the movie it shows that things are coming up to the serious fighting, in the narrative Bonecrusher ends up sticking out of the

Decepticon cause like a very angry sore thumb. And here's the thing: We never find out *why* he's so angry. We constantly hear him sputter along in Cybertronian, but the movie conveniently forgets to subtitle it - meaning he just comes across as bloodthirsty and evil, by extension painting the rest of the Decepticons as such for an uncritical audience. With the whole Dog-named-Bonecrusher thing I suspect there is some clever reason that Michael Bay is just going to take to his grave. There is an expanded universe explanation (he HAETS EVERYTHING!!!) but it's dumb and makes no sense (and fuck the expanded universe anyway) so my pet theory is that it's not actually Bonecrusher that's angry, but rather is feeling Megatron's hatred and anger over that psychic link the Transformers sometimes seem to have (remember Ratchet "sensing" the Decepticons) and just can't deal with rage that cosmic.

This scene is also harshly intercut with the previous one, and again the editing serves to establish a contrast between the representatives' of humanity clueless bumbling and Optimus' effortless *disposal* of another living being. I skipped over all the Maggie/Glen scenes in this movie because there's no way to convey them in written form, and as far as the first movie is concerned they are worthless filler - but it still feels like I under-presented them, because once you get the other two films into the picture they suddenly become part of an important progression. Here, comparing their efforts to even as much as contact the air force (who, themselves, will not actually accomplish much either) to Prime's cold killer efficiency is practically laughable. In this movie, humanity finds itself represented in the final act by an old bureaucrat, a secret agent caricature, a hysterical black caricature and a single sort of clever woman (as far as the movies are concerned Sam and Mikaela are separate from humanity - being inserts for the audience, they function on a different layer of meaning), and it's satirically pitiful. But we will see what happens with the sequels, and the third movie even has a character who feels very much like an extension of Maggie - but under very different circumstances.



The military parade drives through Mission City like it was no thing - interestingly, the movie omits any sort of civilian reaction to this.



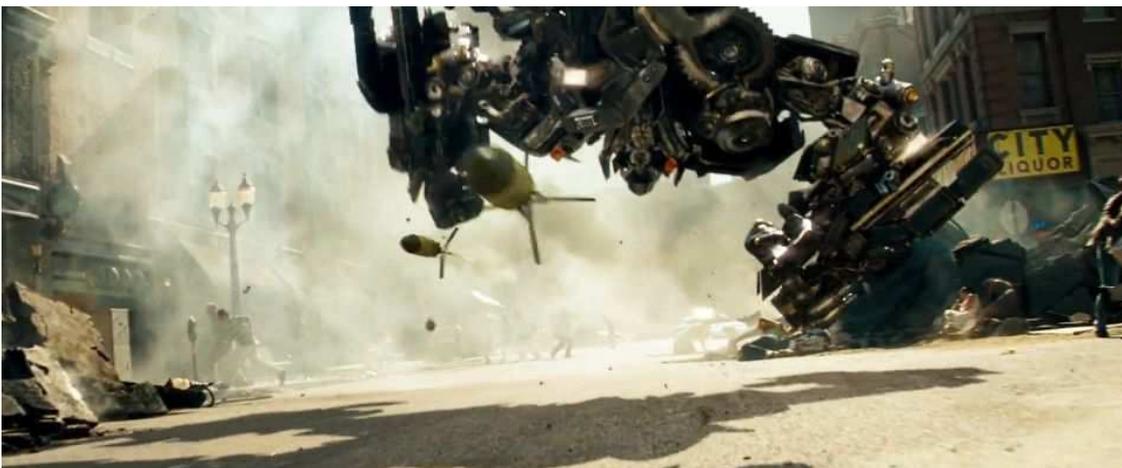
Needless to say, Lennox' *completely* brilliant plan to bring the cube into the city backfires when Starscream finds them and opens fire, destroying Bumblebee's legs.

Lennox is aghast at the fact that an F-22 shot at them, but his black sidekick reminds him that we're dealing with vehicle-copying aliens here. Doh!! Remember that this is the same Lennox who decided to endanger an entire *populated city* by moving the enemies' target there.





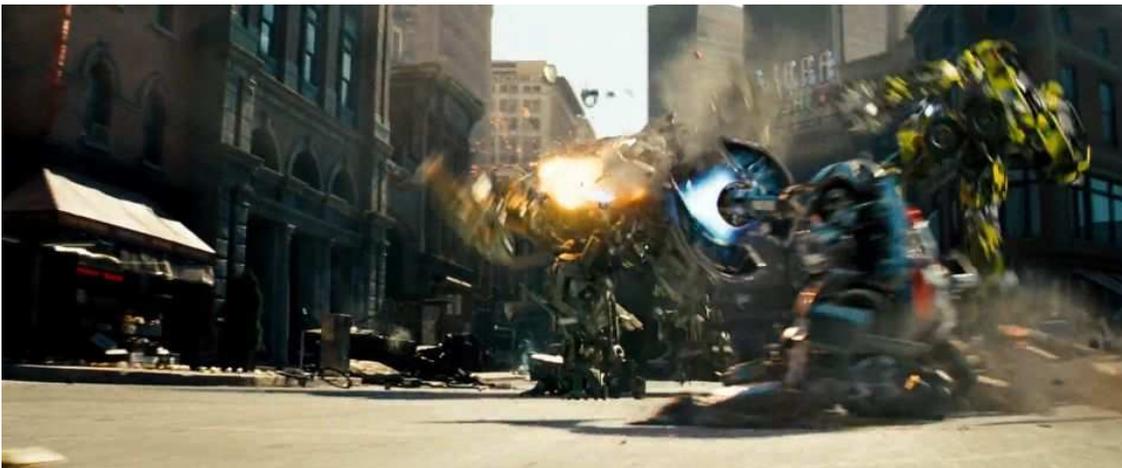
Devastator Brawl arrives at the scene, and causes an even bigger mess while Bumblebee tasks the teenage boy with protecting the Cube. Thanks buddy, you're a real bro! And with this, all the elements for the big final action sequence are in place. The movie treats us to some somersaulting robots, panicking civilians and, of course, EXPLOSIONS!!!, but it's... Remarkably apathetic about it. There's no soundtrack whatsoever, the sound mixing is reduced to an occasional stock scream or missile sound, and the editing is boring and limp-wristed. It's just completely dire in every aspect of its execution.



And that's just the strange thing. While the Transformers trilogy doesn't actually have any really good action until the third film (well, the second is... complicated), it just feels bizarre that all the sound technicians and the director would just randomly decide to completely half-ass the big action setpiece. Megatron's and Bonecrusher's rampages and the Autobots' landing had *weight* to them and worked both aurally and kinaesthetically (oh just look at those big words I'm using today), so clearly everyone involved has the *ability* to make a good action sequence, so what's the problem? Did they just not bother? I'm... Actually starting to think so.



Sometimes *Transformers (2007)* feels like it has a sort of vague disdain for its nature as an action movie. It just skipped over the Bumblebee/Barricade fight, the Act 1 fight against Scorponok was reduced to a bunch of guys shooting at a stationary videogame boss, and now it's like everyone has just kind of lost interest.



That's one of the things that really puzzled me on my first viewing, and I still haven't really figured it out. I know it's the lowest of the low to argue a movie is bad intentionally, but frankly I find it hard to find any other explanation. At this point pure talentless hackery is still sort of a possibility, but this movie is far too clever for that and the next ones just rule it out completely.

Transformers (2007), really, is an incomplete movie. It doesn't elaborate on any of its themes or ideas, basically just throwing loose threads all over the place.



When you start actually thinking about it, these loose threads become impossible not to notice even if you have your brain shut off thoroughly, and suddenly an already shaky movie begins to fall apart completely. And see, the impression I get is that this *may be completely intentional*.



It's a movie that practically calls attention to its own flaws. It points at the absurdity of its characters, draws attention to its horrible treatment of race and sex, underscores the horrible lack of sound in its final sequence by spacing out its sparse sfx, and randomly moves the weightless unrelatable action out of the frame.



I bring up the topic of race again because it ends up relating to what I said about that back in another update: The movie makes you look at its portrayal of black people and go “OK, this is wrong.”



And in much the same way, sometimes it feels like the movie wants you to go “OK, this *doesn't work.*”



But why would they do that? I guess you could say self-satire, but self-satire is completely meaningless and lacks the transgressive nature of proper satire anyway. And it doesn't work as satire of something else, because aside from a vague "action movie"-ness it doesn't actually reference any particular movie or story save for the original Transformers cartoon, which... Doesn't make for much of a target.

But here's where an interesting phenomenon comes into play that I recently discovered about action movies, or, more specifically, about critical response to action movies.



There goes Jazz. You remember who Jazz is, right?

People are pretty bad at articulating opinions in general, often citing completely different reasons for why they enjoyed something than the actual explanations, or just being unable to articulate it at all.

Action movies are particularly awful for this. A Good action movie is just Good, and that's that. Any further deliberations are superfluous.

You get this in other genres too, but much less so: Because action movies, as a genre, discourage critical thought.



Well really not so much the movies themselves as the culture surrounding them. The idea that action is opposite to criticism (since skepticism prevents action) is as old as humanity, and action movies naturally tend far towards one side of this false cultural dichotomy.

So what's an action movie to do when it wants, *needs* to be taken critically to work?



But of course, a movie that wants to be criticized has to avoid the flawless “Good” category of movies - it has to fall into the “Bad” camp. If you pay attention, people are much more likely to discuss at length over why a movie *didn't* work than why it *did*.

So *Transformers (2007)* is a Bad Movie, then? Well, I don't consider it a complete movie that can be judged in the first place, much rather the first act of a greater story, but if you do look at it in isolation, yes, it is a Bad Movie.



But *Transformers (2007)* is also merely an introduction. A setup, introducing various characters and concepts and painting a picture of its own fictional space that we have yet to see grow and unfold. And as it is a setup for elements and meaning, so it is an introduction to the films' tone. *Transformers (2007)* is a Bad Movie, and it warns us right away: *Revenge of the Fallen (2009)* will be too.

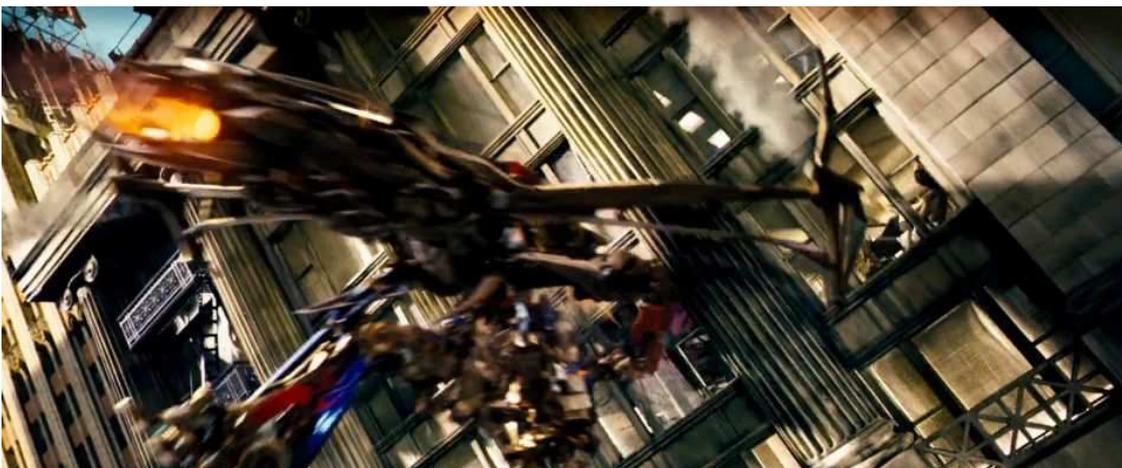
What it doesn't tell us is that where this movie is mostly dull and aimless, *Revenge* is, well...



...Completely off the fucking hook.

So far off the hook, in fact, that it needed an entire movie just to tell us that we're supposed to be skeptical of it.

Actually, no, wait, that's a completely stupid idea, ignore everything I just said.



Is this still going? I'm just about ready to wrap this shit up.

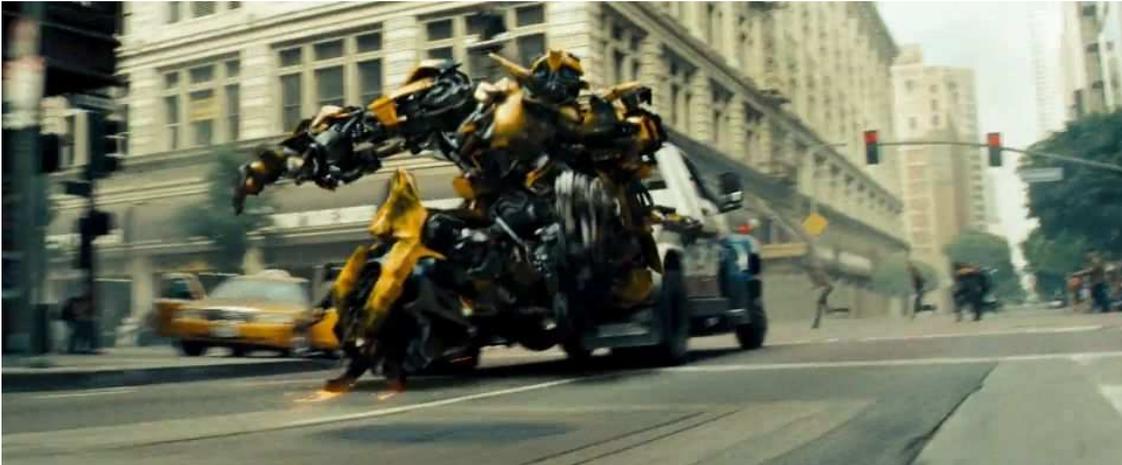


Megatron and Optimus Prime DO BATTLE and well, Megatron kicks the Big O's shiny metal bum with trivial ease - pretty surprising considering they're usually portrayed as evenly matched (but again, has implications for the third movie). What's notable here is the dialogue. Megatron shouts "Humans don't deserve to live!", a line that is complete nonsense until you realize he's speaking judgment over mankind for what they did to him, but Prime just waves it off with a similarly bizarre line about freedom of choice. Then Megatron takes off after Sam, and the dumb little git somehow activates the cube, turning a bunch of appliances around him into mad monsters.



Homicidal Mountain Dew robot. Yes, really.

Megatron chases after Sam, shouting some of the best lines in the movie ("I CAN SMELL YOU, BOY!") and then the movie basically completely loses its shit.



The dull and limp-wristed editing from before suddenly becomes a manic, chaotic nonsense-thrill ride that is virtually impossible to follow. The geometry of individual set pieces makes a certain degree of sense, but the movie starts cutting between them so fast and directionlessly that the whole thing just devolves into a single explosion of action-anarchy while the individual scenes become actual video game sequences. Bumblebee is in an actual rail shooter segment being wagoned around by his female sidekick while Lennox literally *hits Blackout's weak spot for massive damage*. During all this, the sound effects are completely reduced to two pew pew gun noises and the occasional "boss hurt" grunting sound effect over a random heavy metal track, completing the descent into being an actual video game. Even coming off scenes like the end-of-act-1 fight, this shift is so sudden and jarring that I find it hard to even find words for it.



Meanwhile, Megatron is oddly affectionate towards Sam. He actually *stops to talk to him*, asks him whether he's afraid, and offers him to continue living if he hands out the cube, which, considering how Megatron feels about humans right now and that he could just reach out and *take* the thing, is actually a *genuine offer of kindness*. He even seems genuinely regretful when Sam refuses him. Again, this is nonsense until you remember: Sam was the only human to ever refer to Megatron by name or show him any kind of respect.

Optimus rescues him, but gets badly messed up in the process, and tells Sam of the whole "make the cube explode my soul to destroy it" plan. Megatron on Optimus DO BATTLE again, and, well, the result is predictable. Just remember his last line to Prime, "You still fight for the weak. That is why you lose!" because while it may look like standard nonsensical villainous

bravado, this line is a massive set up for the third movie.

Milky Moor posted:

Michael Bay is also the human that Megatron flicks off himself and into a wall just prior to his showdown with Optimus.

The whole disaster film/Sam as viewpoint aspects of the film completely gloss over so much of the final fight and you simply don't see much of it. Bonecrusher and Optimus, Starscream against Ironhide and Ratchet, Megatron and Jazz, Megatron and Optimus... All of these are rendered in little flashes of battle and sound effects with the focus still being on Sam or it's shot from such an angle that you see just the legs of these giant Transformers stomping around. Usually, there's only a good shot of the end of the battle or when it's otherwise decided - Optimus decapitates Bonecrusher (and pay attention to heads and faces when Optimus does battle), Starscream heavily wounds Ironhide and Ratchet, Megatron rips Jazz in two, and Sam shows up and pops Megatron with the Cube. The rest of these fights are glossed over, missed out on because Sam (or the other human bystander in the case of Optimus and Bonecrusher) isn't watching.

The exception to this is Devastator/Brawl and Blackout. I think this is because Lennox is the point of view character here and, as a soldier, he would have his eye on the battle rather than just scrabbling around for cover. In this case, it's kind of the opposite of how the aforementioned scenes are presented - instead of missing the fight, we miss the ending stages and aftermath. We see Brawlstator get absolutely mauled and he promptly falls through a shopfront, literally out of the picture. Blackout gets shot a whole bunch and falls over and, again, we never see him again. They are set up and knock downed in scenes that are far more action-orientated (due to Lennox) rather than survival-orientated. Lennox fights the enemy, he kills the enemy, they are disregarded.

Interesting how a motorcycle features prominently in the demise of Blackout.

Oh! And one thing I just recalled after remembering Megatron's amazing line about smelling Sam. This idea about Cybertronians and the sense of smell being an important tool to the Transformers returns at the beginning of ROTF, interestingly, also linked back to Ratchet's line about sensing Decepticons. I can't remember if this idea shows up in DOTM.

Smell is such a primal instinct and it seems bizarre that robots would claim to make use of it. But, see, the Autobots all have this primal edge to their facial features, more evocative of predatory animals than humans. Just look at Ironhide, for example, or Ratchet - both seem to evoke comparison with some sort of big cat.

And, funnily enough, they *are* savage. We've only seen just a hint of this in Transformers, when Optimus amputates a limb from Bonecrusher and then cuts his head in two, we see Jazz rip a piece of Brawlstator off as he climbs all over him and, while this is going on, Ratchet takes to him with what looks like a circular saw blade and lops an arm off.

Compare this to their opponents.

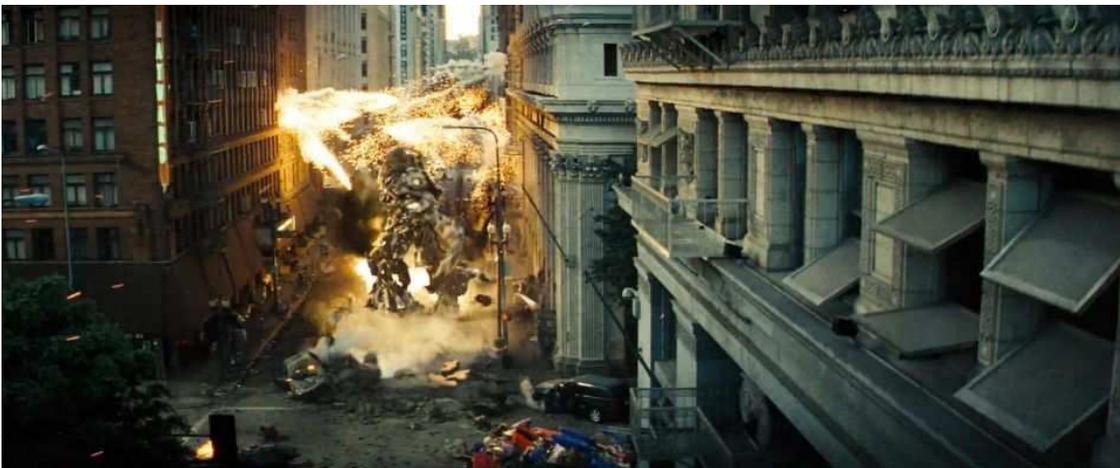
The Decepticons don't really have the same level of brutality in their fighting styles as they tend to use their ranged weaponry. I can't think of any significant acts of shocking violence with the exception of Megatron tearing Jazz in two. Starscream uses missiles and machine guns, Megatron has his big laser cannon, Brawlstator has a bunch of cannons, chainguns and assorted mean looking things. Oddly, they seem to have the cleaner approach to violence. Only Bonecrusher and Megatron appear to have any melee weapons (and Megatron barely makes use of his, using it to smash his way out of containment and smash Sam from the rooftop). The Decepticons are like the weapons of war they disguise themselves as - clean, surgical, modern. Their violence is like action movie violence - a bit of shooting, a bit of punching.

Milky Moor cont...

They Autobots, on the other hand, kind of come across as violent brawlers who relish the kill. Their violence tends to be, without fail, incredibly brutal and unnecessary (after all, all it takes to kill a Transformer is a few good hits to the chest, remember?) It links back to Terry's idea that these are ill-fighting disguises, almost used more as manipulative tools than a genuine aspect of their personality which is something I feel we are supposed to assume.

The crazy level of violence is something that rapidly escalates in the second and third films, keep an eye out for it.

Well, Prime is down, but finally, after a whole act of getting them to move out, the airstrike finally arrives (after Starscream fails to stop it) and, uh... Knocks Megatron around a bit. The implications of the Secretary of Defense ordering an airstrike on a populated U.S. city are never mentioned.



Blinded with rage, Megatron snaps at Sam, shouting nonsense and clawing at everything in sight, but he doesn't realize that merely ducking down slightly was all that was needed.



Because now his chest is in reach of Sam, who, in a stroke of quick thinking, hits Megatron's Spark with the cube, causing its energy to spill out.



Megatron wanted life, and he got it. But in an almost proto-*Prometheus* (2012) twist, it was too much life that destroyed him. Easily missed here is Optimus shouting "No, Sam!" as he is about to kill Megatron. Because killing him may not have been all that Sam just did...

"You left me no choice, brother", Optimus says to the dying lord. Another sentence that makes no sense - what choice? Killing him was all Sam's doing, so-- Ayup, third movie.

And so the movie wraps up. There's congratulations, goodbyes, sad music, and the villain's corpse is thrown into the Laurencin abyss. All the good sappy stuff.



And off in a corner, finishing with some completely meaningless bullshit narration, Optimus crushes the remains of the Allspark in his fist, as he crushed the last hopes of his planet ever being revived. And his choices are only going to get worse from here. So, so much worse.

(The funny thing for me is that Barricade makes no appearance in this last segment. So they specifically had him reappear

after he supposedly died... Only for it to be completely pointless. He doesn't appear in ROTF either (but Bonecrusher does??) and only appears as a cameo in DOTM.)

Revenge of the Fallen (2009)

Part 1: Hoo Boy.

Oh, *Revenge of the Fallen*.

If *Transformers (2007)* left viewers disappointed and disgruntled, *Revenge* left mouths agape and ears steaming with rage. It's the low point of not just the Transformers franchise, but perhaps modern Hollywood CGI-action-busters in general. I mean, it made plenty of money, but I can't really think of a movie that was received more poorly that wasn't also a big box office flop. See, if what I said in the previous update is true, well, the filmmakers' little experiment failed. *Revenge* is seen as little more than daft, worthless drivel, and it'll be hard to convince anyone it's actually a clever little movie. I mean, I'll try, but—no wait I won't, people are right.

Revenge is not a very good movie. Not even in the lowercase sense.

Upon initial viewing I clearly preferred it to the first part because while it as a lot more *bad*, it also has a lot more interesting and *meaningful* content than the first movie. But after watching *Dark of the Moon (2011)*, I'm a lot less kind to it. It's poorly executed, meandering and mostly lacking actual relevance, but the biggest, most catastrophic problem with *Revenge* is: *It's just not vile enough.*



It does, however, start with a bang. While Optimus exposit about something (seriously, pay no attention to that guy), we're in... 17.000BC Africa? OK, sure.



It zooms on the people as soon as Optimus says “[People are capable] of great violence.” It seems absurd to use tribal people as an example of the greeeaaaat viiiiooolleeeence in huumaaaan heeeaaarts but – OH CRAP LOOK AT THE GUY IN FRONT



HOLY FUCK ARE YOU SEEING THIS no really this is where I got all that nonsense about naked savagery from - this entire opening scene is completely pointless and vaguely surreal for the average moviegoer who hasn't learned his lesson from the first movie and still expects robots being punched, but you keep in mind one of the few genuinely well-crafted shots from the first movie and BAM suddenly a tribal African who is painted up to look just like your main villain...



...Facing off against your other main villain. What the fuck, Revenge?

It gets even better: Before this, the tribal guys' enemy is shown to be a tiger, and the movie dubs the same tiger growling noise over the tiger, the humans, and the twenty meter alien robot death machine. And while it respectfully skips over the tiger being killed, it does show said death machine completely ruining the poor folks' shit. Remember how I called Transformers a documentary back in the very first update? Well, this is exactly what this is. A fairly genuine recreation of humans hunting, followed by an impartial aerial take of the hunters being crushed underfoot in front of what looks like a horrible malevolent mutation of the Monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)*. The contrast of the naturalism of these people with their simple, rough war paint with the completely sterile and shiny, yet completely overdesigned and cluttered CGI-aliens certainly leaves an impression, and it's a shame this scene is mostly forgotten in favor of some of the later nonsense this film throws at us.

Actually, I'm going to continue this thought, because while this literally the first minute of the movie, it has more sheer meaning thrown into it than the entirety of standalone Transformers (2007). Again, we're led into this scene by Optimus being all smug about how violent humans are, but the movie actually skips over the humans' (potentially justified?) murder of the tiger, and then proceeds to portray them as the victims. The giant built of orichalcum (read: the fantastic material known as CGI) is as unstoppable as he is unfathomable. There's no "care to hunt for the villain's secret motive" game in this movie, the titular Fallen (not that the movie includes much of a Revenge) acts on pure malice alone. His shiny, jittery, for some reason clearly *Lego Bionicle*-inspired body seems to exist on an entire different level from the mere humans below. In the context of this scene, and so far the entire movie, he's more than just an old space robot: He's the cosmic embodiment of evil. In spite of its documentary style, this sequence does not show a real thing, but mere conjecture on ancient events turned into a story.

It's the age of myth, and the Fallen is the god the story tells of; As Norse myth has Loki and Zoroastrian myth has Angra Mainyu, so the Transformers-universe has the Fallen. (though Loki is more of a Megatron-figure, but, details)

But then, we already saw the first movie, and the Transformers have been thoroughly demystified for us. We know what they are, and the Fallen is not much different. So does that make the gods almost pedestrian, just super robots from outer space (yes, shut up), or have all the characters we have seen, including the useless Decepticon dregs from the first movie, just been retroactively elevated to godhood? Well, both really. After all, the growling sounds the same no matter the species.

Well, I just covered a literal minute of screen time.

Wait no, I'm not done yet. I want to elaborate on that shot comparison above. The shots are almost identically blocked and set up: We're looking at the central figure from below at a very slightly tinted angle while a strong light shines behind them. The big difference are their surroundings. While Megatron's foreground is taken up by the restraining bars that have already been commented on, the human leader's foreground is free of obstructions - because he is free of obstacles. And where he has his comrades, Megatron's company is just more metal arms and bearings, as though in a slight sadistic streak the humans decided to partner him up with what they perceived him as: A misshapen chunk of metal. Seriously, on a surface level the movies present Megatron as a regular villainous monster, but if you keep looking, they just give him *such* a wonderfully crafted emotional journey.

I mean, you can tell me all you want about how these movies have no nuance at all, but, well, I don't believe you in the slightest. Shots like these don't happen *by accident*.

Part 2: What the fuck, Revenge? Part deux



Of *course* the Transformers films would make the first shot of a foreign country a blasted wasteland. It's not even surprising at this point.



Except... Whoa, are those civilians? Yeah, after the last movie carefully avoided showing civilians as anything but a panicking faceless mass, suddenly we're seeing people and children, fleeing from what's apparently a toxic spill. What's happening, Revenge?



Oh, much better. Of course the military screen would reduce this sudden human element back to a monotone, shapeless mass that a bunch of people are just vacantly staring at. It turns out the U.S. and British militaries have formed an alliance with the Autobots to form a secret global strike force tasked with hunting down and neutralizing any remaining Decepticons on earth. Ironhide and the dudes arrive in Shanghai and... Wait hold the fuck up.



Let me repeat that: Two major western nations with imperialist leanings have founded a *secret global police force* that gleefully treks across the *entire globe* and fakes toxic spills and other disasters, forcing people to evacuate and causing *mass panic*, to hunt down *every single member* of a particular race and execute them *without trial*, or, in a few less words, to commit *goddamn genocide*.

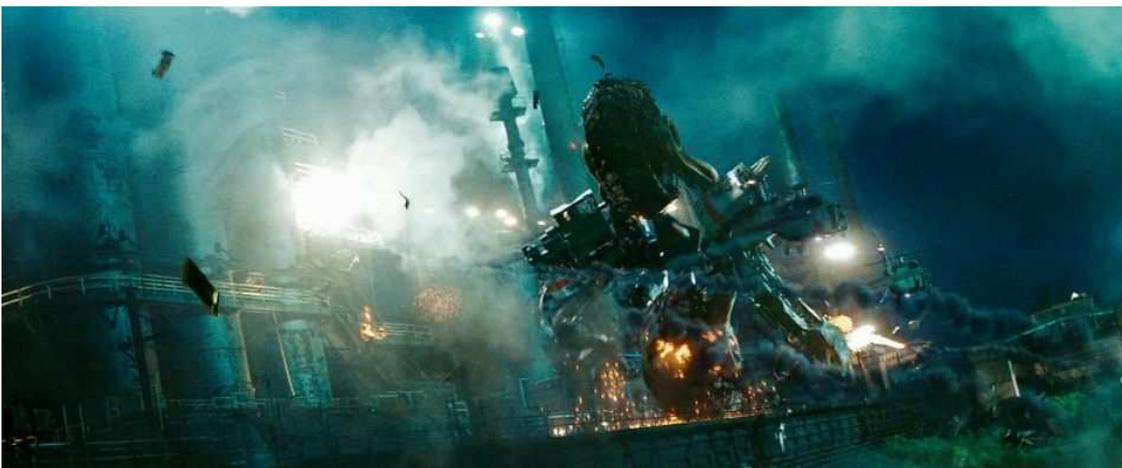
I don't even

I spun circles around myself trying to paint the Autobots as secretly evil in the first movie, and here they are, with the military these movies supposedly so admire, literally committing genocide. Fuck. Optimus Prime explains all this like it's completely self-explanatory, too. "Yup, then we murder everyone." How the fuck did people not notice this? Is everyone so convinced that Optimus Prime is ALWAYS THE HERO that he has to *skin ten kittens alive on screen* before someone starts noticing something's off? Genocide! Fuck!



Needless to say, steam shovel dude is not happy with this arrangement, and starts flipping out at the aggressors and makes a run for it.

It's hilarious because you occasionally come across moral arguments on the internet over whether the NEST force was really justified in attacking Scavenger Demolisher, because, you know, guys. Genocide. We don't really get a good look at his robot mode, but



hold on, is that



...

Fuck this, I'm ending this update here.

And I didn't even get to talk about the twins yet. The fucking twins.

...Genocide. Sheesh.

Milky Moor posted:

I mean, come on, NEST troops wear a patch that reads 'If I tell you, I have to kill you' with a sword on it while they go around killing sleeping Decepticons? 🤨 Not something nice like 'Peace and Vigilance' in Latin?

Young Freud posted:

Not just a sword, but a *gladius*. You know, the one the Roman legions were armed with when they put most of the known world under their heel.

Part 3: Meet the Autobots, Part 2



A second Decepticon takes off, and our newly arrived Autobot comrades-in-murder chase after him!





- Sideswipe, a regular Autobot grunt who has somehow managed to scan a one-of-a-kind concept car and become SCISSORCAR, exterminator extraordinaire!





- Arcee, the physically improbably legion-lady-former who appears in this intro scene and practically never again! Probably because of her *severe* back problems. Ouch, that looks *painful*.

Dammit Who? posted:

Arcee's humanoid form clinches it for me that she's a grotesque of the female image. Seriously, look at that thing. She's got a hideous parody of an hourglass figure, and while she's got feet they're trapped in her improbable shoes, forcing her to move unnaturally. She's practically a mechanical interpretation of a Silent Hill monster.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

Arcee plays absolutely no role in the film's plot, but check this image to see how crucial she is to the themes.

These three identical, virtual, model-hot riders are *directly related* to the (in)famous image of Megan Fox perched on a bike in cheesecake pose, which will appear later in the film.

Is Bay calling Megan Fox a hologram as well - merely a vestigial extension of the vehicle being advertized, which is itself merely an extension of a greater military-industrial-entertainment complex? Abso-fucking-lutely.

This point is *underlined* by Arcee's irrelevance to the plot. She's there for no other reason but to plant this image of three fake, interchangeable motorcycle-riding women in your mind for later - directly linking the imagery of covert American extrajudicial genocide to the imagery of Megan Fox's hot ass.

This sort of detail is what makes it unmistakable that Transformers 2 is 'about' exploitation, and not 'merely stupid.'

(It's also crucial that these 'good' Auto-fembots will be contrasted with an 'evil' Decepticon fembot fatale later in the film. (Not to mention other gynophobic imagery.) But that's a compare-and-contrast for once we get to it.)



- And the twins, Skids and Mudflap(yes, really.)! Ugh, the twins. Yeah, I'm putting this one off as long as I can.

Not much of an impressive bunch, are they. Well, good, because once again only two of them will actually play a role in this movie. Guess who. Just guess.



Oh, and here's what that Decepticon looks like, in case you cared. Well, I hope you didn't, cause he's dead!



Actual threat this guy posed: Less than zero

Only maybe he isn't because there's a chance that maybe he's actually just another incarnation of a dimension-hopping immortal shape-shifting manipulative servant of a planet-eating cosmic monster who decided to visit Shanghai on a whim and can just revive with ease and oh god I wish I was making any of this shit up.



timeandtide posted:

If you pause during Optimus' plane exit, Bay and the lead cameraman are next to him charging at the viewer with "Fuck yeah!" faces while holding cameras.

But yeah, now the Big O himself airdrops in, and this whole scene is pretty much already over. So here's why I completely disregard the toys for this commentary even though I'm actually a very fond of them.

See, when you actually think about this movie, certain questions arise. Like, "Why did Optimus airdrop in instead of arriving on foot like the others?", but when you're thinking in terms of cinematic language, it makes perfect sense - this scene shows effectively how humans are most directly aiding Optimus in his personal desires, how he managed to convince them so thoroughly that the Decepticons are deserving of extinction that they're fully willing to use unthinkably expensive military infrastructure just to play chauffeur for him.



And then the toy line retconned things so the plane was just another Autobot who disappeared afterwards for no reason instead. Yeah, when people take this stuff as canon, no wonder the films end up being completely nonsensical.

And we didn't even end up getting a good toy out of it. Seriously, look at that thing's *feet*



Well, so Optimus drops catches up with Demolisher, and, of course, completely wrecks his shit, so...

You know what? Screw this. Let's talk about children instead.

One of the key aspects of the childlike mindset is their ability to reappropriate their environment. Because children are not yet so used to the ideas and stereotypes we have about our surroundings that they end up seeming elementary and unchallengeable like they would to an adult, they are much more capable of transforming(!) an element into something completely unrelated. Where an adult sees a cigar they see a cigar (or a dick, but that's another discussion), but to a child, a pile of pillows becomes a fort and a plain floor becomes a moat of lava. It's not just play, either - it's very much vital for their development, not just because it helps understand the world and stimulate creativity, but also because it allows them to transgress needless barriers. For example, some studies show that children are more open to play with children of the opposite sex when make-believe is involved. When a boy and a girl can be anything they want, the terms lose their meanings, and all difficulties we socially associate with them wash away. (until puberty that is.)

Needless to say, in a film called "*Transformers*" this idea of reappropriation becomes as central to the films as the board game Battleship is to, well, *Battleship (2012)*. The Transformers are toys to begin with, and the (first) film treats them as such. With a few twists of the hand, a car becomes a humanoid shape, and in the child's mind, a giant friendly killer robot. These films, while hardly at all suited for actual children, are just this taken one step further - toys transformed into moving computer meshes, computer meshes turning into moving pictures, and moving pictures becoming symbols for ideas and values. People saying that these films are just "Michael Bay banging his toys together" aren't actually that far off: The filmmakers assume the role of a child, and expect the audience to do the same. Disregarding ingrained stereotypes is pretty much the only way to enjoy the films.

Of course, we see this reappropriation happen in the story as well. In the first film, Mikaela turns a bandsaw into a weapon. Sam turns Optimus Prime into a dick extension symbol of masculinity. The US government turns Megatron into a birthplace for modern-day technology. All these little human things are fundamental to how people and the Transformers relate. For all of his vacant bullshitting, Prime is pretty on point when he notes that it's their youth as a species that allows both such great compassion and such utter violence, as while this creative force is what allowed them to become what they are from tribal

nomads being crushed underfoot, it's also what made them commit such a crime against Megatron, a simple mistake that kicked off three movies worth of events that eventually lead to humanity being completely, well, fucked.

And here we are now, and guess what, Optimus has learned from the humans, and is now himself busy reappropriating their resources for his gain, instead of his hands using his charisma. Aside from the obvious aspect of becoming-utility, which was forced upon them by circumstances, the only times a Transformer did something like this before is Bumblebee using his radio as a voicebox (notably the youngest Autobot (aside from the twins (grroooooaaaaann))), and Megatron, too prideful even to appropriate an earth-mode, turning Archibald Witwicky's glasses into a map, underlining his total desperation at that point. The Fallen, notably, does not appropriate anything at all. He doesn't even transform. He constantly reaffirms his rightful godhood, and his grand age, by being completely set in his ways. Hence why he appears so much more divine than any other Transformer - as "boy" and "girl" are blurred in play, when god becomes utility, the line that raises him from man slowly disappears.

Basically, what this is leading to is that this is what I'm talking about when I call the Autobots immature. The films don't condemn their immaturity, but it's definitely a factor in how they became so destructive.

Right, where were we? Oh, yeah. Demolisher dies.



"This is not your planet to rule. The Fallen shall rise again!"

Aside from the obvious heavy-handed foreshadowing, notice Demolisher seems to think the Autobots rule the planet earth. He's not that wrong, at this point.

Part 4: I can't even summarize this nonsense.



Sam. Why is this guy here again?

It's been noted that he completed his character arc in the first movie already. He stood up to danger, slayed the dragon and got the girl. That's pretty much it, right?

Well, no. See, while he's run his course in basic narrative terms, the movies focus heavily on his development as a person. And there is one thing, one very important thing, that he has yet to accomplish, his greatest barrier yet: *He has to grow up.* One of the reoccurring motifs of this trilogy is that it shows different stages of Sam's life. We had school, now he's moving out and becoming self-reliant, and in the third movie he'll find work. What's important is how he reacts to, and develops with, these events.

Sam's dad does drop one important phrase, about Sam and Mikaela: "You need to give each other room to grow." Unexpected wisdom from a buffoon like him. Speaking of Mikaela,



And speaking as someone who regularly uses an airbrush, that pose *cannot* be comfortable.

I don't often get into composition of individual shots because that's like, haaaaard but this one is actually pretty interesting. The director's slapdash "blink and you miss it" editing style doesn't give individual shots much room to breathe, but every now and again they'll stop and just linger on an image. And that's when you know: This is where the composition matters.

To the right we see the dilapidated workshop that's the closest thing the movie shows us to Mikaela's home. Its dull tones and messy, naturalistic appearance create a bit of a sad impression, clearly painting her and her family as lower-class. The only object of prestige in the shot is the gleaming, clean bike (though, airbrushes are expensive!), and Mikaela is basically draping herself all over it, turning her back to the sad scene of her home and thoroughly immersing herself in its almost CGI-like sheen. In this sense, the movie paints her own fascination with bikes, and by proxy the Transformers, as her own form of escapism. Her face looks focused, but there is also a certain fundamental sadness to it that follows the character everywhere. And during all this, the shot blatantly, brazenly focuses on her rump - ignoring her artistry and her difficult situation in favor of painting her as no more than a sex object.

It's a pretty sad little image, really, but this shot alone develops her character more than the entire first movie did. *Revenge* and *Dark Moon* constantly pull stuff like this, building characters without actually letting us follow this process and grow sympathetic of them.

Then this happens.





...Yyyeeeeeaaah. Kids, don't play around with the remains of ancient life-giving artifacts. He drops the shard, and it causes a pretty big mess.



I... What? Well, I guess it seems the shards still have a fraction of the real thing's power in them, and all hell breaks loose in house Witwicky.

What's notable is just how *vulgar* the little newborn robots are. Crotch guns and far jokes galore, with the occasional bit of vomit mixed in. The movie once again reminds us how savage and destructive Transformers are without social conditioning.



Good thing Bumblebee is on the scene! He murders all of them, then destroys Sam's house. Yes, he just killed a bunch of newborns. Jesus, genocide and killing babies, what the fuck is going to happen next?



He may be understandably pissed, but Sam treats Bumblebee like one of his dogs, commanding him to get back into his little shed to sulk.



Thankfully, he feels sad about it afterwards, and has a heart-to-heart talk with Bumblebee. I find this little scene genuinely well done - as if to predict people's objections of Sam being in all three movies, *he himself* notes that his time to be a hero has come and gone, and now he just wants to go to college, grow up and live a normal life. He has *outgrown* Bee, and it's time to say goodbye. As if that wasn't enough, he then has a genuinely romantic scene with Mikaela. It's... It's almost like the movie wants us to genuinely care about him now that he's on his way to becoming a normal person. It can't be overstated just how nice and feel-good these scenes are compared to the lurid, grimy depths the rest of the movie descends to. Coming off the particularly vulgar scene of the newborns, it's a pretty incredible contrast, and once again underlines that the presence of the Transformers is *not a good thing for anyone involved*.

There's also the curious subplot of Sam not being able to tell Mikaela he loves her. Again, it doesn't make much sense to the casual viewer, but if you pay attention, the fact is that he can't say it because he *doesn't* love her. Remember why they came together in the first movie? Well, pretty much because they're the protagonists, but also because, well, they were involved in a stressful situation and made discoveries together. But that *can't last*. The two blatantly don't have a lot in common, and Sam is clearly not yet ready to enter an extended monogamous relationship. So he doesn't love her, but he's afraid of breaking up with her as well, because he's a teen and teens do that sort of thing.

Why they get together again in the end of the movie? Well. We'll see about that. The end of *Revenge* is... *Weird*.



In fact, a new tiny annoying Decepticon has entered the picture, and is now stalking Mikaela, under the watchful eyes of...



The watcher in space, Soundwave, acting leader of the Decepticons. A striking contrast to Megatron and his aimless rage, Soundwave is calm, aloof, and literally above-it-all, and the one Decepticon who is well and truly completely lacking in morality. He doesn't do much in this movie, but oh, he will have his time.

Milky Moor posted:

Soundwave also violates the hell out of that satellite, something which he almost does again – albeit to something that isn't a machine – in DOTM.

There's also Sam wanting Mikaela to whisper 'camshafts' to him. Kind of ties in with the sexual imagery that gets all linked up with machines and machinery again and again in these films. Sure, Mikaela knows the ins and outs of engines, but it only seems to matter when Sam wants her to talk dirty to him.

Terry van Feleday posted:

The weird thing is that while the scene clearly uses sexual, "tentacle rape" imagery, it's not really sexual in its *nature*. Soundwave appears completely apathetic throughout, and to him the act is fully utilitarian. Even in the second movie, he's actually just communicating that the person in question is *under threat* to someone else while having no actual interest in the subject itself.

One of the stranger reoccurring themes of these movies I just noticed is the way the Transformers keep using sexual imagery without actually completely understanding how sexuality *works*. This ranges from the reoccurring crotchguns to the oft-spoken of fembot, and will become a thing in the end of this film as well. Remember Ratchet making a weird, clinical comment about Sam's hots for Mikaela in the first movie? He just sort of establishes Sam's sexuality as a fact without really getting into finer points, as though he was talking about the mating cycle of spiders or something.

Part 5: Well, there's no avoiding it.



The Autobots arrive back at base, and the movie makes no mistake about showing the absurdity of its comic relief ice cream truck parading around with this huge military division.



However, the military gives the ice cream twins an upgrade (what, are alt modes regulated by humanity now?) and, well.

Alright, I guess it's time to talk about the twins. 🤪



Alright. So I talked about the racism in the first movie, and there's been a lot of question what it's been leading up to. Well, the answer is: The twins. Not satisfied with simple racist portrayals of black people, ROTF reduced itself to straight-up robot minstrelsy. Their accents are practically torn right out of a 1950s movie, and they embody literally every black stereotype the

filmmakers could think of. They're slow-witted, ugly, aggressive apes who spend more time getting into pointless fights than anything else, they literally cannot read, they're the most explicitly subservient Autobots (not even being at liberty to choose their own alt modes) and one of them has a *gold tooth*. In fact, the movie even plays self-aware with them: They start the movie as an artifact from the pre-civil rights era, and then upgrade to newer forms - taking on a modern shape, but still being the same nasty characters as before, much like racism in Hollywood itself. The very fact that something like them could be shown in theatres is completely stunning, but, see, they also pretty much form the core of *Revenge* as a movie.

Danger posted:

The imagery of 'mud' [as in "Mudflap"] has historically been used to dehumanize non-white people and the word itself is routinely incorporated outright into racial slurs.

They are also completely and utterly mishandled, and the biggest reason why *Revenge* is not even half the movie it could, *should* be.

Based on the last update, you may be starting to see the paradigm the movie is trying to set up. It contains a fine grain of a genuine human element, and puts Sam and Mikaela within reaching distance of it. While glorifying and commending every step they take towards being actual realized characters rather than the action movie stereotypes they formed in the first movie, it also condemns the questionable action movie stereotypes that take shape in the Transformers, who keep trying to drag Sam back into their little fascist narrative. In becoming genocidal psychopaths and vulgar, childish morons, the majestic, yet destructive alien beings from the first movie become fully morally repugnant, inviting us to condemn them and side with the human element instead.

Except then, the movie *fucks it all up*.

The filmmakers are often accused of misanthropy, and frankly, *Revenge* is hardly making a case against this. Presumably noticing that people were seeing the first movie completely differently than intended, they decided to throw the idea of communicating any of these aspects completely out of the window, instead just covering everything in a massively thick layer of false "comic relief" so the entire film just comes across as a sea of vapid stupidity. The emotional high points are surrounded by stupid jokes and stuff involving Sam's poorly written parents so it becomes virtually impossible to actually engage with them. And the line separating Sam's parents from Skids and Mudflap is so thin that the twins actually fail to look as lowly and nasty as they should, instead just coming across as more comic stupidity.

That's why I say *Revenge* isn't vile enough. In failing to properly show us that these stereotypes are repugnant, it ends up implicitly promoting them. What should have been an anti-racist message turns into the complete opposite.

It's just so *frustrating*.

And then the internet kept arguing the twins aren't actually racist.

Cornwind Evil posted:

Like many films, there were a bunch of tie-in materials to each film of the Transformers series, stuff that are pretty much unknown save to the hardcore fans. Apparently one tried to 'explain' Skips and Mudflap.

See, they were experimented on by an evil Decepticon doctor, trying to make them loyal Decepticons, and it gave them brain/CPU damage. (http://tfwiki.net/wiki/Tales_of_the_Fallen_issue_6#Items_of_note)

In the end, this really goes to show you why fans should NOT try and make 'excuses' or plug up 'plot holes' in films, because as the very wiki says, 'So suffering brain damage makes you talk street'. In trying to explain away the Twin's behavior, the writer proceeds to dig the racism hole even deeper by saying that the only reason anyone would act like this is because they're BRAIN-DAMAGED.

Fuck nerds forever, and fuck this movie.

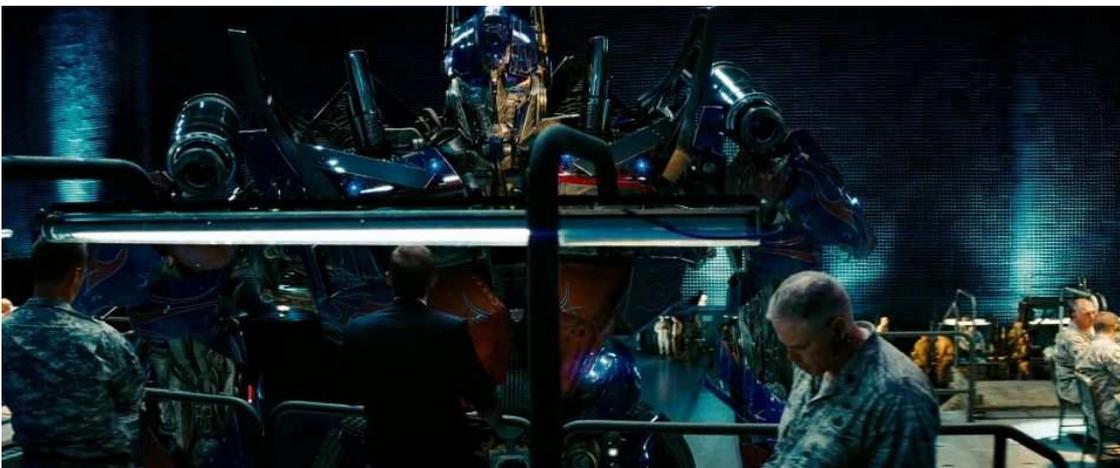
Part 6: The [MOUNTAIN DEW] conspiracy



"You gotta wonder. God made us in his image; Who made him?"

In a meeting with the military top brass, Optimus claims that the 6 Decepticons they already murdered were scattered around the world - clearly, he explains, they were looking for something. The possibility that they were just running and hiding never occurs to him. He also tells of the Fallen, and how only the Allspark knows where he came from. Yeah, from being a life cube, the Allspark has suddenly become a history book.

One of the officials criticizes Optimus for claiming that with the Allspark destroyed, the Decepticons would leave. Everyone else, Lennox and the secretary of defense, show visible disgust at this disapproving voice. It's a little creepy, almost as if they're brainwashed.



Further, he notes that the U.S. President (later shown to be President Obama, no less) is pretty dissatisfied with the untold harm and destruction the Autobots have been causing, and that Optimus clearly agreed to share *a//* their knowledge safe for weapon advancements, which just causes Prime to launch into another diatribe about how humans are capable of suuuuch greeeaaaat eeeeviill.

Optimus has changed a lot in these two years. From the slightly dubious, but at least appearing wise leader he was in the first movie, he became brash, impatient, and his authoritative streak is starting to take an unhealthy note. The official is starting to

get annoyed with him, and asks who Prime is to tell them what's good and what isn't, but Lennox cuts him off because **BATTLEFIELD HONOR** clearly overrides all reasonable criticism. He keeps going on about how the military has been sending messages into space without as much as consulting the government, but people keep cutting him off with how **HONORABLE** everyone is and how much **INTEGRITY** they have, and it all goes nowhere. This, my friends, is how fascism happens. But, the poor man has the president on his side, and keeps going. He logically concludes that the only remaining thing the Decepticons could be after are the Autobots, and that their presence is just putting everyone at further risk. Funnily enough, while he's wrong about the Decepticons' motive, he's still right about the rest.

Unfortunately, Soundwave has been listening in, and found out the locations of Megatron and the known Spark shard. Once again, trouble is afoot.



Meanwhile, Sam arrived at college. Notice how the only people he sees are attractive young ladies - keep your **[MOUNTAIN DEW]** eyes to yourself, dude!



He meets his new roommate, Leo Spitz (Ramon Rodriguez). Yeesh, these people are so surrounded with pin-ups, both living and painted, that one wonders if they ever even met a normal woman before. Like Maggie Madsen. Man, I so wish she was in this movie. Sam and Leo have a pretty cute and charming little conversation getting to know each other though, and it's another of the film's kinder moment.

At the time of writing this, I suddenly realize that during nearly all of these scenes had “21 Guns” by Green Day playing. A song that prominently includes the line “give up the fight”. Subtle.



Except then everything goes wrong, again. Turns out the public somehow managed to completely miss out on the giant robots walking through the streets like it was no thing, so the existence of them is mostly unknown. However, Leo and his dudes are apparently Wikileaks fanatics and obsessed with clearing up this conspiracy.



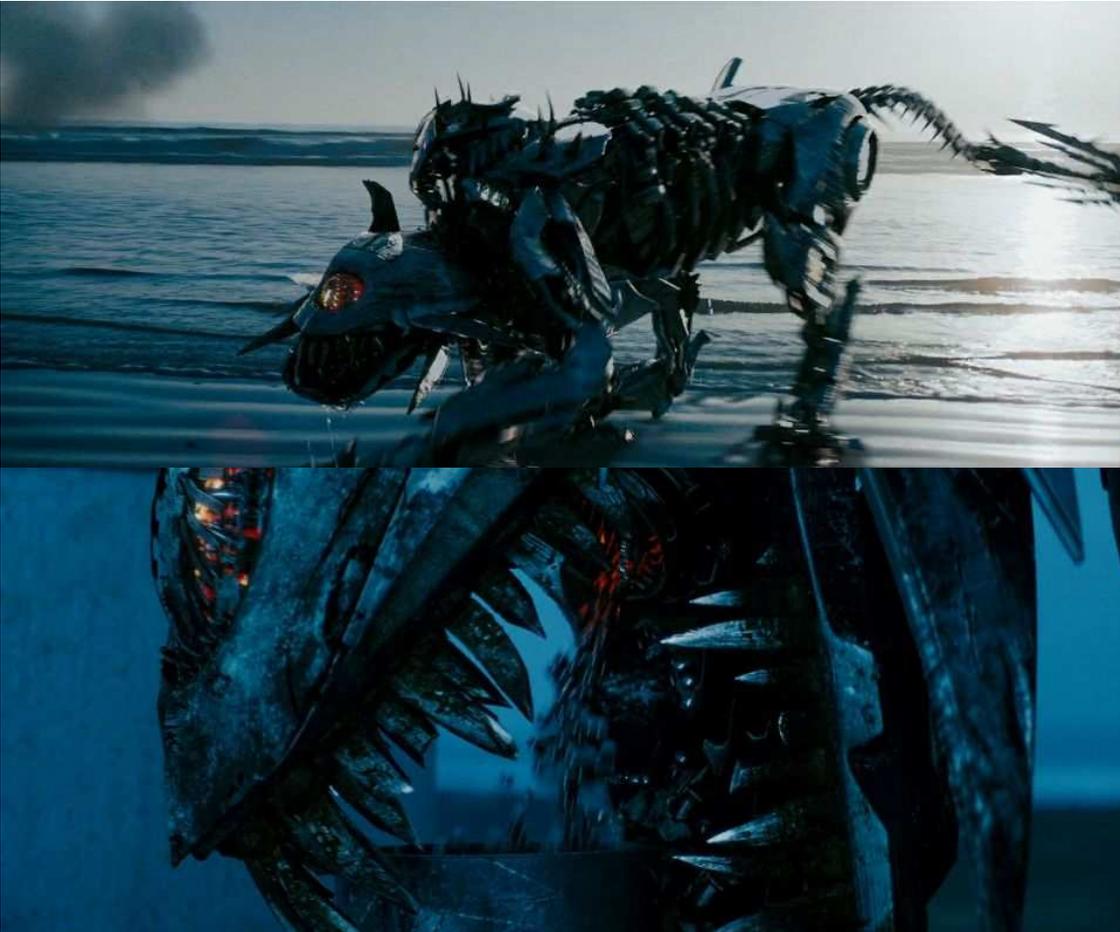
Those honest shots of panicking civilians from before? Well, Leo’s team has reduced them to mere curiosity, admiring how “clean” they are and reposting them all over the internet for page hits. Their sheer glee at seeing people scream and panic is borderline sociopathic. It gets even worse when neckbeard explains with burning eyes how he saw some robots “totally toast that woman” in LA (Mission City has been renamed to Los Angeles at some point) two years ago. Yeah, this movie is kind of critical of the internet generation.

Sam is stunned, and tries to claim those videos are totally fake (“internet video doesn’t lie, man!”) and he totally wasn’t involved, no sir. But, it all doesn’t matter because someone was faster than Leo in getting the videos up - a fearsome anon known as Robowarrior. Man, what a username. Then the movie goes to shit again for no reason when Sam’s parents arrive and suddenly hippies and drug jokes. Sigh.



Then we meet Alice (Isabel Lucas), this movie's blonde one-off woman character. I don't really want to talk about her, either. Thankfully, that's still a bit off.

Part 7: Beware the Reedman.



Soundwave launches his pet cat, Ravage, onto earth, where he proceeds to vomit a bunch of metal hairballs into a pipe in some restricted military zone. Man, cats always do that, it sucks. I can't let my cat anywhere *near* restricted areas nowadays.





Except these hairballs are actually so volatile that they quickly develop sentience, transform and start combining into an entirely new creature. Meet Reedman, one of the strangest transformers this movie has to offer (well... Aside from Demolisher). Even ignoring the matryoshka doll action of Soundwave spawning Ravage spawning Reedman, it does not fit in with any other thing we have seen in these two movies. It's not based on any existing character or idea, its mode of transport and transformation are completely unlike anything we've seen (in fact, the way it grows off the ground in long stalks is most reminiscent of *fungus* of all things) and unlike everyone else, it is very much not a toy. After the Transformers themselves have become almost pedestrian, Reedman is the first genuinely *alien* thing we encounter.

Man, even its name is kind of weird. Slenderman, anyone?



As noted before, this scene forms a pretty unsettling contrast to Frenzy's infiltration sequence in Movie one. Where Frenzy was almost jolly and likeable in his hyperactivity and tried to avoid pointless bloodshed, Reedman just gently, unnaturally *hovers* toward his target in a straight line, and then disposes of the human security in a painful and hideous way, just ramming into them with its razor-blade body while Ravage pointlessly and ruthlessly guns down any human security outside. It's creepy, it shows that things are starting to get a lot nastier, and it wonderfully foreshadows Soundwave's role in the third movie.



Meanwhile, Sam visits a party with Leo instead of chatting with his girlfriend like he promised her. I'd get angry at him, but, uh, something's clearly not quite right with the guy.





"Are you ok?"

"No. Uh, I'm just getting a napkin for my drink!"

From one second of showing relatively genuine concern, Alice immediately switches over to making transparent and inappropriate sexual advances towards the crazy guy making cake drawings. It's bizarre and unnatural, and seems like she just suddenly shifted gears from "normal person" to "be creepy and slithery and drape yourself all over this random dude you just met". Almost as if she's some kind of robot. Hum.

I have to say, while Isabel Lucas' role is of course mostly remembered for the blatant objectification, she plays this part about as well as anyone could possibly play it. She gives it just the right amount of leery, unnatural creepiness that it actually ends up making the audience uncomfortable instead of just being "ho-ho, this hot chick is totally coming on to our main character!"

Man, creepiness is just the theme of this update, isn't it. Well, luckily for Sam,



Guess whol

Sam climbs in after Bee tells him trouble's afoot, and Alice feels so free to invite herself right in as well.



Bee starts radio-“talking” to Sam in his usual jokey way, and Alice is very clearly not fond of this fact. Bee catches on that there’s something wrong with her, and starts annoying her in every way possible, at one point jerking her forward so strongly it actually looks like a clip of a car crash. Then he pees on her, because that’s like, his thing. Yes, in car mode. I don’t even know. Anyway, that’s finally enough for her, and she leaves.



Bee brings Sam into a graveyard (seriously guys, subtle), where Optimus has decided to meet with him.

Optimus’ speech is pretty bizarre, so I’ll just quote it in entirety:



“I’m sorry, Sam, but the last fragment of the Allspark was stolen. We placed it under human protection at your government’s request, but I’m here for your help, Sam, because your leaders believe we brought vengeance upon your planet. Perhaps they are right. That is why they must be reminded by another human of the trust we share.”

It starts with a passive-aggressive snipe at the government, then a single line of introspection laced with a tinge of regret, and then suddenly he switches gears again and returns to talking about TRUST and BATTLEFIELD HONOR.

The strange thing about Optimus is the way he sometimes almost seems to get that things are starting to horribly awry because of his decisions - The sad look at the end of the last movie when he realized he had sacrificed the Allspark to thwart Megatron, and now this single, ignored line of dialogue, but then he just goes back to his usual ways like nothing happened. We are never actually told Prime’s true thoughts and motivations, so the only explanation I can think of is that he’s descending further and further into insanity as the movies happen.



*“This isn’t our war.”
“Not yet, but soon it will be.”
More foreshadowing for Dark Moon, and look, he’s literally standing right between two graves, where a third could be. Seriously, subtle, movie.*



"You're Optimus Prime. You don't need me."

"We do. More than you know..."

Part 8: Well hello there, old friend.



Somewhere over the Atlantic, a totally inconspicuous set of construction vehicles is being transported. Except then Ravage crashes onto the ship, and, well...



Yeah. Not conspicuous at all. Sometimes I wonder how the whole “disguise” thing is supposed to work if they’re just going to paste their faction symbol all over themselves anyway.



I'm just going to make toy introductions for all these characters even though they basically serve no purpose and you can't stop me! (please buy the toys)



- Long Haul! I wish his toy was half as gorgeous as his movie model. Well I guess it is roughly half as gorgeous but I guess I'd have liked a bit more than SHUT UP WHO CARES. Screen time: ~15 seconds.



- Mixmaster! Oh my god, what happened to your ARMS!? Screen time: ~15 seconds.



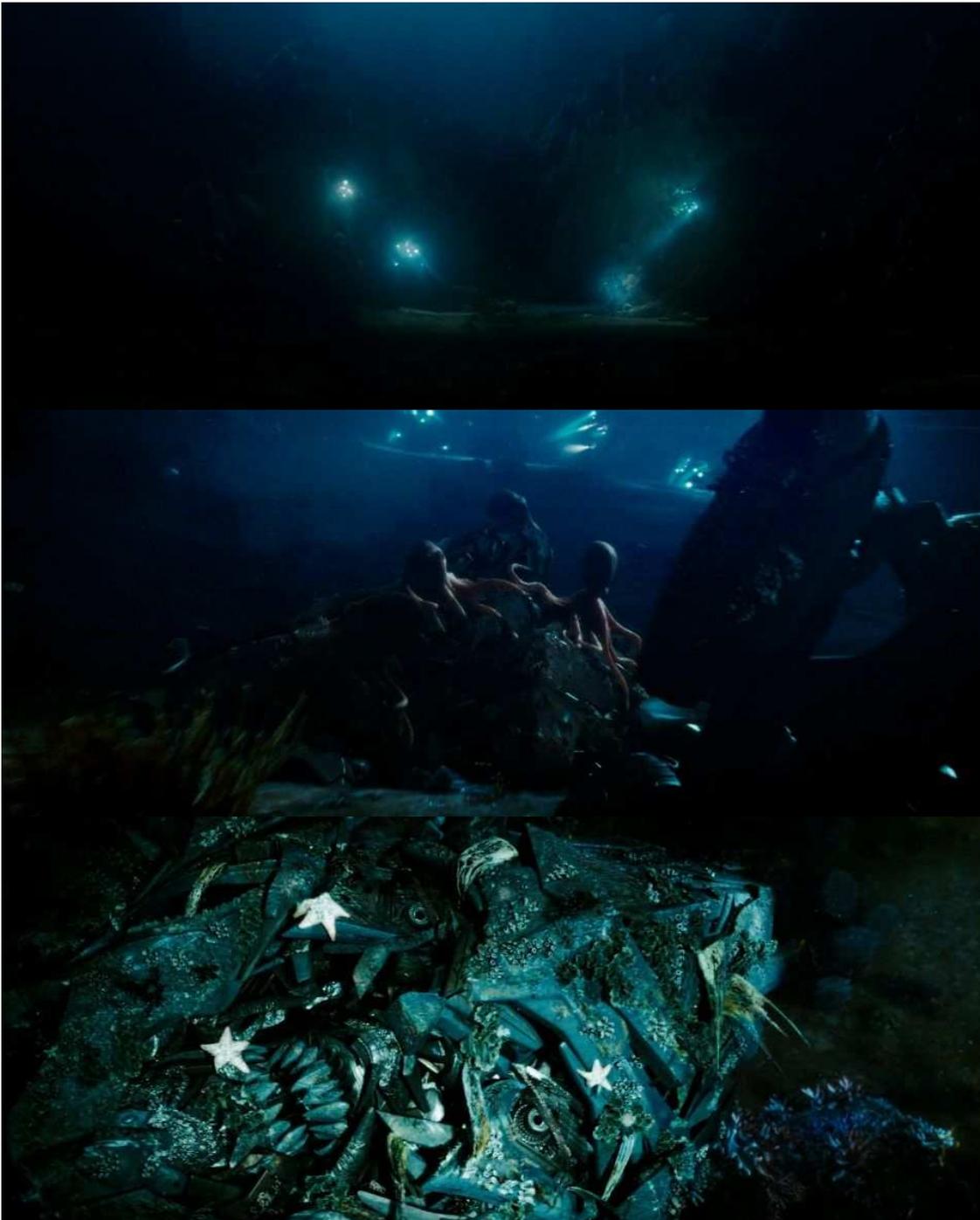
- Rampage! Actually he's supposed to be red, since the yellow Rampage is a different character (yes really). Screen time: ~5 minutes.



- Scrapper! He... Didn't even get a full-scale toy. Wow, poor guy. Screen time: ~3 seconds.



Not unnoticed by the military patrols, the Constructicons dive deeply into the ocean, since I guess robots don't breathe or have to worry about pressure. The movie makes a big scene of a submarine crew preparing for battle, and while it's just the usual military drones spouting nonsense, after Reedman it's honestly starting to make me feel legitimately queasy, since you just know that sub is going to have its shit wrecked. Then again, maybe I just feel that way because I saw *Das Boot* (1981) when I was five and it pretty much put me off submarines forever.



We meet again, Megatron. (Looking a bit doofy there buddy)



Ravage spawns another tiny Decepticon, the “scientist” Scalpel.



“Need pahts... Kill tze littel one!”

People keep saying Scalpel’s screeching is supposed to be a German accent, but speaking as someone who would know:
This is not what a German accent sounds like.



And so, the Constructicons apathetically murder a quietly screaming Scrapper. (seriously, creepy.) Poor guy, didn't even get a toy and now he's dead. Oh well, he'll always live on in our hearts... And in Megatron's new legs.





With the shard of the very thing that killed Megatron now stuck in his chest, Megatron jumps to life. He growls his signature growl, then takes off.





Megatron was pretty pissed off in the first movie, but nothing can compare to the blinding, *all-consuming rage and terror* he immediately exudes here. That submarine? He just *bodyslams into it* hard enough that its hull actually *explodes* and the rear half ends up following him all the way to the surface. He remembers pretty clearly where fucking about got him in the previous movie, and he's not going to repeat that mistake.





If this update seems a bit screenshot-heavy, that's because good god, this movie is just gorgeous sometimes.



Megatron announces his return with the oddly cheery phrase "Starscream, I'm home." Except... Something's off. He doesn't sound very cheery at all, and really



Uh, buddy, is everything alright? No?



oh god

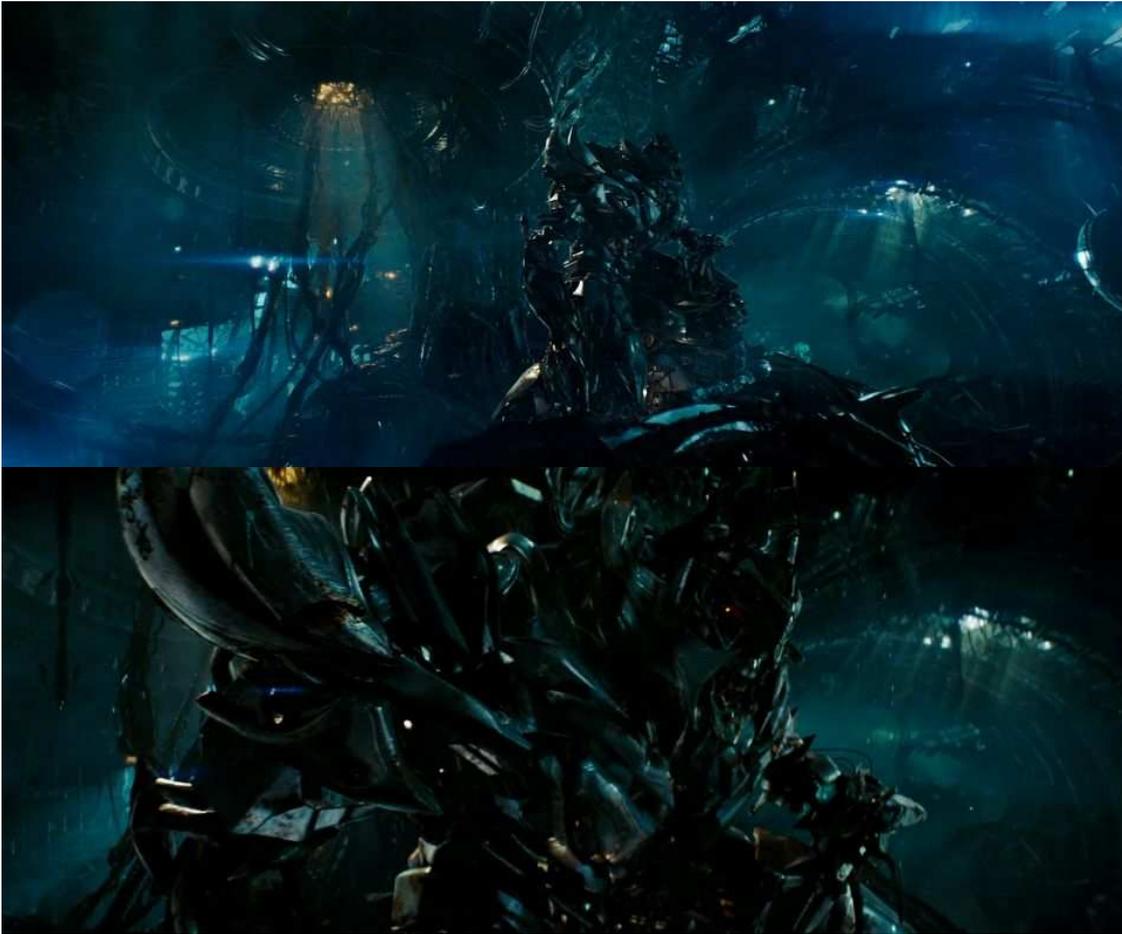


what are you doing man you are tearing me apart 😞



Yyeeah, those blue things? Those are eggs. Megatron's rage and pain has rendered him completely delirious, and throughout the entire movie he seems off in his own world somewhere. His speech is heavy and monotone, and for all the hatred and destruction he causes in his aimless rampage, there's a scent of weariness and tragedy to his words. Even the closest thing he had to a friend, Starscream, is just another target to him now.

Alright friends, it's been over half an hour since this movie had a big defining moment, so let's take in this scene at its fullest.

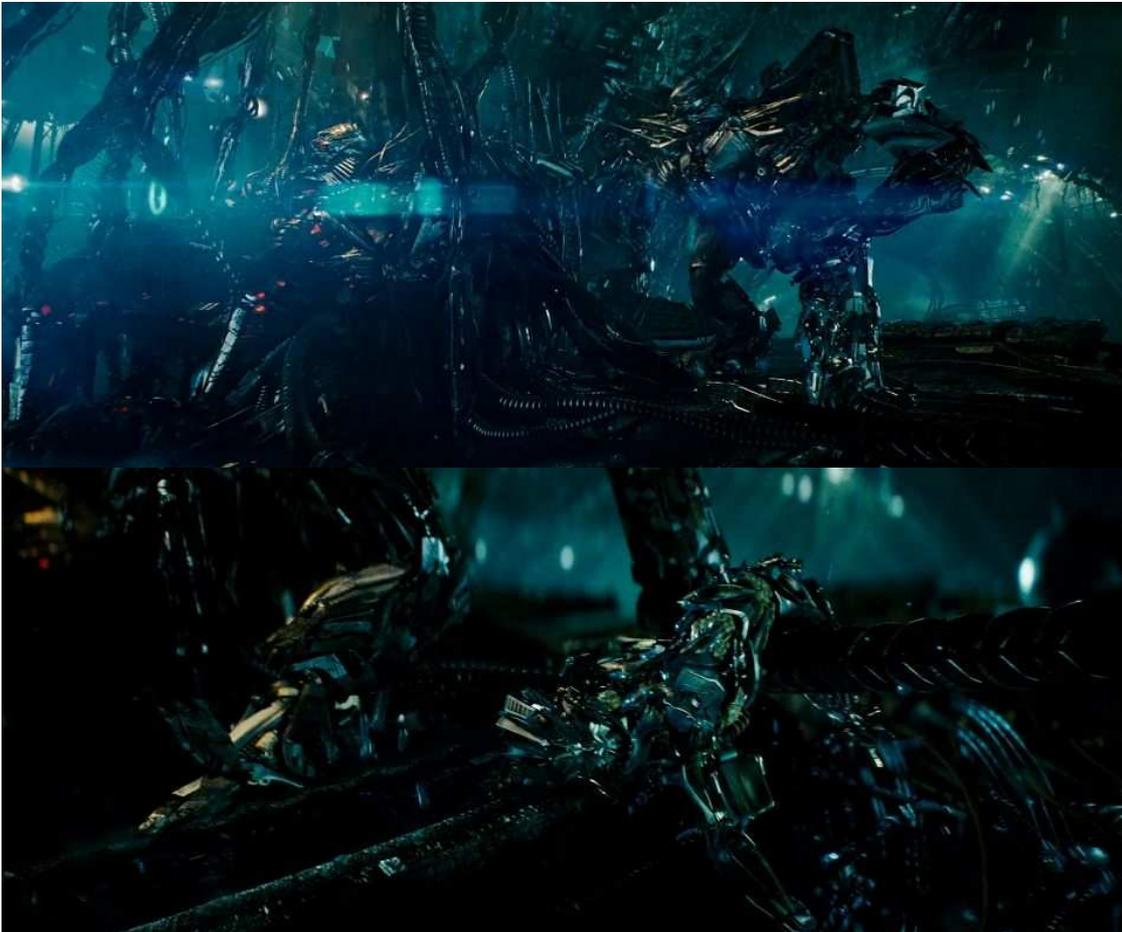


“My master, I failed you on earth. The Allspark is destroyed, and without it... Our race shall perish.”



In heavy contrast to Megatron's voice's sheer emotional weight, the Fallen's voice is generic, yet strange and dissonant, like a standard villainous drawl being run through a bizarre filter. Seriously, the voice acting in this scene is completely top-notch, and it's a shame I can't seem to find it on YouTube. The Fallen finally explains what's wrong with Sam: Killing Megatron did not destroy the Allspark, it merely transformed it - turning it from a life-giving artifact of cosmic knowledge into pure

information absorbed by Sam's body. He further exposit that millennia ago, he was betrayed on earth by his brothers, the Primes, and that only one of their descendants, who carries the title Prime, can defeat him. And Optimus is the last one, so all they need to do is kill him, and there will be NO ONE TO STOP THEM, HRAAAH HAH HAH HAH.



And then amidst this scene of villainous scheming, Starscream drops in, throws a baby's corpse on the ground, and gleefully tells us that without the Cube's energy, their children will keep dying.

He throws a baby's corpse on the ground. Our villain. On screen. And then tells us all others will meet the same fate if the heroes win.

What.
The.
Fuck,
Revenge!?

You think I was making up that stuff about Megatron originally just wanting to save the children? Nope! This movie straight-up tells us, black on white, that because Prime and co. stopped him from getting the cube (on paper-thin pretenses!), all children on Cybertron will die. And this is after it told us that the "heroes" are busy committing genocide.

Yes.

I... Can't even add anything to this, I think this scene speaks well enough by itself.

Seriously, what does it take for people to realize that the Autobots are not supposed to be heroic in the slightest?

Tuxedo Catfish posted:

Honestly [the Fallen's] mere existence explains a ton about the Decepticons -- they're moral actors (desire to protect their children, etc.), but at the same time they're comically evil. Why? Because their father figure is just comically evil. The Fallen is to the Decepticons what Optimus Prime is to Sam and humanity.

The movie makes it even more explicit because Megatron and The Fallen outright call each other "master" and "apprentice," which apart from the relationship itself is a reference to the Star Wars prequels -- in which a well-intentioned young man is corrupted by comically obscene evil, not because evil is morally convincing, but because he's too young to know any better.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

In previous transformers threads, I pinpointed the Decepticons as totalitarians, while the Autobots are champions of liberal democracy. (Specifically, the contrast is between DeBord's 'concentrated spectacle' and 'integrated spectacle', which the respective factions personify.)

The fascinating thing is that the Transformers films present the Autobots as infinitely worse for attempting to sustain the exploitative baby-killing system, while the 'totalitarian' Decepticons are constantly trying to change things for the better. There's a revolutionary potential in their actions.

The recurring imagery with the Decepticons is all about abjection: they're vomited out of Ravage, and now we've seen their biomechanical wombs - with an honest-to-god onscreen robot stillbirth/miscarriage.(!!!) That whole sequence reads as a reference to Alien/Aliens - making The Fallen the Decepticon Queen, right?

Again, this is the exaggeratedly gynophobic imagery in the film. Having babies makes the Decepticons icky and inferior, and this is absolutely tied to all the shit and fart humor. When Bumblebee pisses on people, he's making the statement that 'you are excrement'. Of course Bumblebee pisses/cums on the face of the Decepticon femmefatale as a display of dominance. Women are bitches and shit.

What Michael Bay does, subtly, is side with the excrement. This is why Mikaela Banes is named after him. Bay sympathizes with her the most.

This is also the reasoning behind the repeated use of insect and dog imagery in the films. Again, women are presented as 'bitches' - and so are the Decepticons.

SuperMechagodzilla cont...



The Decepticon has chosen this as a symbol for himself: a dog wearing a mask. In keeping with the theme of nakedness meaning confidence, the Decepticon self-identifies as 'just an animal', but uses his allegiance to his cause as an existentialist stance. He is an animal who chooses to be a (robot)man. He wears his mask with pride. (Chris Nolan botched the same themes with the masked revolutionary Bane in his Batman 3. "Nobody cared who I was until I put on the mask...")

The Autobots, by contrast, are ashamed of nakedness, hate animals and want them safely domesticated (Skids/Mudflap) or cleansed (everyone else).

Bay is one of those directors, like Spielberg and Kubrick, who knows the importance of shit and piss humor. In this case, however, it's an exaggeratedly bad piss joke, where the facile mean-spiritedness causes discomfort in a perceptive audience.

The imagery of dogs pissing, humping, and so-forth is recurrent throughout the film – and, as a result, obviously intentional. The piss joke needs to be read in that context.

The 'evil' fembot getting pissed on must also be contextualized by the 'good' fembots Arcee and Mikaela, who serve as non-threatening decorations and so escape punishment.

The film actually goes so far as to state outright, in the exposition, the theme that the characters are little more than dogs "asserting dominance" over each other. This is the importance of the Witwicky family dogs, Mojo and Frankie, to the story.

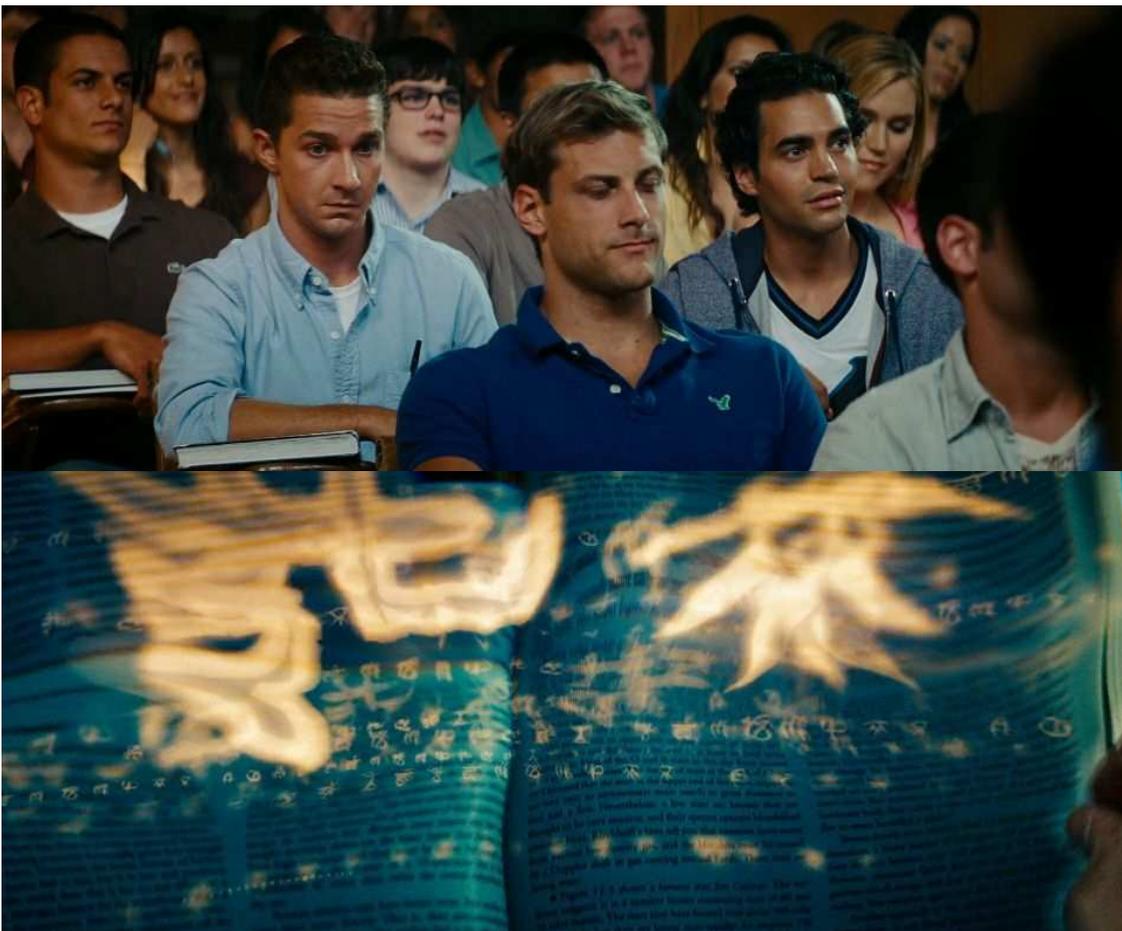
Return for a moment to my point about how the symbolic mask is what elevates men beyond being mere animals (or in this case, robots from being heaps of scrap metal). The violence against faces employed by Optimus and Bumblebee has a very specific goal: not simply defeating the enemy, but disfiguring them – dehumanizing them.

Transformers 2's greatest asset is that it dispenses with plot continuity and just lets this stuff get into abstract nightmare territory. It's a free-associative rant that ties Hasbro's character Arcee to the objectification of women in Maxim, to the resurgence of blackface in performance-captured CGI, to 'the war on terror' – and provides a vision of God as an alien monster shitting out starving babies on a dying planet. It rules.

Part 9: What movie am I even watching at this point?



First ridiculous hippy caricatures, and now a ridiculous hipster teacher. I wish I could tell you where the movie is going with this.



While the teacher is busy being charismatic as all hell and putting about three sex jokes into every one of his sentences, Sam is starting to have another one of his episodes. Hoo boy.



"I just finished your book and there's one problem Einstein's wrong"



Turns out absorbing massive amounts of total cosmic knowledge will do wonders for your education... If not your sanity. The teacher is not impressed, and sends Sam off.

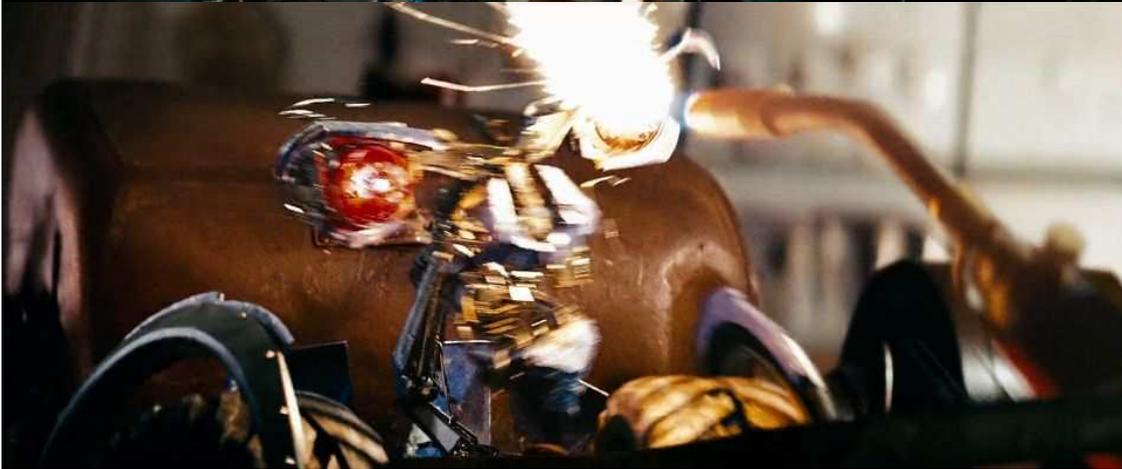
The interesting thing here is the way the teacher references being god ("I am the Alpha and the Omega") while talking to someone who, for just an instant, was basically all-knowing. Lines of personhood/godhood are blurring, I tell you.



Tiny Decepticon du jour, Wheelie, finally decides to pay Mikaela a visit. I'm not sure if the Decepticons even need her shard at this point, but I guess that's why they're sending Wheels instead of Ravage and Reedman.



And thank goodness they didn't, because those two would probably actually have been successful (and made a pretty grisly scene). Wheelie, well, not so much. His attempt at breaking into Mikaela's safe is just a comedy of errors, as he immediately alerts her with his shouting.



Good lord, do *not* piss off Mikaela. It's curious how when he is cornered, the noise he makes changes from his ranting and shouting in English to the shriek of a terrified bat. What's also curious about this movie specifically is how many archetypes the Transformers cover in this movie. Of course we have the ostensibly heroic superhuman Autobots, but we have also a clear evil deity in the Fallen, the hateful resurrected demigod Megatron, the somewhat abstract controlling entity Soundwave, the good buddy Bumblebee, the animalistic, yet powerful servant Ravage, the alien fungus nightmare monster Reedman, and now Wheelie, who is pretty much just a small animal. And yet they all belong to the same species, divided into only two races. It's a very interesting spectrum.

Well, Mikaela locks him in a box, and that's that.



She boards a flight to Sam's place while he completely flips his lid,



the Autobots are on their way to engage a number of Decepticon contacts,



and Alice is ready to start her grand scheme.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

Shot Context!



Men in Black (1997), Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld

Z: May I ask why you felt little Tiffany deserved to die?

J: Well, she was the only one that actually seemed dangerous at the time, sir.

Z: How'd you come to that conclusion?

J: Well, first I was gonna pop this guy hanging from the street light, and I realized, y'know, he's just working out. I mean, how would I feel if somebody come runnin' in the gym and bust me in my ass while I'm on the treadmill? Then I saw this snarling beast guy, and I noticed he had a tissue in his hand, and I'm realizing, y'know, he's not snarling, he's sneezing. Y'know, ain't no real threat there. Then I saw little Tiffany. I'm thinking, y'know, eight-year-old white girl, middle of the ghetto, bunch of monsters, this time of night with quantum physics books? She about to start some shit, Zed. She's about eight years old, those books are WAY too advanced for her. If you ask me, I'd say she's up to something. And to be honest, I'd appreciate it if you eased up off my back about it.

Armyman25 posted:

Is "Introduction to Astronomy" too advanced for a college student?

SuperMechagodzilla posted:



Will Smith-buddy Michael Bay is appropriating and subverting the Men In Black imagery with this satirically misogynistic image of a girl who threateningly *reads books*.

In Men in Black, the joke is an anti-racist one. Will Smith's ghetto upbringing is what allows him to see past the 'monstrousness' of the surrounding aliens and, in an absurd twist, *correctly* target the upper-class white person as the enemy.

The scene in Transformers 2 lacks this race subtext and outright reverses the class subtext. Women in T2 are simply presented as lesser beings, *equivalent to* all the other animals and monsters.

Tuxedo Catfish posted:

Disguising herself as a human requires that Alice look more ignorant than she actually is, because humans are stupid and childlike. (By contrast almost every alien in MIB is immensely childish, and MIB itself feels more like a nursery for technology-superpowered toddlers than a secret government agency.)

Sam is an exception, but this is a) because of infectious contact with Cybertronian technology and b) an affront to the Decepticons. Megatron is cruel to him in the "we need his brain!" scene because Sam has ceased to be just an insect and is treading on God's / adults' domain. Optimus's adopted children are threatening to surpass his own literal children, and it's infuriating! (I mean, on top of killing him. Obviously.)

Remember, we're still in the first act. But it's time for it to draw to a close, and things are ramping up.





“Hey! You ever have a song stuck in your head and it’s like the worst song ever but you keep wanting to whistle it or sing it and it repeats itself repeats itself repeats itself repeats itself kittencounter kittencounter kittencounterkittencounter”

Pick posted:

Kitten calendar 🐱.

Alice kicks Leo out and closes the door, because I guess crazy people really are her secret turn-on. What follows is, uh



Mikaela finds just the perfect moment to arrive and enter without knocking (rude!), then leaves in a huff.



What follows then is the most perfect caricature of sexuality I have ever seen in a movie short of *Alien* (1979). Alice, dressed in a piece that barely covers her up, sits spread-legged on the bed, mouth hanging open, with the same leery eyes she had for most of the movie, and out of it sticks a ridiculously long prehensile black tongue that wraps itself around Sam's neck and thrashes him about the room like some kind of H.R. Giger-inspired BDSM act.

The weird thing about this scene is that if it were in, like, a David Lynch movie, it would be pretty easy to read as metaphor. One of the film's stranger plot points is Sam's faithfulness in his relationship, and it follows him for the entirety of the film. I pointed out how the only people he sees in hallways are pretty young women, there's his completely unexplained decision to refuse contacting Mikaela in favor of going to that party, and Alice hangs around these scenes like some kind of spectre, following Sam on every step he makes towards unfaithfulness. If we pretend there are no space robots in this movie for a minute, the "reveal" of her being a monster actually ends up fitting into a completely different context. Remember, we see the movie through Sam's eyes, and Sam has been pretty explicitly going mad over these last 10 minutes. The idea, then, would be that Alice is just a regular person whom he decided to hook up with - but Sam's warped perception turns her into an evil monster. Unable to deal with the idea of having betrayed Mikaela's trust, he paints Alice as a forceful sexual predator who basically raped him. Remember the sudden shift in her personality back during her first real scene? That shift happened just as Sam actually took a good look at her.





Except... This movie *does* have space robots. Leo and Mikaela see and interact with Alice, and here she is, chasing them through the library while destroying everything in her path, so clearly she's neither a normal person nor a figment of Sam's imagination, but just another transforming space god robot. Except why the hell would the Decepticons have a spy themed around *adultery* of all things? It doesn't fit in with their methods and ideas in the slightest, and Alice never even as much as communicates with another Decepticon, where all the others belong to a particular subfaction and form a part of the whole. In fact, the movie never even says that she's a Decepticon *at all*, she could be something *completely different* for all we know.

And this is before we even get into that weird subtext of her entire character actually also centering around the pursuit of knowledge. She's seen prominently holding a book about Astronomy in that lingering shot I posted slightly upward, she gets interested in Sam because of his cosmic knowledge and then she chases him specifically through a library with books flying all around her and for some reason her weird head-tails make her design highly reminiscent of Medusa and 🙊

So yeah. I really have NO idea what her deal is. But I guess next to "small animals" we can also add "sexual metaphors" to the Transformer archetype list now.

Tuxedo Catfish posted:

Alice makes a bit more sense if Sam's arc across the trilogy is not about him becoming an adult, but him trying to become an adult, failing, and becoming a tiny, squishy Transformer instead. Alice is his Bride of Frankenstein; naturally the first time we *see* Sam in an unambiguously sexual situation, it's with a machine.



The three manage to get to a car, but Alice is on their tails. Or rather, her tail is on them.



Then Mikaela smashes her against a column.





She really looks kind of pitiful like this. And we never did find out, or will find out, what her deal actually was. But that sort of takes me to another point, because Alice ends up being very reminiscent of Bonecrusher in the first movie. We were never told what his motivation was, so Optimus Prime seemed “”justified”” in murdering him. Similarly, Alice remains a mysterious figure. What does she need Sam’s cosmic knowledge for? Why did she attack him when he didn’t comply? Questions like this are never answered, so in the end the movie never actually portrays her as having a motivation at all beyond “being evil”.

This is something the movies love to do, portraying the actually very complex Decepticons as “just evil”. Because they are the antagonists, any questions about their morality and motivations are pushed aside so it seems on a surface level that Prime appears righteous. In fact, the very idea of the Decepticons being complex individuals clearly *disgusts* Prime -

MilkyMoor and SuperMechaGodzilla rightly pointed out that Prime always focuses his violence on the enemy’s head and face - he’s not just killing them, he’s actually *destroying their identity and individuality*. (Which has interesting parallels to *Dredd (2012)*.) Bonecrusher makes an appearance later in this film - after Prime killed him? No, because Bonecrusher is more than just dead. His individuality is destroyed, and now he’s not “Bonecrusher”, he’s just “a Decepticon”. Where the first film’s Decepticon dregs were all unique, this movie has a noticeable rise in identity-less generic grunts and drones. Prime destroyed not just the face of Bonecrusher, but that of the Decepticons in general as well.



Well, their troubles aren’t over. Wait, is that...

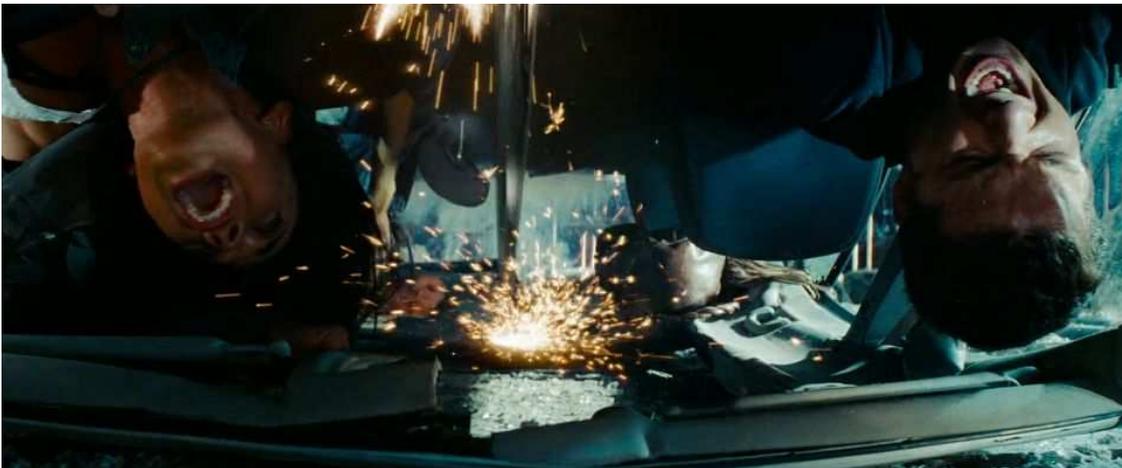


...Blackout!?



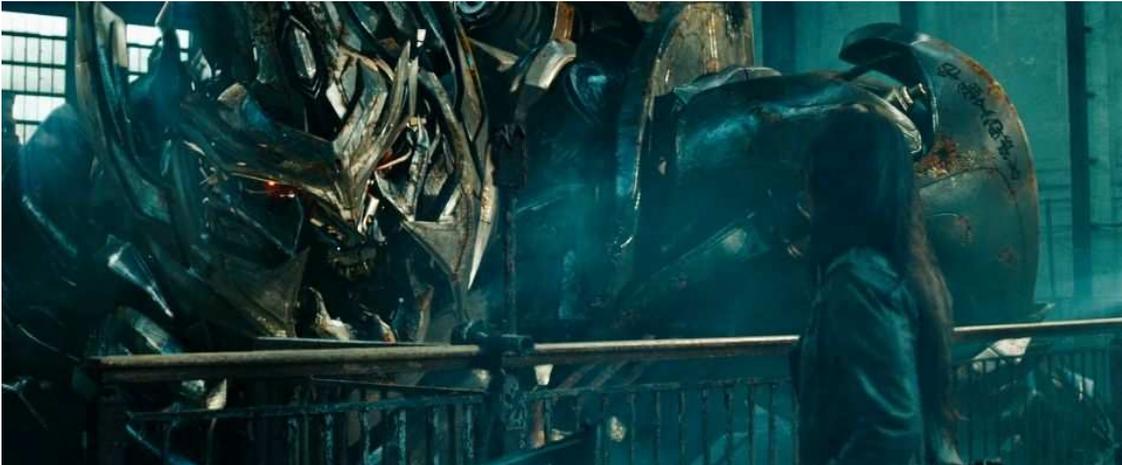


Actually, it's his identical twin brother called Grindor (not joking). He carelessly drops the three kids into a factory...



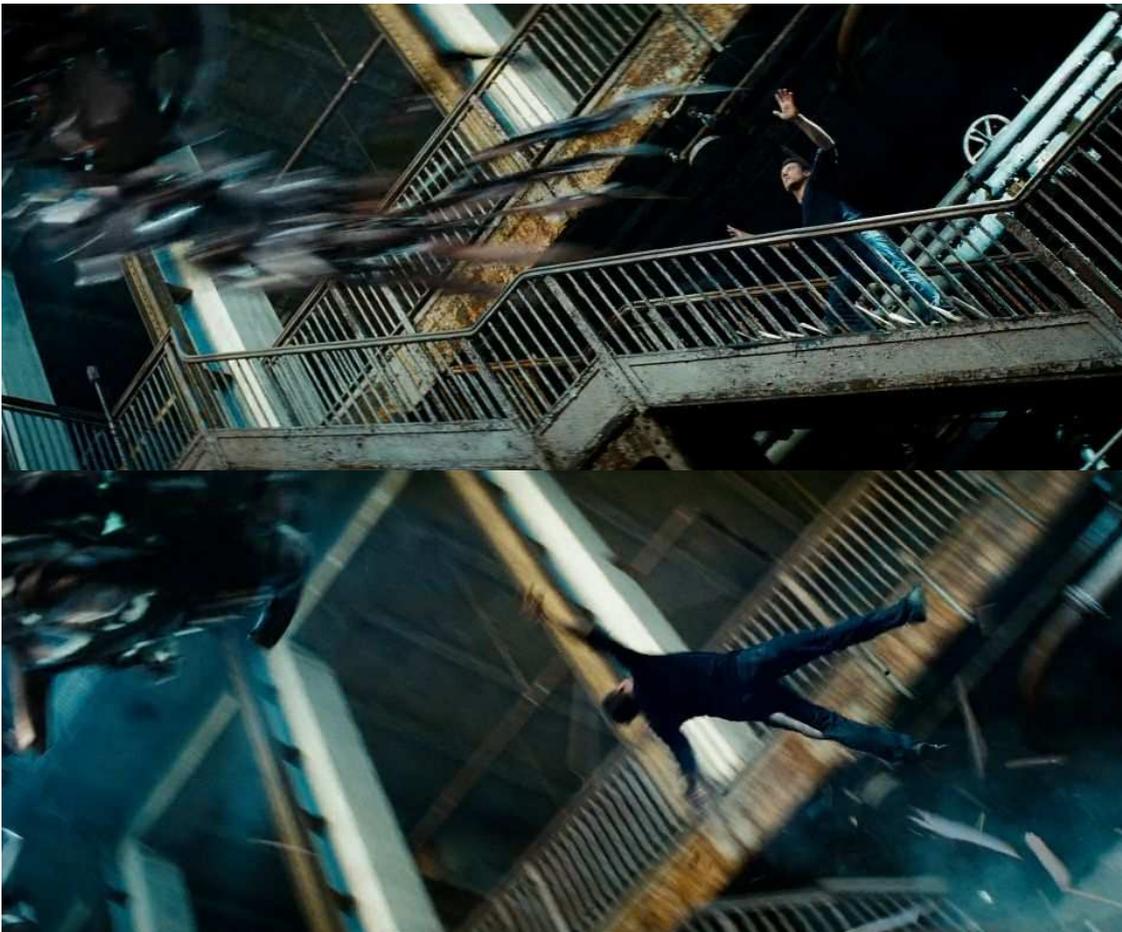
Jesus, this is some horror movie shit.





"Come here, boy. Closer. You remember me, don't you?"

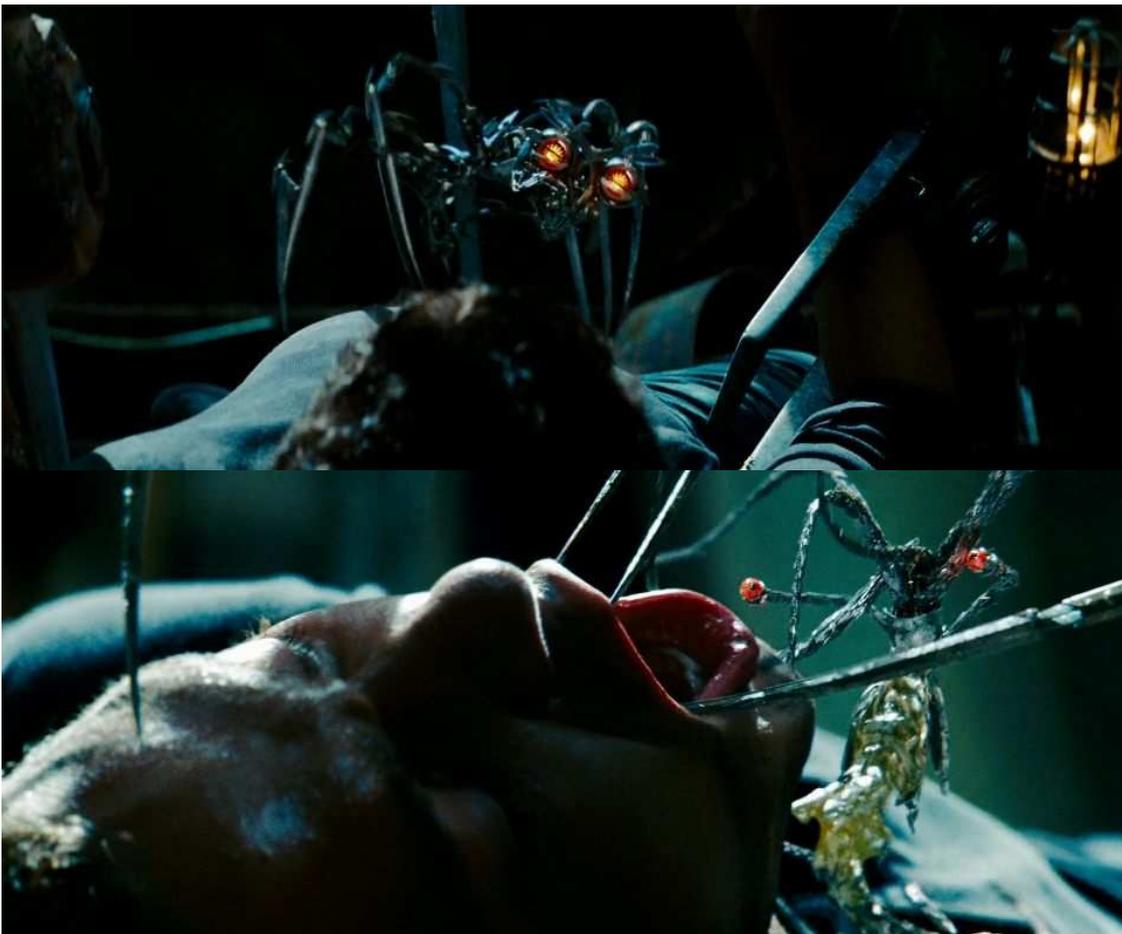
Again, Megatron is oddly polite with—



...Okay, nevermind.



This scene is just *relentless*. The sheer *amount* of punishment Sam goes through is just unsettling, and he's completely at the mercy of Megatron, whose madness shines all the brighter than it ever did before. He loudly *fantasizes* about murdering Sam, and only doesn't act on it because Sam's still needed. That is, his brain is.

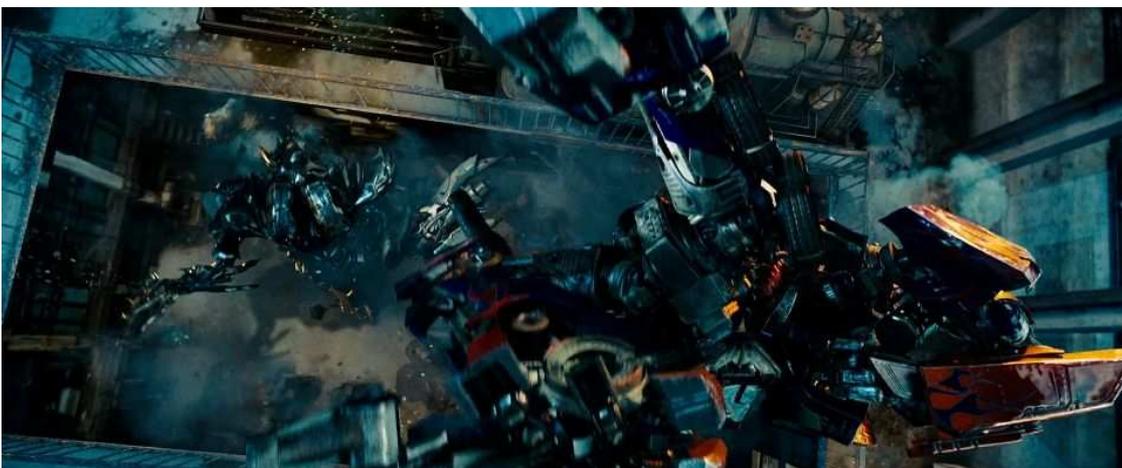




Seriously, this movie gets *creepy* in places.



Man, I didn't think I'd ever be so happy to see Bumblebee.





Optimus takes along Sam, while Bumblebee gets the other two kids.



And we're coming up to another one of those Big Scenes.

This is another one of those scenes you'll just have to see in motion. Since I couldn't find it on YouTube in non-garbage quality, I even uploaded it for you! (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6cXvdAIQtc>)

Holy wow, it's so... *Kinetic*. I'm kind of baffled by people who claim that the first movie is full of action scenes and robot punching, since the choreography of the action is weak, the CGI models have no weight and the sound is poor. This? This shows that the filmmakers *are* capable of making a great action scene. The robots have real *weight* - the ground shakes when they step, and every punch feels like a multi-ton metal hammer hitting a giant (though strangely, the trees seem oddly floaty and weightless). It's not pointless lasers and missiles being fired or things exploding for no reason, but pure, unadulterated martial combat between two giant monsters (and two henchmen). There's a lot at stake for everyone involved, and what's interesting is how things have changed from the first movie.

Back in the end of that one, Megatron just completely steamrolled Prime. He represented the supreme power of the Transformers, a grand emperor without equal who would have been victorious were it not for Sam's quick thinking. But here, he is completely incapable of dealing with Prime - his death and resurrection have severely weakened him, and now he needs two helpers just to set things even (though admittedly, Starscream and Blackout/Grindor are hardly fighters).

But even as fantastically as this scene is coordinated, and in any other movie I'd absolutely love it, in this movie, well... It's

kind of hard to really get “into” it. Thing is, we just spent a third of the movie establishing that Prime is a genocidal psychopath and that Megatron just wants to save his kind (in fact, he tries to explain this during the fight, but Prime just waves him off), but... He’s not in the right either, since he’s still a servant of the evil. Fallen, and this is one of the few cases where it turns out in retrospect that he would have accomplished nothing even if he got Sam (since they wouldn’t be able to get the Matrix of Leadership anyway). So on a rewatch, the only consequence of this battle is whether Prime lives or dies, and it ends up diminishing the impact quite massively since I’m not exactly interested in Prime’s survival. So in other words, it’s a battle between two super-powerful madmen, and whoever wins, we lose.

And then the movie suddenly backpedals on everything it has told us so far and tries to portray Prime as a hero dying a hero’s death. Like, I understand that we see the movie through Sam and Sam is very sad that Optimus dies, but I think there are limits. Showing the sad faces of various people all over the place while sad music plays is a bit too much, and just makes it look like the movie is actually siding with Prime.

Shanty posted:

Optimus' face shield thing is really interesting in the context of the general face-chat in here. It usually protects/hides his face unless he's talking to someone. But I mean his face is just as much made of metal as that thing, so it just emphasizes that he's got a thing about faces.

In the forest combat, Megatron actually punches it off, which is kind of where Optimus starts to really dole out some damage. He doesn't take kindly to people going for the face. In fact he gets so worked up about it that he actually *tears a face in half*. It's so specifically a face that it reads pretty strongly as retribution, since we've just had that close up of Optimus spitting out a robo-tooth showing clear damage to the mess of metal that is his face. Jesus, that shit belongs in... I don't even know which horror franchise would show something that gruesome. Peter Jackson's "Braindead", maybe?

Milky Moor posted:

The forest fight is, simply put, amazing. It is incredible. There's a lot of things going on in the subtext and, for a series of films that is criticised for shakey-cam and action that you can't follow or understand, this is remarkably clear cut. I might say that it is the best action sequence in all three films. I disagree that it is 'sputtering' or 'flailing'. Its story consideration and its editing in regards to time and space (in the context of the film as a whole, because this scene is very, very good at its use of space) is another issue but that is something that can be - and is - levelled at the entirety of ROTF.

This is one of the few scenes in all three films that is not set in an urban environment. This is helpful - it demonstrates that the Transformers destroy everything they touch. A tranquil forest gets absolutely demolished in this scene. Every footstep throws up dirt, trees are crushed and splintered beneath them and/or used as (ineffective) weapons, fires get started. These Transformers are titans that cannot exist along with nature, even discounting their exhaust belching vehicle modes. The ground trembles with their passing.

We start with great long shots of Optimus and Megatron, allowing us a good look at the two combatants. They are *huge*. We see them trade blows as Optimus tries to maneuver or push Megatron out of the frame - this is important and will happen again and again in this scene. And, for much of this initial sequence, Megatron is obscured or knocked out of frame.

Immediately apparent is that Megatron is *losing* this fight. Despite his initial tackling attack, Optimus is immediately dictating the flow of this battle. He calls for assistance and Starscream and Grindor (AKA: Blackout 2.0) leap into the fray. Megatron's weakness as the films go on is a pretty important theme. Optimus gets more and more powerful, able to take on dozens of Decepticons at once, while Megatron becomes a crippled and mentally-addled wreck by the time of DOTM. He has already fallen far from, as Terry pointed out, 'a grand emperor without equal'. He was like a force of nature whose sheer presence was enough to make Autobots fall back.

Milky Moor cont...

If martial power symbolised the 'evil' of the Decepticons in Transformers, what is this saying about Optimus Prime now that he can take on three Decepticons and, as we'll soon see, utterly crush them?

So, the two Decepticon lackeys show up. Watch the next sequence. Sam is in the foreground, where he remains for the entire scene, and the Decepticons hang in the background. This really illustrates not only the chase but the sense of danger. If the Decepticons reach the foreground, it's all over. Watch Optimus, he keeps the Decepticons engaged in the background, pulling them back when they advance and literally kicking or throwing them out of the camera's frame. They are no longer a threat, providing they exit to the left, right or behind him.

The moment Prime kicks Starscream into the foreground and past Sam is when the fight turns against him.

All three of them descend upon him from all angles, savaging him with blades and knives. Megatron kicks him in the head, hard enough to tear his mouthguard off and *shatter one of his optics*.

This is notable. Optimus attacks eyes as much as he attacks faces. He jams a blade through Bonecrusher's face and pops one of his eyes out of its socket during the fight. He will end this fight by jamming a hook into Grindor's eye socket.

Optimus is in the foreground with a big close up as he spits out his... teeth? Mouthplate? Blood? Energon? This fight is so completely visceral and heavy that it clashes with the almost-cartoon violence of the first film where much of it was done off-screen or through shooting weaponry. Sure, Jazz was ripped in half, but you would miss that if you blinked.

Megatron advances in the background, looming huge and terrible. These are not long shots now, but close ups on Sam. The tension is almost palpable.

So, Optimus loses his mask and if masks dehumanise then Optimus must be humanised by this, and he...

...completely flips out.

"Is the survival of our race not worth a single, human life?" Megatron asks.

"You'll never stop at one," Optimus intones, without much evidence, "I'll take you all on!"

And suddenly we're back into long shots with the robots in the background, big shots that let us see the leg and arm movement of this fight, because, once again, Prime is winning. Still, there's a chaotic edge to the fight and the editing and shot composition now, with lots of close ups, because Prime is in this mad frenzy.

Still, it's important to note that Prime doesn't just win. He *dominates*.

He seems to break Megatron's knee and then shanks him in the side, forces him to the ground and hits him again and again and again before tossing him aside. You almost expect Megatron to be begging by this point. He uses his elbow to snap Starscream's arm off and then *clubs him with it*. He then jumps on Grindor, now sporting a pair of hooks where he had swords, and tears Grindor's face and head apart from eye socket to jaw.

Milky Moor cont...

Holy fuck. Hooks. What a horrific weapon. Optimus has gone from using swords, the weapons associated with knights and nobility, to hooks and will go on to use a big two-bladed axe. He's now using weapons associated with barbarians, savages and nightmarish serial killers.

"Piece of tin," Optimus remarks disparagingly as he throws Grindor's corpse aside. Utterly annihilates Grindor and then insults him, just because.

Then Megatron grabs him from behind, impales him through the chest and blasts his chest to pieces. It's a bad ending to such a good scene that had kept the location and placement of its characters so integral to the progress and flow of the fight. It feels odd and discordant but helpfully demonstrates that Megatron can only defeat his opposing number through a sneak attack – and he will use a similar technique against another Prime in DOTM.

OneThousandMonkeys is correct. It's Prime's consideration for Sam that kills him, and it's not a mistake that Optimus will make again.

Hewlett posted:

Rewatching the films (particularly the first two), I'm actually starting to admire Jablonsky's score. It does the typical Michael Bay–Hans Zimmer trappings of heavy use of repeated percussion and staccato orchestra hits following the rhythm, to be sure; however, I LOVE the themes and motifs Jablonsky occasionally uses to elongate or punctuate a significant moment. The Autobots theme, Optimus' theme, even the Prime theme are all these determined, dramatic and romantic cues that are at least effective in conveying the alienness and stateliness of many of the bots' personalities – it's also composed to accompany their clunky, metallic bodies. By using primarily loud, blaring brass to deliver these sweeping themes instead of woodwinds or strings, the orchestra itself becomes a heavy, lumbering machine. I love that.

The Autobot theme, from the beginning of the first film, is a good example of this – it sounds almost naval or maritime in its progression.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=WEL5atUKRZQ

In the aforementioned forest scene, for example, the score wonderfully accompanies one of the few well-done and interesting fight scenes by syncopating the Autobot theme somewhat in a really cool way:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Y-Dcg7cdnRY#t=88

In addition to it being fairly strong action scoring (at least to me), it also plays into the reading that the audience is being fooled into thinking the Autobots are the good guys through their placement as heroic protagonists; the score is literally romanticizing them.

Lobok posted:

I like the idea that Bay or the writers looked at Optimus Prime and thought "What would a guy who calls himself that *really* act like?" Imagine you knew or heard of someone, a human, who called themselves the equivalent of "The #1 Bestest Superior" or "King Supreme Ultimate" – do you not picture either a 7-year old boy or a mentally deficient oo-rah alpha male? Maybe the two combined? Seems much more apt than a wise, noble father figure.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

I love that observation. It's an important contrast that Megatron is (seemingly) named for Metatron, the angel who is second only to YHWH in the in the Talmud's spiritual hierarchy. (Metatron, as it happens, has a cube(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metatron%27s_Cube) connected to the tree of life and knowledge of YHWH.)

I don't really know jack shit about esoteric Judaism though, and that's a hell of a rabbit hole to venture down. But we can focus on the basic idea that Megatron is a spiritual character in direct contrast to Optimus's secular humanist rhetoric. ("Freedom is the right of all sentient beings, blah blah blah." *tortures a dude*)

Megatron being apprentice to The Fallen (with connotations of 'fallen angels' and Lucifer – I read it as God Himself who has fallen) fits right in with this. And it corresponds with the whole Deception belief system – that they know they are 'bitches and shit' but nonetheless choose to believe in and embody their ethical ideal.

Terry van Feleday posted:

huh, I had no idea about Metatron's cube, even more parallels there. I'm going to return to Megatron's angelic nature in the next movie, because it's one of the most important images in the trilogy.

However, thinking about the Fallen, I realise that the idea of him being God goes further, as rather than being the conventional christian god, he more resembles the gnostic Demiurge.

For the uninitiated, gnostic thought believes that the God described in the bible is not actually God at all, but in fact, an entity created by the *actual* God of gods, the abstract entity of cosmic wisdom, Sophia. However, laldabaoth has a severe case of "no fuck you mom" and decided to commit himself to total cosmic evil.

The interesting thing about laldabaoth is that he is a clear creator figure, what with having built the world and all, and so is the Fallen, thanks to his association with Devastator. There's also the implication that laldabaoth is just one of multiple gods – one of multiple brothers, if you will.

Wikipedia also goes on to claim that Sophia "gave birth to the monstrous Demiurge and, being ashamed of her deed, wrapped him in a cloud and created a throne for him to be within it." Remember the image of the Fallen being trapped in his throne back on Cybertron/wherever they were?

Further interesting implications arise from this. *Revenge* insists on using the word "Brothers" to describe the Primes, yet that word implies the existence of a family – a mother. This mother is never mentioned in any of the movies, and the Fallen doesn't even seem to know of her at all. *But neither does laldabaoth*. He's described as being completely ignorant of her existence, believing himself to be the highest being in the universe.

The kicker to all this (and *of course* there's a kicker)? At the very core of gnostic thought lies the idea that we are surrounded by lies, and to find true wisdom, you need to see *below* the surface – and that only this wisdom can ultimately save your soul.

Overall, Act 1, if unusually long, was pretty fantastic in places, so why am even I complaining that ROTF is a bad movie? Well. We've reached the breaking point. *Revenge* has shown us its pretty face, and now it's time for its head to slowly turn around to show us the ugly face. This movie is unusual in that it only has two acts, since the real first act is the entire first movie. And the final act...

Part 10: ...*This* is our villain?



Megatron and Starscream meet on top of a random skyscraper, and Megs berates (read: abuses) Starscream for not being able to find Sam. But, he hatches a plan: Sick of the “KEEP THE GIANT ROBOTS SECRET” conspiracy nonsense, he decides to reveal the presence of them and the Fallen, and give humanity an ultimatum that will make *them* find Sam. “No more disguises!”, he cries. The leader of the Decepticons steps out against the continuous deception. Soundwave relays the order and...



...No, I mean,



...Uh, I guess Mixmaster apathetically knocks over an American flag. No, but really...



...*The cavalry arrives.*

Wait, did we not see this shot before?





Well, this scene. It's somehow eerily reminiscent of the Autobot arrival in the first movie, and yet so much more disastrous at the same time. The film shows us every grisly detail of their arrival and all the destruction it causes, where in the first movie the destruction was fairly subdued. Buildings fall apart, cars explode, and all-around a lot of not good stuff happens. The interesting thing that where the first movie at least sort of showed the Autobots in detail, this one barely does at all - the only one we see in detail is the Fallen himself.



Because he appears on TV.

There is no possible way to properly convey how completely ridiculous this scene is. After the pretty unsettling scene of destruction the movie just led us through, suddenly we have Robo-Satan himself... On a tiny TV screen that makes him look like he's wearing a lampshade on his head. The atmosphere of the room is so friendly and not eerie at all, and if you took this image out of context, it'd just look like some bored guys are watching a *Bionicle* ad. It gets even better when the Fallen proudly exclaims that there's a super-powerful race of robots on the planet, able to destroy it on a whim, and holding it ransom for One Million Dollars! a random college kid. Yes.

The Fallen is using TV exactly the way it is supposed to: Broadcasting information to a wide audience. But seeing him so diminish himself via profane human media, you almost end up feeling pity for the old coot. He's just too ancient for this shit.



Well, and here's a whole bunch of stuff that I, quite frankly, will just skip. I tried to find some sort of meaning tangled in this nonsense, but really, I give up. Really, with ROTF I get the impression that the writers used their two weeks to write the first act and the finale, and then realized they needed to add a whole hour of stuff which mainly consists of the twins (urghhagurbl), Leo being a gibberglocking sweatpaddle and the occasional gay joke. From here on, I'll be skipping large parts of the film and only pointing out the scenes that somehow managed to end up halfway interesting. Trust me, you will not be missing much.



President Obama orders the Autobots to  , which they, after Ironhide nearly murders everyone again, reluctantly comply with. You know, I find it funny that most people interpret this as the filmmakers criticizing Obama for being Weak On Terror, when, well, *he kind of has a point*. Also, why does TFWiki always go on about how annoying this government official is? He's *by far* one of the more bearable characters in the movie. Does this horrid complex of always siding with the “good guys” extend so far that a guy becomes more hated than fucking *Leo* just because he's not siding with the Autobots?

I mean, “Get your assets back to base!” is a great line, how can you not like that?



There's one last semi-heartfelt moment between Sam, Mikaela and Bee, but by this point it's clear there's no point in trying to salvage Sam's life and relationship. It pretty much went to shit the moment he picked up that shard. He finally gets curious about what the glyphs actually *are* (note: As opposed to what they *mean*), and Leo figures that internet celebrity and potential goon Robowarrior can help. Who is Robowarrior?



...Oh no. After Sector Seven closed shop at the end of the first movie, Simmons apparently decided to open a racist meat deli. He has no interest in dealing with Leo, but then he recognizes Sam.



And after a short argument, invites them into the meat locker. (I have no idea what the subtext of this scene is.) Interestingly, he responds to Sam bringing up that he had a robot “projecting images” from his mind.



There's a big ol' standard conspiracy theorist's basement (just missing the event map with the red strings), and Simmons starts showing us some Ancient Aliens shit about how those glyphs have been seen painted independently in various parts of the ancient world. Further, he reveals that some Transformers have been on earth for a long, long time. I really don't know what to make of any of this.



They talk to Wheelie, and he's becomes remarkably cooperative when Mikaela threatens him with a blowtorch again. Kids, this is not how you discipline your pets.

Tuxedo Catfish posted:

Specifically: when Mikaela threatens his *face* with a torch. A threat she backed up by earlier burning out one of his eyes. It's like little predatory animals practicing on something their own size, imitating their parents.

He tells him that there's a bunch of dudes who are old enough to know, and one of them is in the Smithsonian museum. Let's go there!!

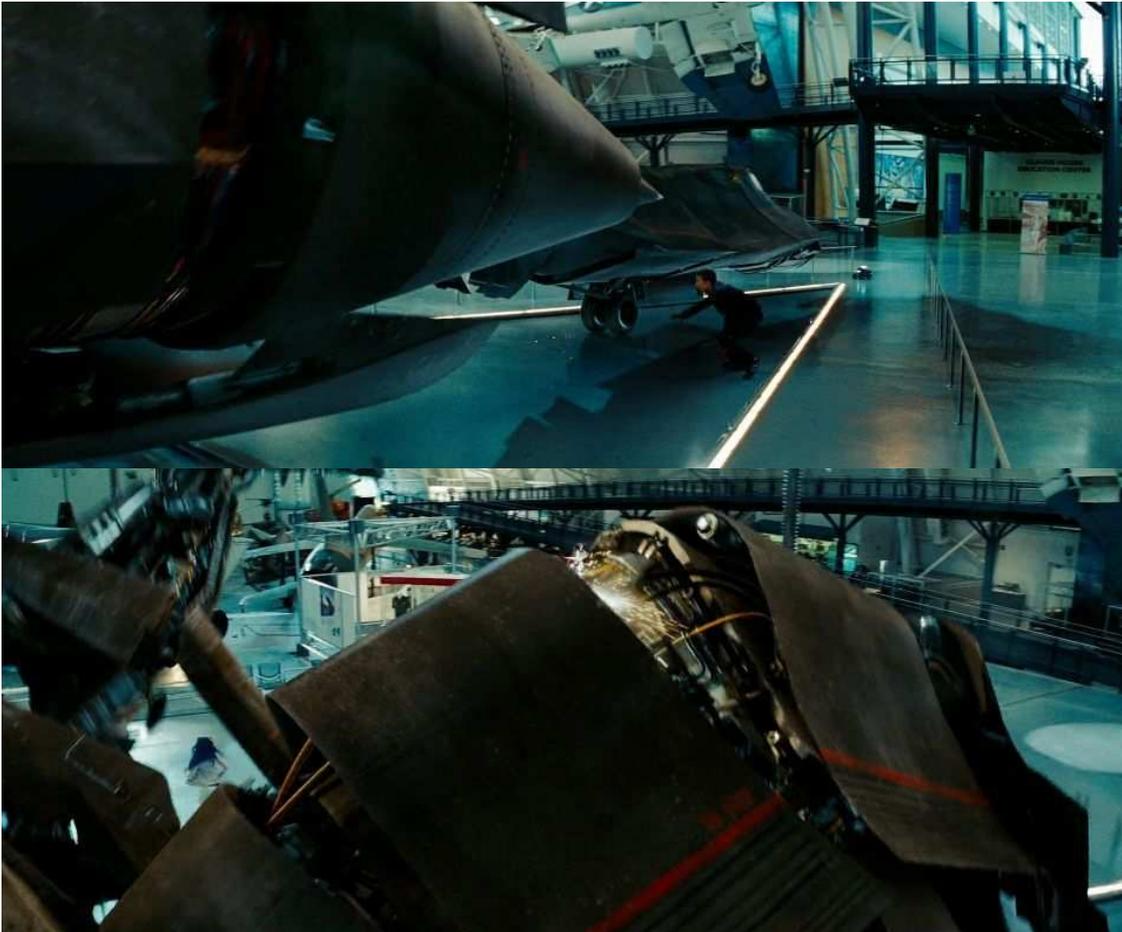
Part 11: BEHOLD THE GLORY OF JETFIRE!

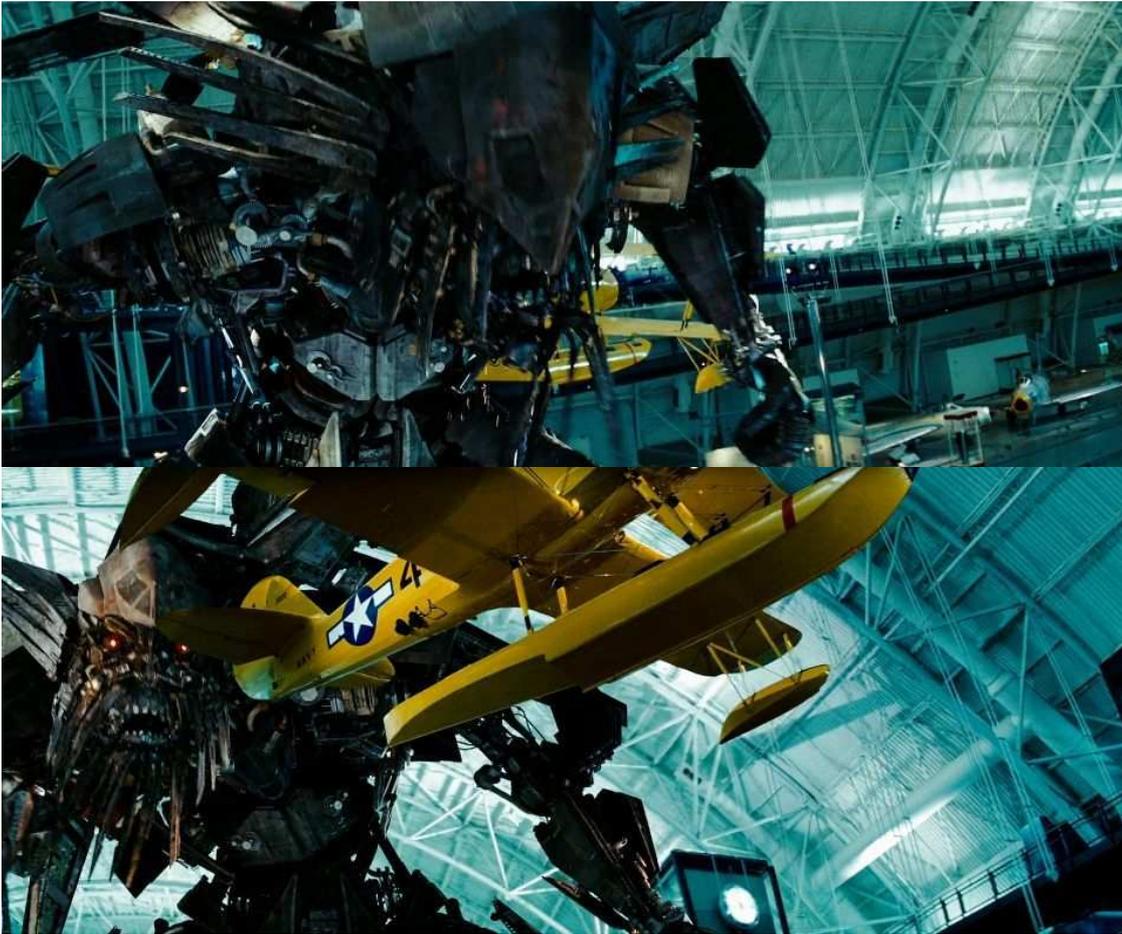


The shots of the Smithsonian are completely gorgeous. These films have a clear, almost childlike fascination with machines of all sorts, and you get the clear impression that they want to share this feeling with the audience. The *majesty* of the pieces on display here is contrasted with the bumbling idiocy of our “heroes”, almost portraying these machines as so much greater than the men who created them.



And of course, who could the legendary creature they were looking for be if not the grand highlight of the museum, the SR-71 “Blackbird” itself. Wheelie tells Sam to give it the Cube-shard, and “watch the magic happen”.





Except the “magic”, in this case, is the great, majestic Blackbird curling itself up like some kind of tortured worm, creaking and folding onto two unsteady legs, and becoming an unsightly, hideous and kind of pitiful looking senile alien creature. Meet Jetfire, one of the few legitimately fun characters in this movie (although even he can’t avoid some cringe worthy gags). Something I noticed in this scene is that in the wrong hands, the Allspark may not be quite the benevolent life-giving entity it was played as in the first movie - in fact, whenever we see it used, it totally corrupts whatever it touches. Megatron being killed and revived by it became a mad, delirious monster, sinking from benevolent intentions to literally serving Robo-Satan, it’s repeatedly shown turning useful appliances into hideous, vulgar crotchbots, and now Jetfire is just... I mean really, *this guy* transforms out of the Blackbird?

On the other hand, while Jetfire is one of the most unattractive designs to come out of the movie (and one of the worst toys to come out of the line), Mark Ryan’s brilliant voice acting just makes him so endearing in his silliness. (Also, while looking this up, I realized Megatron is voiced by Hugo Weaving. Huh.)



Now Wheelie? A lot less endearing. The interesting thing is how much of a big deal ex-Decepticon Jetfire makes out of switching sides, calling it an “intensely personal choice”... And then Wheelie defects because Mikaela basically coerced him into it. The film actually draws a good number of similarities between Wheelie and Jetfire, in spite of their completely different nature - even though one is an ancient legend and the other is a small animal, they’re still both of the same species.



Sam shows him the symbols, and Jetfire teleports everyone into... A desert in Egypt. There's a whole bunch of exposition, basically something something the Matrix of Leadership can revive Optimus, something something the Fallen wants it so he can blow up the sun something. Actually, scratch that, it's not exposition, it's storytelling. The wise old man sits in a circle with the younger generation and tells them of tales of yore.



Simmons makes it past customs by saying he's from New York. I guess when you're American, you're truly allowed to do anything! Also, funny foreigners hrgf herf hgfrgh



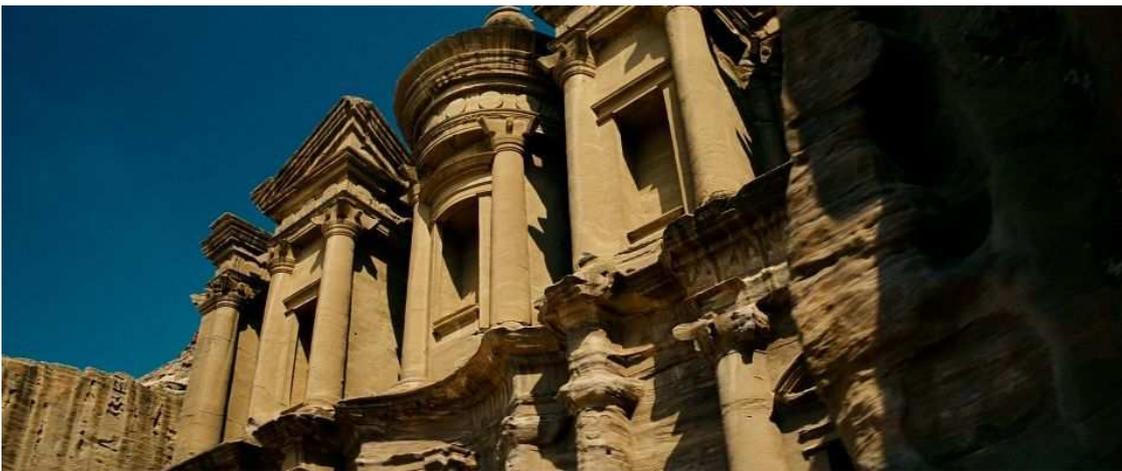
The film pretends to show us another one of those emotional scenes, and Mikaela really tries her best, but it's obvious at this point that Sam is too far gone to really emotionally invest in other people, as evidenced by the fact that he suddenly cuts the scene clean off when he ~solves the riddle~



After being told by Simmons to drop Optimus off in Egypt, Lennox decides to solve the dilemma of following his orders and returning to base or potentially reviving Optimus by... Spitting the president in the face and doing his own thing.



In fact, he then proceeds to throw the government official out of the plane, abandoning him without supplies or communications in the middle of the desert in a foreign country. And people seriously took this scene as justified and Lennox is still a good guy because Galloway posed a minor inconvenience. Sometimes the mind boggles at how sociopathic Hollywood audiences can be.



Our heroes finally find the Matrix, only then they don't, only then they do, thanks to the twins.





Only then they don't again. Yeah, turns out the Matrix is a fake and all hope is lost. Only Sam doesn't think so, and still insists to take its ashes to Optimus because dammit, he's the protagonist and this movie isn't over. Notice how his unwillingness to partake in the Autobots' bullshit has made a total 180 and now he's suddenly into it with heart and soul.

At the time of writing this, I suddenly realize how absurd this entire scene is. Two robot blackface actors find the corpse of god, whereupon the embodiment of capitalism blows a hole in it so it can find his ancient treasure... Which is a useless pile of dust. I think that even tops the space scene in terms of sheer, hilariously brazen nihilism.



The team splits up to shake off Starscream, and Megatron calls forth the big offensive. Time for the film's big half-hour action sequence, oh boy.

...I think it says a lot that I needed three updates to talk about the first 10 minutes of the movie, and now I used one to cover a whole quarter of it.

Part 12: Devastator, hero of the working class!

Alright, so watch this. (<http://vimeo.com/50887763>)



They never made a Devastator toy that isn't either tiny or total garbage, so have some concept art.

In a movie already filled with visual spectacle, Devastator just completely takes the cake in terms of sheer *gravitas*. And in spite of being limited to less than 10 minutes of screen time, he's one of the most interesting and under-discussed characters in the movie, nay, the trilogy.

MilkyMoor said that all Transformers are born equal, and I have to respectfully disagree - there's a difference between there *being* only a single class and us, as an audience, only being *shown* a single class. Virtually all Transformers we see throughout the trilogy are representatives of either military or government, but then ROTF, without comment, suddenly throws the Constructicons at us.

Disregarding Arcee (seriously, let's just forget about her), the Constructicons differ from everyone else both in form and in function. They're barely-humanoid, strange, abstract *things* that make no visual sense at all (I can only quote this amazing fellow (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsjVzWNbZLM&feature=plcp>) calling Demolisher Scavenger a "Mantis-crab roller-skate"). Where the Autobots are lithe, skilled killers, the Constructicons are clumsy, lumbering and imprecise. Where most other transformers grow weapons and items right out of their complex bodies, the Constructicons are mostly left using their shovels, overlong arms and other vehicle-kibble as improvised crushing weapons when involved in a fight.

And where all other transformations are beautiful, fluid and heavily automated, Devastator's combination is intense, laborious, and clearly not pleasant for anyone involved.

And then you take a look at what they actually *do* throughout the movie. Occasionally, one of them will get involved in a fight, but then they're usually torn apart within seconds. But mostly, they do *work*. They rebuild Megatron (going as far as to

sacrifice one of their own to do it!), Rampage makes a simple delivery, and then Devastator's big role is not to wreak havoc among the human resistance... But to dig up something. He "fights" using a *vacuum cleaner*, and can't even defeat fucking *Mudflap*.

There's multiples of every one of the Constructicons, and they have virtually no agency. The other Decepticons' military getup speaks of their nature as warriors, and the Constructicons' construction uniforms speak all there is to say about their nature: They're the transformers' *workforce*.

The movie doesn't make much of this unfortunately, but it does show that Decepticon civilization is a lot more complex than we're getting to see (while *all* Autobots are clearly there to fight and *only* to fight), and it rubs additional salt in the wound of Demolisher's execution as a "threat". And then we get to Simmons doing everything he can to destroy Devastator - activating a terrifying weapon in development to kill *a civilian*.

It's equally sad and hilarious to see what horrid depths the protagonists descent to fight off the Decepticons. Moreover, their nature as blue-collar workers shows once again that the Decepticons, if totalitarian, are actually willing and able to *build*, while the Autobots can only destroy.

Of course, how does Mudflap attack the creature? "I'm gonna bust yo' face up!" Tuxedo Catfish put it very well when he likened this behavior to children emulating a parent. Defacing enemies started out as being Optimus' thing, but by the time *Dark Moon* rolls around basically everyone on the Autobot side does it.

Thulsa Doom posted:

Something about [Devastator's combination] reminds me of the scenes in Carpenter's *The Thing* where the creatures unfold and separate (like the head spider) and similar scenes in the 2011 film, especially the bit when the head flops around before it's fully connected and the tentacles used to draw the limbs into the main body.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

The Decepticons are, in this series at least, the actual champions of the working class. Optimus may drape himself shiny trucker clothes, but that's a farce akin to Romney visiting a small-town factory on the campaign trail. Where the other imagery of Decepticon monstrosity had mostly to do with their race or gender, Devastator is a monstrous vision of the workers united.

Of course, the race and gender aspect is still a part of it: Devastator is hunched like an ape, and features a massive vagina-dentata mouth, in the tradition of Predator. But check the middle of Devastator's transformation sequence: one of his hands walks around on its own, before joining with the body. There are a ton of horror movies where the hand revolts against the mind, as in *District 9* - with obvious connotations. Here, though, Devastator's body is entirely 'hands'. This isn't imagery of lost agency, but of *communion*. The workers literally unite as a single entity.

I would actually argue that Devastator didn't 'fail to kill' Skids (or Mudflap, whichever). I choose to believe that he spared them.

The specific means by which Devastator is eventually killed present a very important contrast, so keep an eye out for that.

Hewlett posted:

The fact that Devastator has a scrotum in addition to the vagina-mouth has always puzzled me, and I would argue that Devastator, by virtue of literally having the biggest balls, is one of the more stereotypically masculine Transformers in the films. But I think having both genders plays into your reading of working-class communion; it is also both male and female, representing unity of gender as well. At the same time, it brings with it the same kind of low-class potty humor stereotypically assigned to construction workers; the balls are used for humor and the vagina-dentata mouth is used to destroy and swallow everything in its path, so it's not entirely a positive thing. I guess that's more "women are bitches and shit" imagery.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

It's definitely sexual, but I don't think it's a bad thing. You gotta remember (in a reading of the films as satire) that everything is seen "in quotation marks," as how things are viewed through the lens of American culture.

The way the red one grabs the other guy and pulls him onto his circular port, it's totally sexual – but it's consensual. All the constructions are coupled together into this writhing communal mass with a vagina-mouth and literal balls.

Devastator's monstrosity satirizes American puritanism – where people fetishize the 'holographic' image of Megan Fox on a motorcycle while simultaneously getting thoroughly, adolescently icked out by her physical biology. This is directly related to the gynophobic nightmare imagery behind Alice and The Fallen, and the film connects it to the fear of other races and of the working class. Devastator is an asymmetrical Frankenstein of *different-coloured* robo-people, to go along with the communist symbolism I covered earlier.

The balls are a crude joke, but not 'just a crude joke'. Obviously they're not functional testicles. We've seen that the robots *do* have biologies, so these balls are purely symbolic – like the hood ornament of the dog wearing a mask. I believe they're associated with the theme of brazen nakedness representing honesty and conviction. Devastator goes so far as to sport this genderfuck prosthesis – an exaggerated, transgressive parody of nakedness.

Hewlett is right that this is 'bitches and shit' imagery, but the Decepticons are saying "yes, we are the dregs of society, we are monstrous, and *we will unite against you who oppress us.*" Bay loves the bitches and shit – not in an ironic way, but in the same sense that District 9 supports the thoroughly disgusting, inferiorized aliens.

And then there's Simmons.

You may be familiar with the term "ghost ship moment" – which describes an instant a character realizes that they're *actually in a movie*, and *what kind* of movie as well. Often this realization is treated as a moment of enlightenment, which radically changes the character's views and behavior.

What's interesting about Simmons is that it's hard to pin down when exactly his GSM happens – I guess back when he sees Sam in the deli and realizes his "adventures" are not yet over – but it is abundantly clear that he has this awareness. He explicitly cites being in a movie when he first sees Devastator, and he's the kind of guy who clearly gets really into a role he's playing. In the first film he was a secret agent caricature, and now he's become an action movie protagonist caricature, providing his own narration for the benefit of the invisible viewer. In a sense, Simmons is a meta-movie entity, an actor playing an actor playing a part that varies from film to film, and in the third movie, his role will shift once more. Can you tell I'm starting to get impatient about actually getting there already?

penismightier posted:

He talks about Gunfight at the OK Corral, which is a classic '50s movie about Wyatt Earp. Ends with a big gunfight between Earp and his family and the Clanton family in which, as Turturro says, "a lot of people died."

The real gunfight happened in 1881, the movie was made 1957, and people still to this day argue over who was in the right. There've been a handful of films (Hour of the Gun, Doc) positing that instead of a great leader, Wyatt Earp was a dangerous obsessive murderer who wiped out a family for no good reason.

Jonny Angel posted:

So I've been following along and there's one point I'd like to make before we get to Dark of the Moon (usual praise for the OP and other contributors applies). There's been a lot of talk already about how Autobots project heroic/likable identities while ignoring everything actually symbolized by those identities (Optimus is a warrior from the ruling caste who dresses up as a symbol of blue collar workers, Ratchet is an ambulance who practices no medicine). It reveals a fucked-up need on the part of their psychology to identify as the good guys but *not even convincingly*, e.g. Optimus doesn't present himself as a hero of classical myth which I guess would be the closest "good" analogue to the kind of violent authoritarianism he practices.

But who else does this? Who else self-identifies in a way that's farcically divorced from their actual actions/intentions?



Pictured: RoboWarrior



Slightly off-screen: Ladiesman217

Oh, fuck, they're Autobots. Sam suffers from this a lot in the first two films, self-identifying as a ladies' man but never actually acting accordingly. He can't bring himself to say he loves his incredibly desirable girlfriend (because, as pointed out, he doesn't), and he expresses disinterest in both spending time with her and cheating on her with Alice. At no point does he act like a ladies' man (except tangentially during the aforementioned ending sequence of RotF when it's more accurately The Allspark speaking), but at no point does he give up the assumed identity either. He doesn't break up with Mikaela, instead displaying just enough interest to *have* her and thus *have* the identity. It's the same reason that Optimus, after whatever damage he takes in battle, is always going to get that red-and-blue coat of paint re-applied to his salt-of-the-earth trucker self.

(Also, what's contained in these spoiler tags is vague enough to not actually spoil any DotM stuff but still spoiled because it's about DotM: Sam continues down this same path, with a new very beautiful girlfriend that he's chiefly interested in *having*.)

Let's talk about RoboWarrior though. Simmons from the get-go is identified as delusional and pathetic compared to actual RoboWarriors (Transformers), getting peed on by them and displaying an ignorance about both robots ("His name is NBE-01") and warriors ("Nokia . . . they know the way of the samurai.") In RotF, he's again on the path of self-serving self-

Jonny Angel cont...

he's fighting the good fight against this conspiracy. Simmons, of course, knows the entire extent of the conspiracy because he was on the ground floor the whole time, but speaking to any of that would run counter to the Autobot mentality the same way that Sam telling Mikaela he loves her would.

But here's what's interesting: just as Sam breaks from his Autobot self at the film's climax, Simmons has a similar moment. Except this is actually him, not a dead and revived him that's been infused by otherworldly forces and no longer bears any resemblance to him. Simmons, faced with the seemingly unstoppable Devastator, calls down heavenly thunder upon him. Upon the robot. Like a RoboWarrior.

Simmons' arc in the first two films is a beautiful little spot of optimism among the relentless cackling ugliness presented by the rest of the text. He's suffering from the same kind of Autobot-coded identity delusions as Sam, set up to have a similar arc to him, yet he somehow escapes Sam's fate. He actually lives up to his self-ascribed name, in a way that's a lot more poignant than the farcical nature of the scene (RoboWarrior aims for the roboscrotum) initially suggests. But that's essentially how Michael Bay is operating here, and a touch of optimism wouldn't even be permissible in the films unless obfuscated by mad robot genitals.

**Part 13: I'm bored now, can we start *DOTM* alr—oh god what is happening
aaaaah**



This scene is a little... Odd. The breakneck editing suddenly slows down to a crawl, and I'm really not sure how to place it. And what's up with the stained glass window made up of empty bottles? Is that a thing they do in Egypt?







There's a long panning shot moving out of the building, around and back in again, and while it is genuinely well crafted, well, the movie usually just doesn't *do* these kinds of cohesive, fluid shots, so it really doesn't "feel" entirely right. Also: We had our small animal, so here's a Transformer that's a literal insect.



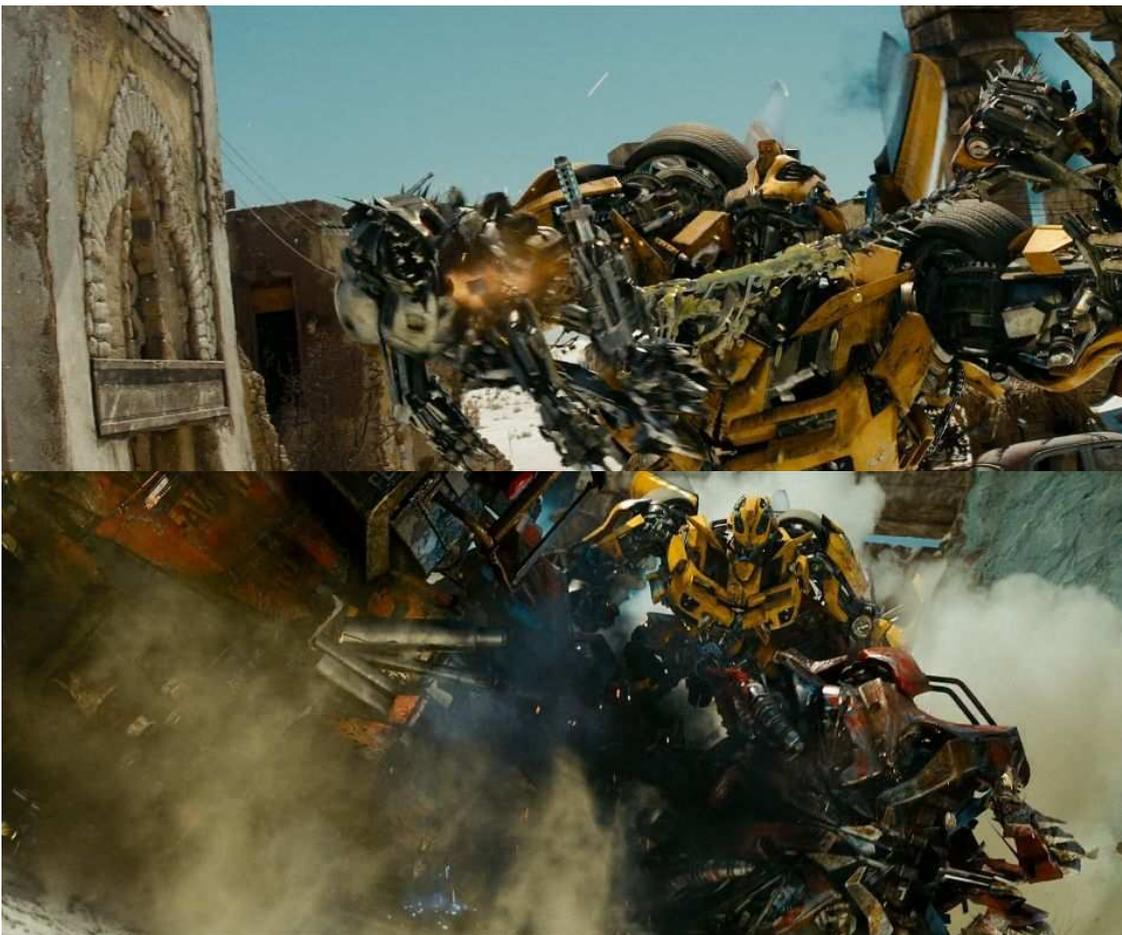
And yes, they did make a toy for it.



Equally strange is the scene with Sam's parents. Rampage brings them to the battlefield (I guess in exchange for Sam himself?), and Sam actually stops for them - from everything we've seen so far, Sam at best holds antipathy for them, and now he's suddenly willing to delay Optimus' resurrection (and put untold lives at risk) for them? Nothing Sam has done in this movie after the end of the first act has made any sense for his character, as though he has fully absorbed himself into his role as an action hero protagonist. The contrast to the naturalism surrounding his scenes early in the movie just makes him appear completely inhuman and unrelatable, almost as if he has, too, become a CGI space robot.



It's really exemplified in a single line - Bumblebee attacks Rampage, and Sam crouches down and whispers "kill him, Bee. *Kill him.*" to himself. This line keeps giving me shivers, because it's just so creepy how this guy who once represented *us* suddenly gives this dead-eyed psychopathic stare and wishes a brutal death upon another living being just out of pure, senseless *hatred*, and then *keeps watching* as Bumblebee just *tears it apart*.



This calls to mind the end of act 1 because it's just similarly *relentless*. Instead of just killing Rampage while he's down, Bumblebee *tears both his arms off* and then knocks around the dying, defenseless creature *just for fun* while it pitifully cries out in pain. This isn't a fight, it's *torture*, willful torture, committed under the cheering of the audience. A few elements of end-of-act-1 called to mind horror movies, but I have never seen a horror movie that made me as uncomfortable as this scene, for a simple reason - there's limits to what you can do to a human actor on a screen, but CGI has no such limitations, and so the terrible, inhuman cruelty you can subject the audience to is only limited by the filmmakers' imagination.

I've taken on a strong dislike of the idea of "action movies" as a genre. It might have meant something at one point, but these days I notice more and more how any movies are stuck onto that label just because they have some action scenes *in* them. *Revenge* had a grand total of one action scene, back in the forest. What we see happen here, at the film's end, is not action. All pretense of "robots punching each other" has disappeared - there's no heroes, no villains, no justice, no resistance, no emotional catharsis. There is only torture, chaotic destruction and total narrative anarchy, culminating in the cold murder of God himself.

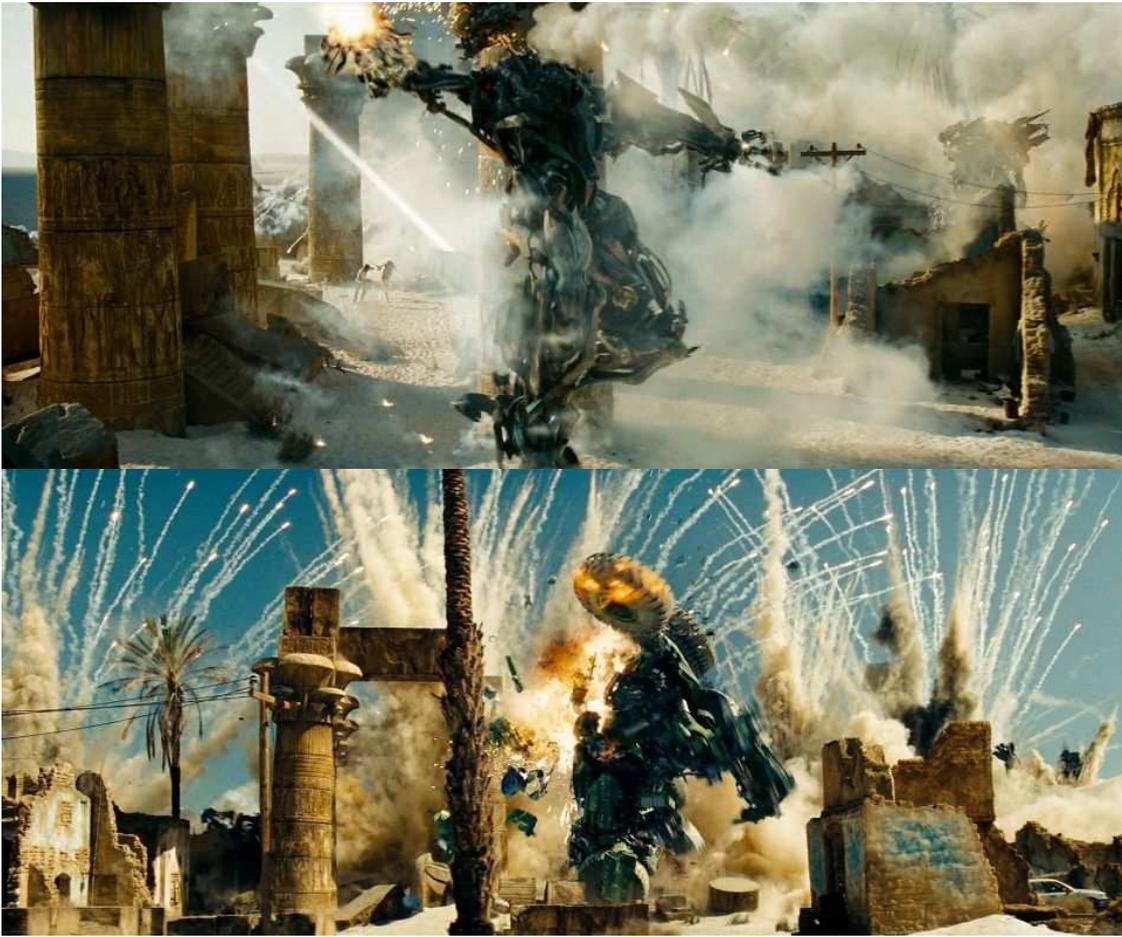
Revenge of the Fallen is a horror film. In the purest sense. Its finale grinds down every aspect of its world into total nihilistic despair, and it's *terrifying* to behold.

Yo, have some mood music. (Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (The Complete Score) - Precious Cargo
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcVYvAFpUU>)



The big airstrike is coming, and the military is launching their big offensive. In an extended montage, we see Decepticons being torn apart. Arms fly and screams echo, dying creatures are being buried under rubble. And you have to keep reminding yourself: These are sentient creatures. They're not drones or machinery acting by programming. This isn't plucky heroism turning the tides, it's war.

In the first movie, what we saw of the human military were pretty much Maggie Madsen and company. Silly characters doing silly things, barely managing to call in the actual strike force. Said military's grand event, the great display of airborne superiority, the greatest display of sheer destructive power humanity holds that isn't the atom bomb itself? It barely manages to make Megatron *duck*. And now we have a repeat of that same event. But suddenly, barely any human characters appear. Leo, who's the closest equivalent to the first movie's idiot brigade? Rendered irrelevant almost immediately. The events have far outgrown simple civilians like him. Now every face we see is a cold military official, relaying orders and coldly sentencing the enemy to death.



And the airstrike itself? Gone are the days of impotence and failure. The war machine has grown, become a destructive behemoth that tears itself through the Decepticons with ease, leaving only shrapnel and corpses behind. And Megatron? After he was only defeated because he underestimated the factor of the enemy holding an omnipotent artifact, here he is damaged as easily as the rest of them, making a last few eerily human noises before being driven back into the pillar of hellfire he emerged from.



But he managed to make one final shot, and hit Sam. And with that, the entire movie's narrative breaks down.

Sam is dead.

Every time I watch this movie, I just wish these last few scenes had been in a different, better movie, because in spite of their clinical impartiality, or perhaps *because of* it, they very effectively show the horror of war. But this is a franchise movie about giant robots. Its central premise rests upon Sam's interaction with the fictional world in which ideas and values - ideas and values *he* believes in - take physical shape. Sam *is* the audience. His desire to see Rampage be torn apart and tortured does nothing if not reflect the audience's hero worship of American values, and it is through him that all of this takes shape at all.

And now, the movie killed him.



And with that, *Revenge of the Fallen* is over. Without an audience, there can be no movie.



Without someone to speak to, messages and symbols become meaningless.



Sam Witwicky is dead. And now, for the movie to continue, something else has to take his place.



At the end of the last movie, Sam received a gift from the gods. Total cosmic knowledge and the ability to create life itself have integrated themselves into him, become *part* of him. Remember, the Cube cannot be destroyed, it can only *transform*.



The Matrix of Leadership he was given in this movie was a fake, a decoy. Worthless dust. Sam is dead, and the Matrix is gone.



And yet, both are right here. But Sam Witwicky, the audience insert and sympathetic character, has died - not from Megatron's last, spiteful shot, but far earlier, when the Allspark took his mind and Bumblebee and Optimus symbolically buried him. The man we see here - whose first words are "I love you", words that the real Sam would, *could* never say - is not Sam at all. He gives life, and he takes life. He has total knowledge of the film's narrative - *destiny itself* - and communes with the gods. This "new Sam" is *the Allspark itself*, given new form, and the Matrix of Leadership is just an extension of him.

(Notice how in this shot, it *covers up his face*.)



And so, Sam dies so Prime can live again.



But the Allspark itself was corrupted by humanity's petty evil, so does it further corrupt everything it touches. Prime was not a nice character before, and now he, too, transformed - into something *a lot worse*.

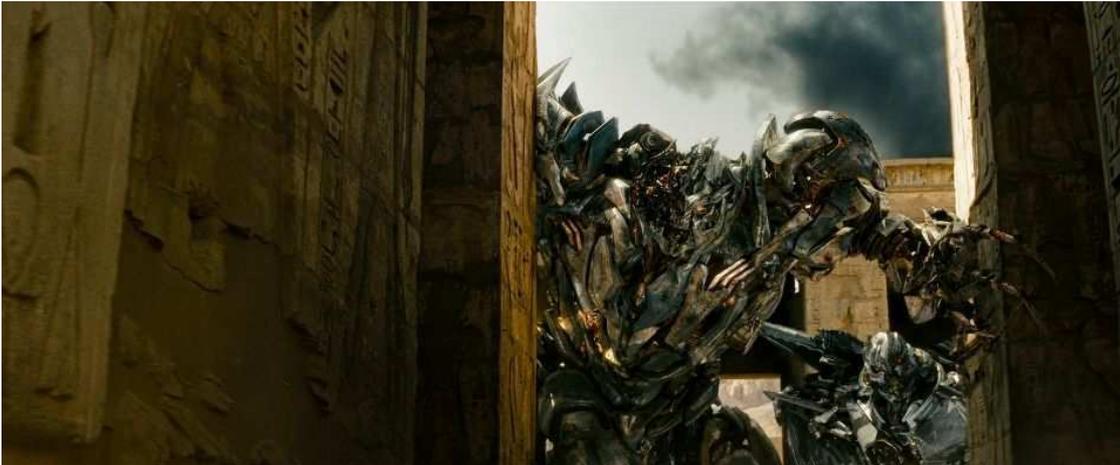
A LOT worse. (<http://vimeo.com/51051264>)

The terrifying power of the human military has once again been surpassed, and rendered useless. This is not a fight between men nor machines, but a fight between *gods*.

And in spite of the Fallen's terrifying power, Prime cracks him like an eggshell.

I... There is so much going on in this final scene that I don't even know where to *begin*. Megatron, as I will once again remind you the most powerful and terrifying thing the first film had to offer, is simply effortlessly shoved aside. His yelp of "Starscream!" is one of the most pitiful things I've seen in this trilogy.

Optimus, by contrast, is just *terrifying*. "Give me your face!" is remembered so starkly for a reason. It's the perfect summation of the sheer, base cruelty of Optimus reducing a godly figure to melting rubble. His finisher is disturbingly sexual, as well. Remember, the Fallen is naked, and Optimus even removes the closest thing he had to a mask, then penetrates him from behind while giving off an extended moan and shouting "I rise!!". Remember what I said about the Transformers not really understanding sexuality, and seeing it as more of a utility than anything? Well, now we see how that turns out - for Optimus, violence and sexuality are inseparable in their aspect of domination. Yeah, Optimus has pretty much sunk to the total bottom of depravity - and he still has an entire movie left to go.



At least Megatron finally has a moment of introspection. After two movies of blind, senseless rage, the haze in front of his eyes is beginning to clear up, and in his pitiful, damaged form he is ready for a new take on things. By the next movie, he will be a *very* different character.

Febreeze posted:

My favorite part about the entire ending of this movie is when Bay reuses a shot he had literally a minute earlier. Finally, someone uploaded the whole scene so I could point it out:

At about 21 seconds in Terry's video: You see a quick 2 second shot of Optimus looking up at Jetfire as he awakens. Optimus is on screen right, looking screen left. There is smoke in the background billowing up.

Skip to 1:46

It's the exact same shot, flipped and played backwards. Optimus is now looking screen right, and instead of lifting his head, he lowers it as if he is sad. But the smoke in the background is retreating, like it's being sucked into a vacuum. This isn't the first time Bay has done this, he reused A shot from T1 for Fallen, and he altered a shot from The Island for DOTM. But these two shots come literally less than two minutes apart.

Thulsa Doom posted:

"Let's roll" is associated with 9/11 now... Todd whatever his name was that was on the flight that was brought down by the passengers reportedly said "Let's roll" before he and the others charged the cockpit. I've seen it used frequently in 9/11 references and patriotic materials and such. It's one of those patriotic memes that inexplicably appeared the day after 9/11, like the word "homeland".

[Optimus says it] After he combines with a *jet* and immediately before he rams into the enemy.

A jet who had a long beard and a turban.

Igiari posted:

Would it be going too far to say that, at the point of Optimus' revival, the Autobots have become a cult, with Optimus as a divine figure? Bearing in mind I haven't seen DOTM, (or ROTF) one thing that really struck me about that scene was how when Jetfire saw Optimus return to life, he had no qualms about tearing out his own heart and giving Optimus his skin to wear, and which Optimus discards as soon as it has outlived its usefulness? I originally typed "death cult", to match the Autobots' lust for violence and desperation to stop birth, but I think if that were true, Optimus would probably have held Jetfire's sacrifice in higher regard.

Thinking of sacrifice, is it maybe worth noting that Optimus has previously (if I recall the first movie correctly) gone on and on about how he and he alone has to make a sacrifice, like he wants to be this messianic figure? Now that he's returned from death, he doesn't even voice an objection when an elderly follower commits suicide in front of his eyes whilst his followers tear apart his corpse for parts that will benefit Optimus, and which he literally shrugs off moments later.

Mr. Safe posted:

What's a Decepticon to do when he comes to view his own side's values as reprehensible? Is there any choice available to him that will wash away the stigma of being one of the "bad guys"? How can he become a "good" Decepticon? He certainly tries throughout the movie. He helps the protagonists in every possible way he can with his knowledge, getting them from one place to another, and even with his waning strength. Still, he's never seen by any of them as anything more than a tool to be used. No concern is given to him even as he rusts away before their eyes. He was doomed to this treatment from the moment they saw his Decepticon brand regardless of his actions.

During his final battle he almost seems like he's the sole member of some third side in the fight as he flails away at his former comrades and isn't acknowledged by the ones he has chosen as his allies, receiving no support from them. Eventually, he gets it in his head that the best way he can help (or even gain some form of recognition) is to sacrifice his very body and life to an Autobot who will gain all the real glory. He has come to a primal realization, you see, on how to be a good Decepticon.

The only good Decepticon is a dead Decepticon.

blurry! posted:

I think I remember Terry van Feleday remarking she couldn't pinpoint what the title was about, as *The Fallen* did not exact revenge or really make any comments about any sort of revenge.

I think its a bait-and-switch. By naming *The Fallen* that, its a diversion to distract us from what's really going on. From the fact that a character that had been killed earlier in the movie, had come back from the grave to exact a brutal retribution upon his antagonist. A character that has been progressively become more and more corrupt. And with his resurrection, he has completed his corruption. He kills God and all but takes his title.

Optimus Prime is the Fallen.

Revenge of the Fallen was pretty much a battle between evil and greater evil. Really, it deserved the tagline “Whoever wins, we lose” much more so than *Alien vs. Predator (2004)*. But as the last act of the film went on, the scales increasingly tipped. *Revenge* both started and ended on a bombshell. Sam is dead and has been replaced by a malicious, quasi-human entity, Optimus Prime has killed Robo-Satan, thereby *becoming* Robo-Satan, Megatron has embarked on a journey of self-discovery, and now the stage is ready for the *real* last act of the trilogy.

INTERMISSION - Duel (1971)

PSYCHE!!

No, we're not taking on *Dark Side Moon* just yet, because there is another movie I will need to cover first. See, *Dark Side Moon* is a sequel to *Revenge*, but it's also a sequel to a different movie. Yep, that's right, *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* is the sequel to one of Steven Spielberg's first movies, the 1971 film *Duel*. Yes, to the point where *Dark Moon* will actually *make less sense* unless you randomly decided to watch a fairly obscure old TV movie right beforehand and pick it apart for implications.

I keep saying it, but *Dark of the Moon* certainly is a fun movie.

And so is *Duel*! I actually quite enjoy it, and it'll be a nice break from the *Transformers* trilogy's extremes of vapid nonsense and total brilliance to watch a movie that's solid from beginning to end. I'll just kind of lightly skim it in a single part and point out the highlights, so I really suggest everyone to go out and see it for yourselves before reading this post(!).





Tiny screenshots! For the first scene of the movie, the filmmakers pretty much just tied a camera to a car's bumper and let it drive around. We don't actually see a human face until some ways in, and the only human voices we hear come from the car's radio, which is mostly pedestrian nonsense. Lacking this human element and any sort of special camera dynamic, this scene feels very detached and apathetic.



As the car leaves the city, the grassy green and metropolitan grey slowly make place for a completely monotone beige and brown scenery. We're leaving civilization; the rigid, crowded structure of the city makes place for the vast simplicity of the wilderness.



This scene does go on for a while, actually. This is a pretty slow-paced movie in its entirety, and there's something very monotone and dreary about this stretch of emotionless driving. We haven't even seen the driver of this car yet, but his choice in radio program and complete disinterest in his surroundings, just moving slowly from point A to point B already makes him look like the most boring person in the universe.



Finally having completely left ordered civilization behind, the camera breathes a sigh of relief and stretches its wings, finally giving us a shot of the car and its driver.

Meet David Mann and his crafty orange Valiant, and well, he certainly does live in the 70s.

What's interesting is what part of the radio chatter the first shot of our main character coincides with. A caller is complaining that he is not actually the head of his household - it's his wife who's wearing the pants in the relationship, and he's so ashamed about this that he isn't even willing to mark her as the breadwinner in a simple form. After the dreary and emotionless intro, this somewhat unnerving example of extreme masculine insecurity and covert misogyny coupled with the first actual human face we see in the movie causes our first actual emotional response to it, subconsciously binding these two impressions together, establishing without a single word from Dave how insecure he is. And boy, he certainly is insecure.

Steven Spielberg was a really talented director even in his early days, can you tell?





Dave's car eventually comes up to an obstacle on the road, a particularly pollutant, extremely rusted and ratty old fuel tanker. Hoo boy, meet Death, Destroyer of Worlds.





I'm not sure having that many number plates is entirely legal, yo. Dave slowly overtakes the behemoth, and moves on unimpeded. Guess he's got more boring road ahead of him!



...Or not, wait what? So far, the entire movie has been really slow and deliberate, devoting like 10 seconds just to the action of Dave passing the truck. And suddenly, it just zips past him in like a second flat, leaving Dave pretty disgruntled - particularly after it just slows right back down after passing him. Of course, Dave will not stand for this insult to his masculinity, and overtakes again.



The truck doesn't take this so well either, and starts shouting at Dave with its horn.



He doesn't make much of it though, they both stop to fuel up, and we finally get a look at the truck driver...s feet. These and

his arm are all we'll ever see of him, for the entire movie. I also love this line of the script: "Camera keeps withdrawing until we see the full truck and trailer dwarf Mann's car. In relative size, it's like seeing a tug boat beside an ocean liner."

Mann makes a call to his wife, but all it does establish is that yep, they're a regular Hollywood-middle class 70s couple with children and serious marriage issues that neither of them is willing to talk about. We don't find out much about Dave's personal life, but everything we do paints him as a pretty sad little individual.



Back on the road, he waves for the truck to overtake him, but of course, as soon as it gets in front of him, it slows down to a crawl immediately. Dave is starting to get seriously annoyed, and it's becoming clear that he's starting to see his interaction with the creature as some kind of strange competition, his insecurity causing him to become genuinely jealous of the enormous, rusted man-machine. And so, he decides to enter a dickwaving contest with a god.

Well, the god seems to be amused by the idea, and starts playing along. As Dave tries to overtake, it actually switches lanes and blocks his path, until its driver finally copies Dave's waving-through gesture, ostensibly letting him pass, except...



Compare this waving motion to the one Dave made. His was disorganized, frantic and frustrated, while the truck driver's movement is slow, serene and consistent.





Yup, it straight up nearly makes him crash into another car.

Alright, so maybe it's time to talk about this film's actual concept in detail. See, the truck is our antagonist for this movie. But the interesting thing is, we never actually are shown what its deal is. It goes from toying with Dave to nearly murdering him in a second flat, and we never even find out what he did to displease it so in the first place.

I've been referring to the truck as a creature rather than a vehicle driven by a human because, well... It's questionable whether the human "driving" it is *even a real person in the first place*. We never see anything more of him but his arm and his feet, and occasionally he just seems to disappear from existence. In fact, the truck itself appears unbound by the laws of nature. With Dave's car, we're constantly reminded of its physical (and Dave's psychological) limits in form of its various gauges. It needs to refuel, it has a speed limit, a temperature limit etc... Well, the truck can just go however goddamn fast it wants (Dave expresses exasperation with how this behemoth could accelerate so much at multiple points), and just kind of teleports from place to place later in the film.

Dave's cute little orange Valiant feels like a remnant of the first scene of the movie, its bright colour contrasting with the dull-brown wilderness around, while its straight path and adherence to the laws of physics remind us of the static camera used in the confines of the city. By contrast, the truck is right at home on the desert road, with its gnarly brown colour and contemptuous disregard for traffic laws. Whenever Dave reaches signs of civilization throughout the movie, the truck just simmers down and waits on the side until Dave goes off on the road again. And its most important, identifying factor is that it is *completely unfathomable*. Dave's ordered, stagnant life has reached a breaking point, because he's decided to pick a fight with a Coyote-esque nature trickster spirit. The most interesting part of watching this movie is just seeing what the truck is going to do next, because it appears to operate on a completely different logic from anything we know, and constantly seems to change its behaviour depending on Mann's actions.

I don't really want to keep referring to it as "the truck" and I like things having names, so from now on I am going to refer to it by the name *Dark of the Moon* would eventually give him... Megatron.



Fun fact: out of multiple possible trucks to use, Spielberg went with the Peterbilt model because its front most resembled a face. Interestingly, the Peterbilt truck prominently featured in *Transformers* is *Optimus Prime* - Megatron as he appears in *Dark Moon* is actually a *Mack* truck. Of course, that won't be relevant until we get there.



Megatron chases Dave all the way to a café, where the poor man crashes into a fence. We get an extended scene of Mann being a tattered mess, and then, well.





Dave reasons that if the truck stopped here, its driver must be in the café as well. And surely, now that the driver has left his giant metal murder-shell, he should be possible to confront, right?

What's amazing about this scene is just how awkward and terrible he is about dealing with this possibility. He tries to identify the correct person by the boots, but of course, they're all truckers, all their boots are pretty much identical. So Dave plays through multiple possible scenarios in his head, but always stops himself with "no, that's not going to work". Really, it's just kind of amazing seeing how horribly repressed Dave is: The idea of just going up to the men and asking "yo, which one of you drives that tanker" never even *occurs* to him, and so he's stuck sitting in his little chair, playing My Little Conspiracy, perceiving every single person in the room as a potential threat to his life.



It comes to a point when Mann finally snaps and directly confronts a random person, making vague allusions that make no sense to the poor fellow and eventually escalating things to a straight-up bar fight.

This scene gets really interesting when you see it from the perspective of the fellow he's attacking. I mean, there you are, sitting in a café, in the middle of a tiresome and difficult trip, and then there's this crazy man just walking up to you and telling you to "cut it out", then catapulting your sandwich out of your hand. In the end, how is Dave's behaviour not any less unfathomable to his victim than Megatron waving him into an oncoming car? Here, the movie highlights the serious lack of *communication* going on. The café man knows nothing about Dave who knows nothing about Megatron, and as such any action is immediately interpreted as pointless hostility. Notice also Dave's marriage issues coming primarily from him being unable to talk to his wife about anything.



Further on his way, Dave encounters a stuck school bus. The bus driver tries to motivate him to push the bus out, but Mann argues against trying, arguing that his car will just go under the bus, the car is not strong enough etc... Notice Mann's cynicism immediately getting in the way of him actually trying to help the children. Well, eventually they manage to convince him, but it turns out he was right. His car just isn't strong enough. However, it's pretty clear that Mann experiences any of the

car's failings clearly as his own - he nearly bursts into tears, and it becomes clear just how much of his self-worth is tied to his stupid little Valiant. He's so concerned with it being dentless he doesn't even allow children to sit on the hood, in spite of just crashing into a fence at ~80MPH. This is because well, a car is usually a symbol of machismo - and it's pretty obvious that Dave has the rest of his own failing masculinity completely projected onto the car. This importance of the car to his self-worth is a pretty important aspect of the movie.



And well, guess who finally made an appearance again, actually having *turned around* to continue stalking Dave. He stops, and just *observes*.

Dave himself completely loses his shit, and takes off in a huff, leaving a bewildered bus driver and kids behind. As for Megatron?



Yep, he turns around and pushes the bus out of its predicament. Megatron, friend to children everywhere. It's a pretty weird little act of compassion, from a being that's supposedly completely motivated by chaos and murder.



Afterwards, we get a quick glimpse of another character who'll play a bit of a role. Yep, that train is an actual character. Because again, I like things having names, I'm going to call it Astrotrain, because that's the first train-based Decepticon I can think of. Whether it also transforms into a space shuttle remains unconfirmed.



While Dave just kind of waits for Astrotrain to pass, guess who's done helping children. Yup, Megatron begins to very slightly push Dave's car along, threatening to smash it against his buddy.

At this point it becomes clear that Megs is not actually out to murder Dave at all. See, if he just wanted to kill him, he could

just ram into the Valiant at full speed, *flattening* it against the train. But he doesn't. Instead, he just kind of threateningly pushes it forward a centimetre at a time, unnerving Dave quite a bit but not actually doing any sort of harm or damage, eventually just letting him continue on once Astrotrain has passed. What's interesting is that it never even occurs to Dave to just *leave the car* - in fact, he proves remarkably resistant to the idea of abandoning the Valiant.

After all, out here, it's everything he has.



On their way forward, Megatron and Astrotrain exchange sounds from their horns - almost as if they're having a conversation. The movie suggests that Astrotrain is the same kind of "nature spirit" Megatron is. It's a mostly drab and colourless transport vehicle, unbound by the laws of space and time and steered by an invisible driver. What's curious, however, is that its *personality* seems to differ. It's the king of its own little set of tracks orbiting the main road, uncaringly moving along and not interfering in the world of mortals. If Megatron is the malevolent, mysterious side of nature, then Astrotrain is its apathetic and simple side.

Honestly, I'd really love to understand what they're "talking" about.



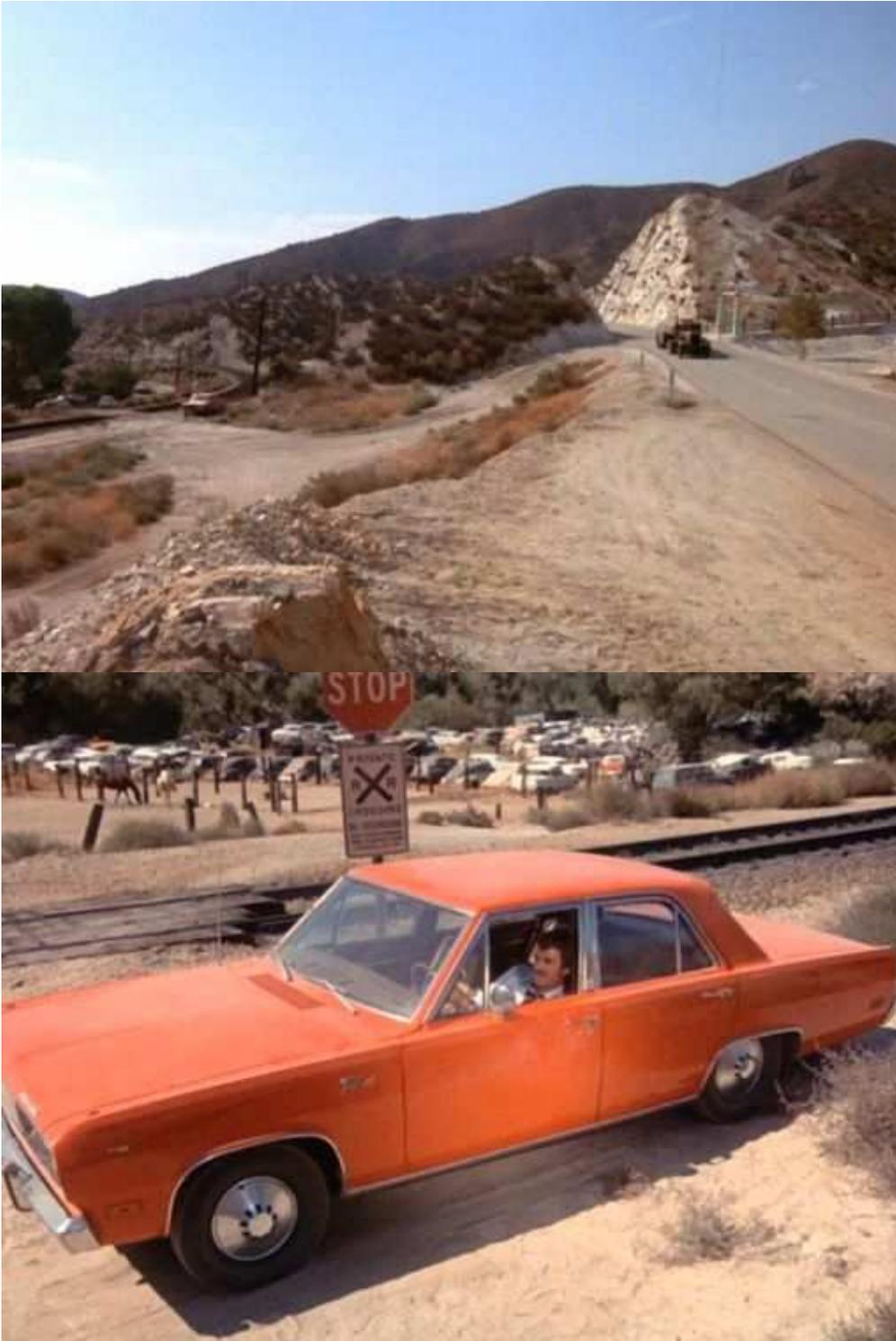
Dave stops to refuel at a strange snake-themed gas station, while Megatron continues to simply wait and observe. Dave then has a very, very bad idea: Trying to call the police.





Megs starts *tearing the place up*, running over various animal cages in his attempt to flatten Dave. This is the first time in the film he actually stopped just kind of playing around and started putting all of his force into murdering his target, and the sudden change from him just sitting around and observing to causing massive amounts of collateral damage trying to run over a defenceless being is pretty frightening. He does *not* like the idea of Mann getting the police involved.

And even so, he still gives Dave ample warning before running him over by tooting his horn.



Dave manages to escape by getting in his car, and, after a short drive, duck away behind a hill. He decides to wait out the

storm - just stop for a couple of hours until his nemesis is far away.



After a loving montage of a nearby scrapheap, Dave is suddenly shaken awake by an all-too-familiar motor sound and horn...
Megatron is back!



Nah, it's just Astrotrain. But the fascinating thing about this scene is: Dave laughs. After a full hour of dull emotionlessness, at best mild amusement and sheer misaimed rage, this is the first time we see Dave actually express a positive emotion - relief. It's completely unlike anything we've seen Dave to be so far, and it almost makes him... Likeable? Happily, he drives off until



Yep, his troubles are not yet over. Megatron appears to have calmed down quite a bit though, and is back to mostly just sitting there and observing. Seeing his reactions to various things Dave does is quite fascinating - when Dave tries to dash past him in his car, Megs moves forward and blocks the way imposingly. As Dave approaches on foot, Megs simply *drives off*, then returns when Dave approaches his car again. At this point you start getting the real sense that for some reason,

Megatron *really wants Dave to leave his car behind*. The only time he attacked Dave on-foot was when he tried to call the police, seeing him trek across the desert road on foot causes him to leave Dave alone completely, and that attack back at the railway crossing *could* only be interpreted as him trying to scare Dave out of the car. It's kind of weird, but slowly, you can start getting an idea of what Megatron actually *wants*.



Of course, Dave doesn't know any of that, so he stops a passing old couple to ask them to make a call to the police. Of course, we all know what Megs thinks of that, so he shoos away the old couple, but actually remains remarkably calm otherwise. As Dave runs for safety in the desert, he threateningly builds himself up in front of the car - as if to say, *stay away from this* - and then returns to his little waiting spot.





Dave *still* doesn't get the message, and returns to the car, rolling up to the truck. The holographic driver within stretches out his arm, and repeats the gentle "you may pass" motion he copied off Dave - an invitation to death. Dave accepts the challenge.





And then decides to settle the issue by outrunning the physics-defying hate machine. Yup. Surprisingly, this works for a little while, until...



Yup, fences. For some reason, they appear to present an insurmountable obstacle to Dave, and he wobbles a bit on the approach, then swerves off onto a side road at the last second.



Megatron, of course, plows right through. This film is generally pretty light on symbolic imagery, but the appearance of fences during this last bit is pretty important.



Remember how the first time Dave actually *ran* from Megatron, it caused him to smash into a fence and break it? Now, again, his increased speed causes him to trip over fences left and right, injuring him in the process.

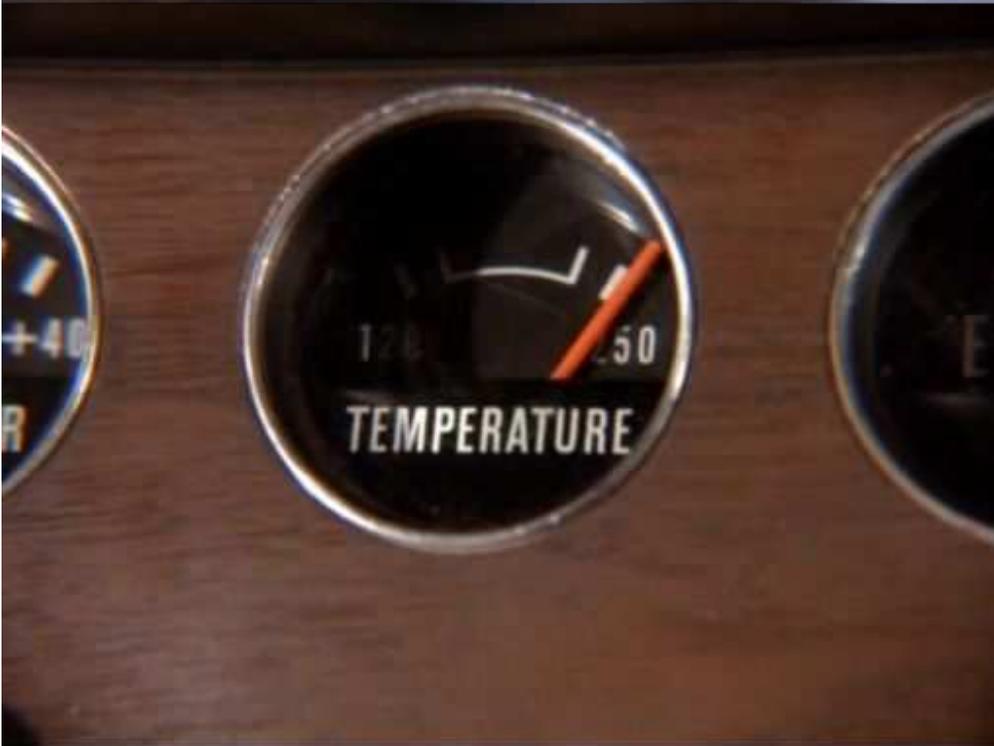




Astrotrain makes his last little appearance, and he has another short little “conversation” with Megatron. Megs shouts at Astrotrain, who returns the noise, but increasingly falls behind and leaves the frame. Compared to their last toot-off, this one seems much more angry and urgent, which gives me the impression that the two actually got into a bit of a fight offscreen, and now Astrotrain is trying to stop Megatron from whatever it is he’s trying to do while the truck himself just ends up moving away from, and ignoring his buddy. There’s this very real implication that Megatron actually has some kind of life on his own, social contacts and values and such, but Dave never sees any of it - from the first minute to the last, his antagonist is just a mad man driving a rusty truck trying to kill him because Dave overtook him.



More fences, and Dave tries his best to avoid them, but ultimately fails. It's kind of absurd how even in this life-or-death situation, Dave still insists on following all the traffic signs - but why wouldn't he? All his life has ever been about is following signs and pre-paved roads. Everything around him led him into this perfectly stereotypical idea of life as a husband and worker, sitting in his little dim car and spending entire days of his life just moving from point A to point B at 60 MPH in a straight line. All of his life, he's been entirely fenced in. He doesn't *know* a world beyond the rigid, strict regulations they provide. As far as he is concerned, beyond these road barriers, the world is over. And suddenly, his empty, structured life is broken up by this... Creature, this malevolent force that he just cannot understand is bearing down on him, and everything he thought about how the world works is slowly crumbling apart under its enormous pressure. And so, just in his attempts to survive, Dave crashes into more and more of these fences of his, and one by one, they slowly start breaking down...



But there's one limit he cannot surpass. In spite of how much of his self-worth was tied to his little car, Dave neglected it just a little too much - his damaged radiator fries completely, and the car quickly begins overheating. Dave tries to push it, but you don't need to be an actual car mechanic to know that once something's wrong with your engine, trying to keep going is just going to fuck it up even further. But, well, as far as he thinks, he has no other choice - he keeps his foot on the gas pedal.



However, against all reason, after picking up some speed on a downhill race and basically rebooting the car, it picks up speed again - and continues going. It's just so absurd - by all reason, this car should have broken down a while ago. But it keeps going. The final fence Dave breaks is the barrier of the laws of mechanics itself.





In the final showdown, Dave ends up finally discarding every law, every idea of common sense from his mind, turns his car's back to a chasm, and drives directly toward the onrolling behemoth -



Then jumps out at the last minute, finally abandoning the car he had tied so much ire to, and watching Megatron push it straight over the edge, following along. With a last cry from its horn, it bears over the edge and into the chasm.



And once again, we see Dave express pure emotion - it's not even really clear *what* he's feeling, being joy or terror or relief or anger, because there just seems to be so much going on in his head, but there's something very *liberated* about him compared to his horrible, repressed self earlier in the movie.



In the end, Megatron went not after Dave, but *after his car*. Even after Mann jumped out, the truck made no attempt whatsoever to turn around and go after him, instead continuing in a straight line, pushing the car along. You see, if you look closely, you realize that it was not Dave's life he was after - he could have killed him at multiple points easily, but instead he would always wait and observe, as if to see whether Mann was going to do the right thing. But why?

David Mann is a sad example of a human being, really. He's a perfect example of masculine frustration, being unable to deal with his family life and projecting his failing self-worth onto an object. What he never realizes is that his problem isn't his car, or his wife, but his *society*. He's living on a path pre-dictated by his cultural norms, and norms he clearly doesn't fit, and suffers under. He's trapped, fenced in by the very car he practically holds as the most valuable part of himself. In the end, it is only by breaking through these psychological constraints that he manages to give up this false idea of being, and defeat the spirit that haunts him.

Yet it's never clear *why* Megatron is so interested in Dave leaving this negative aspect of his life behind. Is he actually some kind of guardian angel, trying to save a man? Is it just spite against the material capitalist world, a petty attack on an infinitely tiny aspect of the society he abhors? Throughout the entire film, he seems like he wants Dave to do something very particular - but his attempts at communication are strange and unclear, and just paint him as a pointless aggressor, which seems to suggest that he doesn't understand *us* the same way we don't understand *him*. In the end, does he die because he saw no other way to truly rid Dave of the damnable car, or was there a deeper reason why he needed to destroy himself (since he had ample time to stop before going over the cliff)? In the end, just at the last second, he hits the brakes; Second thoughts? Was Astrotrain trying to stop him, knowing what his attack would lead to? All things we never find out.



Ultimately, all we're left with is David Mann, sitting in the sunset, unsure how to continue his life. Shocked out of his regulated and stagnated lifestyle, he finds himself at the beginning of a new life. Where he sits in the sunset, drained and exhausted, there exists an implied *sunrise*, a new start from which he can begin unraveling the paths that led him to this point. Come tomorrow, he'll be a new man - and perhaps a better man as well.

Ultimately, *Duel* is a fairly simple movie. It shows us a simple encounter between man and nature, driven by a total lack of communication, which may have ended well... Or perhaps not. It leaves a lot up to individual interpretation.

And I feel all of this is very important going into *Dark of the Moon*. You really need to see *Duel* beforehand just to see

this *contrast* - to see it take a lot of the simple, open-ended elements of *Duel* and twist them beyond recognition. A lot of what I wrote about *Revenge* and what I will write about *Dark Moon* seems pretty absurd, recontextualizing simple shots and images through fourteen layers of film theory until they express something completely bizarre and extreme. And I think it's important to underline that this is not my imagination running wild or anything - it's important to put *Dark Moon* into context with its prequel *Duel* just to see *what a balls-far-out fucking movie it is*. If you haven't watched *Duel* before reading this post (shameful!), please do so now, and just keep the simplicity of its ideas and images in mind as we go on this magical journey together.

Dark of the Moon (2011)

Part 1: “Strap in, kids. It's going to get fucking weird...”

Yo, there will be music in most these updates because the DOTM soundtrack is *really* good. (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Main Title / Moon Mission <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGg49c4oNIw>)

Upon release, *Dark Side Moon* was treated with pretty little fanfare. “Better than ROTF, worse than 2007” was pretty much both the best and the worst thing anyone ever said about it.

So why is it that I just spent the entire thread hyping up a barely notable movie like this? If it’s neither as insane as ROTF nor as memorable as 2007, how can it be such a complex movie? Well, let me set one thing straight.

I fucking *love* *Dark Side Moon*.

Sometimes, when I hear other people discuss the movie, I end up wondering whether I’ve actually seen the same film as everyone else or some kind of bizarre Chinese bootleg copy. Even now I can’t really bring myself to regard *Transformers (2007)* or *Revenge* with anything better than apprehensive appreciation, but *Dark Moon* just stands head and shoulders above them. The first movie was setup, the second a mess, and now we have our payoff. And I will say, completely without irony, that it forms one of my top 5 favorite movies *period* - and definitely the reason why I made this thread, because on some level I’m hoping I could help someone share this appreciation.

I think a big reason for *Dark Moon* being such a different beast than the other two films is *Revenge’s* failure. It’s immediately clear that that film went far differently than anyone wanted it to, and as a result the filmmakers ended up backpedalling from a lot of stuff that was ultimately too hot for them to handle. Mostly gone is the pointless misanthropy of the first films that culminated in the symbolic murder of the audience, as this movie is actually open, communicative and sometimes genuinely emotional. Gone are the inept and ill-fated attempts to comment on racism, making space for other topics the authors felt more comfortable handling (though it doesn’t always go well here either). And now that we’ve reached the end of the trilogy, it finally stops just throwing unresolved threads and strange occurrences everywhere and finally ties up everything we’ve seen into a neat knot, even if it takes it until the last five minutes of the movie to do it.

I’m just... There’s exactly two extended scenes in the movie that I don’t think are completely perfect in every way (Sam looking for job, “Deep Wang”). Every moment of the movie is just this completely lunatic kaleidoscope of shapes and colors and sounds and symbols, and some of the stuff that ends up rising out of this cinematic soup is just *jaw-dropping*. I’ve seen the film 4 times, and I *still* notice like a dozen new things that leave me completely aghast on every viewing. The first two films are pretty out there, but... Well, you know what? Let’s just start this and let you see for yourselves.



We begin, as always, to Optimus Prime's narration, only this time it takes place over the prettiest rail shooter segment I have ever seen. He talks about the war - good Autobots fought for freedom, evil Decepticons for tyranny yadda yadda. Only this time, he begins to reluctantly state something unusual...



"We were outnumbered, and outmatched."



"A desperate mission... Our final hope."



"A hope... That vanished"



He cannot actually say it. Of course, it wouldn't be unlike our manipulative narrator to just state an important detail like that. He tries to dance around it, but there's no avoiding it. Even he can't twist the truth that far.

The Autobots were losing. They had one last chance.

They failed.

The entire previous two movies were built around the central premise of the war between Autobots and Decepticons. A war between equals, a stalemate that lasted eons before they finally found earth.

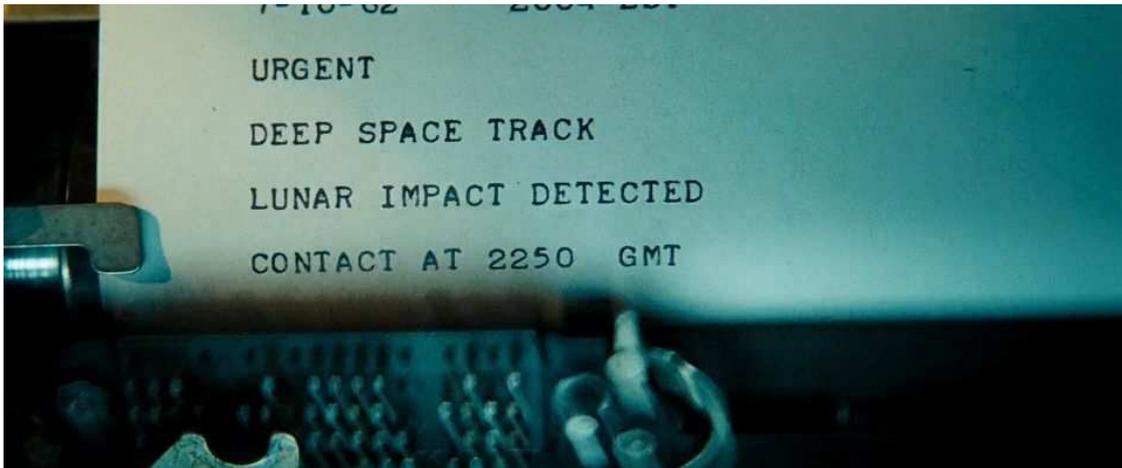
But as we watch *Dark Side Moon*, an inescapable fact dawns upon an observant viewer. There is no war. The war is *over*. The Autobots *lost*.

The entire central conceit of the trilogy, the very first thing we hear established at the very beginning of the first movie, is all a lie spun by Optimus, unwilling to admit defeat even as it stared him straight in the face. Why do we see working class Decepticons, but no Autobot civilians, and why can the Autobots be counted on two hands while the Decepticons have millions of grunts? Because there *are* no more Autobot civilians, they have been eradicated. Why was Optimus so obsessed with destroying the Allspark instead of taking it so *he* could revive Cybertron instead of Megatron? Because *Cybertron belongs to the Decepticons now*. And in fact, remember how MilkyMoor noted that Optimus doesn't even consider defeating the Decepticons as a way to end the war instead of destroying the one thing that could save their species? That's because there was *no hope* of him being able to defeat them, because it would mean defeating the *entire transformer species*. All he could do was destroy the thing that could keep them alive and let entropy do the rest of the work.

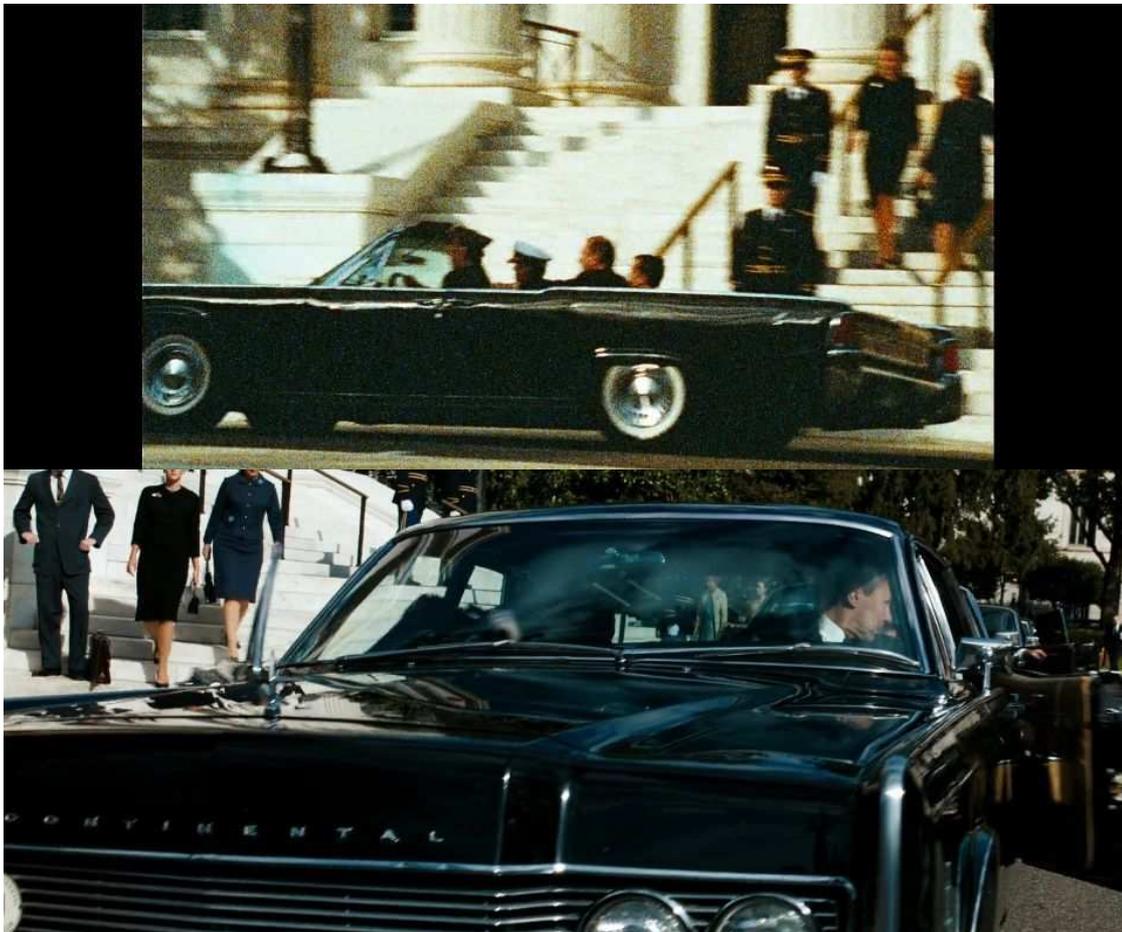
All along, the battle was never between two alien races one of whom humans decided to ally themselves with. The Autobots we see in the movies are not the vanguard of an organized military force, but merely remnants seeking to sabotage their victorious foe out of sheer spite and hatred. And Optimus has succeeded in manipulating them into re-igniting a war that he himself could not win.

Remember Megatron saying "you still fight for the weak, that is why you *lose*" at the end of the first movie? "The weak" does not refer to humanity, because that would make no sense. It refers to the *Autobots*.

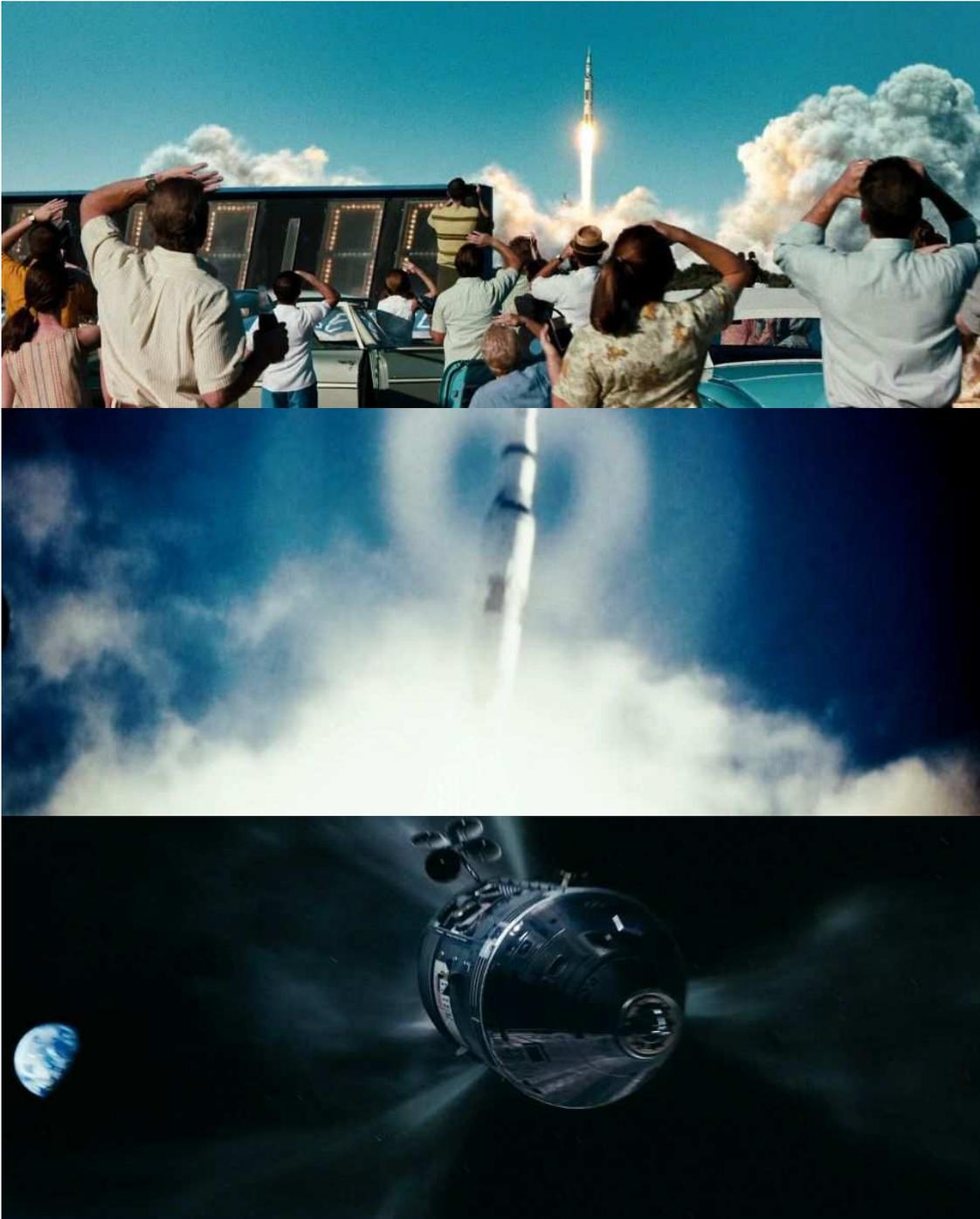
Well. We certainly started on a bombshell, didn't we.



Scene shift to the 1960s! Uh... Okay, sure?







The movie then does something *incredibly weird*. I'm not even sure how to put this into words. It starts harshly intercutting historical footage of John F. Kennedy and the first moon landing with modern re-enactments of those times, sometimes in clear HD-vision and sometimes with incredibly fake old-timey film filters applied, with a generous helping of CGI while, completely independently of that, we switch between actual recorded audio clips from that time and ridiculous exposition about UFOs on the moon.

It's... Remember the first real scene of the trilogy and how it used harsh cuts to create a deliberate contrast between humanity

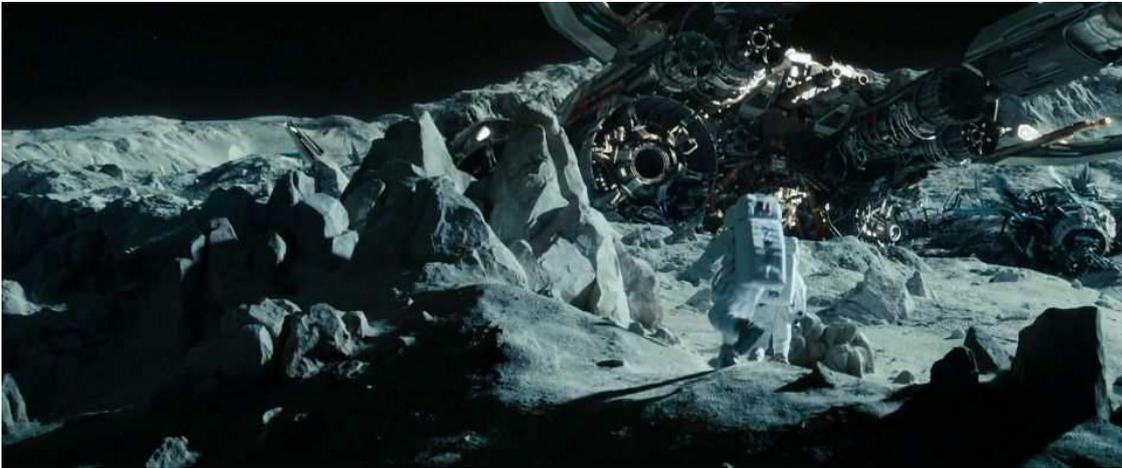
and the transformers? Well, this is kind of a callback to that. Only this time, the contrast is between the actual, real historical footage and the clean, sterile Hollywood-re-enactment.



While the real world looks on, a toy-like Neil Armstrong replica climbs out of the prop-shuttle and onto a CGI-laced recreation of the moon.

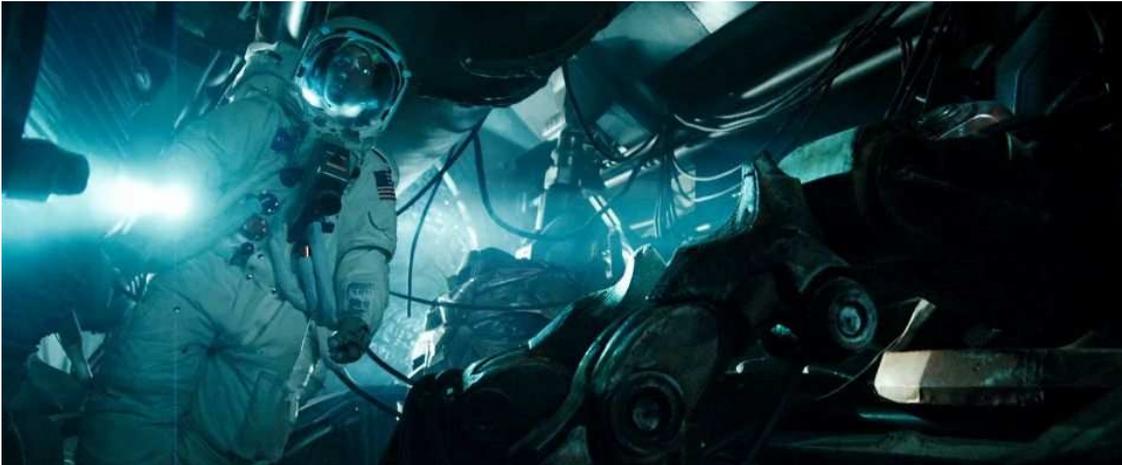


The simulated dunes reflect in the visors of the pretend-astronauts, calling to mind the pop culture image of a skeleton in a space suit while tilt-shift-esque photography makes the scene look as though it was built in miniature.



Remember those conspiracy theories about how the actual moon-landing footage is faked because the astronauts didn't jump right or didn't kick up enough dust or whatever? *Dark Side Moon* stretches these ideas to the point of caricature. We clearly see what are slightly slowed-down earth-gravity jumps in a completely sterile environment, while in the distance glimmers what can only be a mad artist's flight of fancy.





The real sounds and images start to thin out, and eventually completely make way for the Ark's CGI-insanity. The fake astronauts have entered a new world, one much unlike our own. The movie contrasts the reality of Apollo 11 with the simulated *hyperreality* of this film's universe. The contrast of the fake and the real, the foreign and strange with the oft-repeated and familiar makes the actual footage of the moon landing somehow feel so much closer and more, well, *actual*, while the conspiracy-narrative of the movie end up being so much more *artificial*.



Transformers: Dark of the Moon is a movie.



A piece of fiction, a simulation, a narrative crafted by sets and actors and computer animation.



It is not like the moon landings, or JFK, or the people watching the screen. It's *not* real. It's *fake*.



Why the heavy focus on conspiracy theories? Because a conspiracy is, at its core, an attempt of a human being to override simple, stark reality with a structured, purposeful narrative.



Because it is this separation from reality, this total rejection of the *real* in favor of the *symbolic*, is what allows this film's story to be told.



But no story is ever *just* a story. And in a roundabout way, a story can change reality itself.

Thulsa Doom posted:

It's amazing how *Dark of the Moon* does the same thing *Independence Day* does, co-opting conspiracy theories into its narrative.

(By the by, "there were aliens on the moon!" is a real conspiracy theory advocated by real people, a sort of dark mirror counterpoint to the faked moon landings theory)

It does it with so much more verve and balls, though. Where other movies with similar plot lines come off as embarrassed, *Dark of the Moon* embraces it totally. There are no shadowed figures or composite characters who narrate a montage of faceless men shot in black and white at odd angles. Kennedy and Walter Cronkite are *right there*. Moon landing

footage is incorporated straight into the conspiracy narrative and the astronaut who finds the Ark is explicitly identified as Neil Armstrong.

It goes beyond that. They actually got Buzz Aldrin to appear in the movie, in the flesh.

Contast this against Oliver Stone's *JFK*, a three hour movie about a conspiracy that never shows the shadowy cabal in the stark, light-of-day tone *Dark of the Moon* does.

Part 2: "It is impossible to strive for the heroic life. The title of hero is bestowed by the survivors upon the fallen, who themselves know nothing of heroism."



Oh hey, Alice is back.

I mean.

It seems sometime after *Revenge*, new Sam broke up with Mikaela and met a new ladyfriend. Most people seem to thus consider her Mikaela 2.0, only used because Megan Fox had enough of the franchise, but Carly (Rosie Huntington-Whiteley) is very much *not* Mikaela. In fact, she rather more resembles the fembot who died in the last movie. Notice how she sits on top of Sam exactly the same way Alice originally did. So Alice is dead, but now she also isn't and is actually Sam's girlfriend and not a robot? The interesting thing is that both one-off blonde woman characters from the previous movies have a proxy in this one, but where Maggie's replacement is fairly similar to her role in the first film, Alice is very different now that she's human.

We see them in a scene that is actually quite pleasant... Or rather, should be.

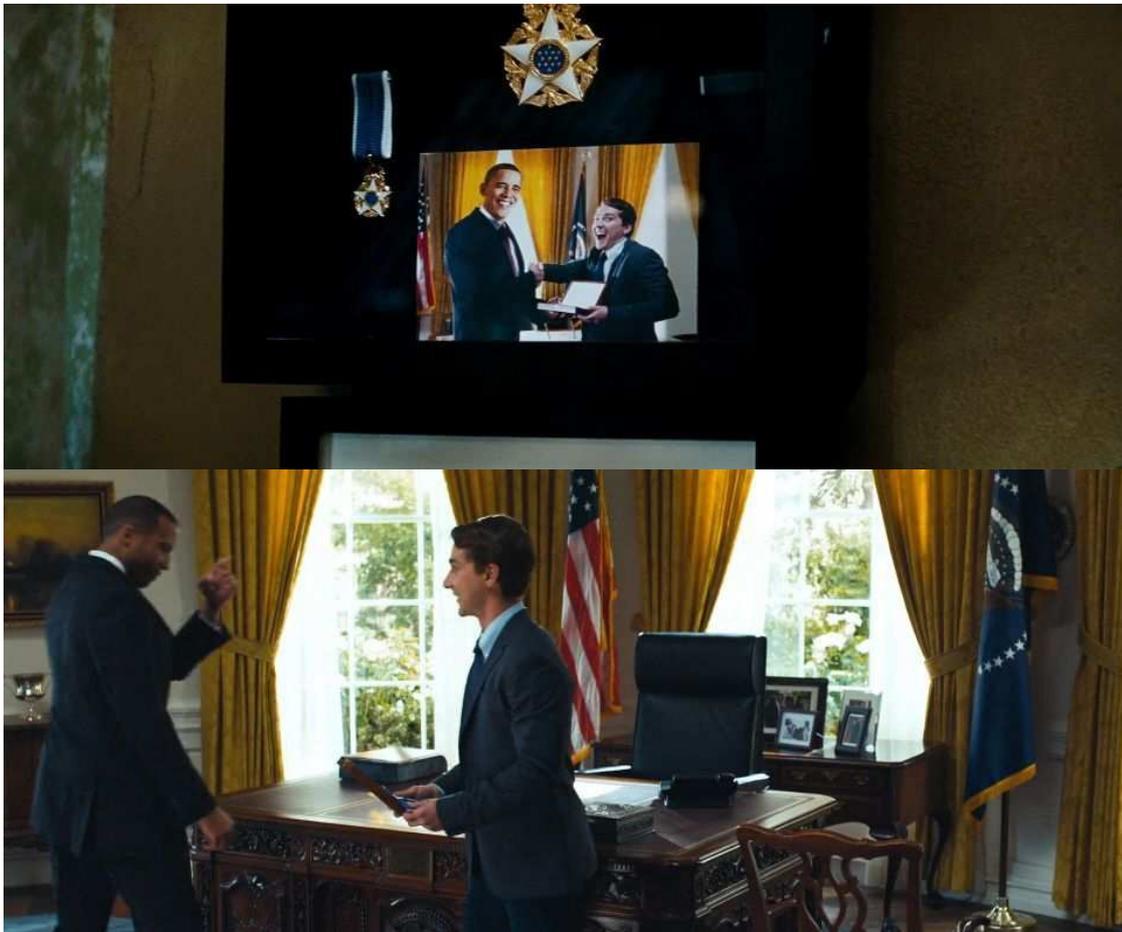
See, *Dark Side Moon's* Sam scenes are just plain weird. Ostensibly, they seem to keep going along the same thematic line as the previous movies, showing Sam's development as a person growing up. Except... Sam is dead. He died at the end of the last movie, and was replaced by an artificial, godlike version of himself. And now that very god-robot, the Allsam, is lying in a bed thinking about finding a job while conversing with his robot girlfriend who died in the last film at the hands of his real, human girlfriend.

It begins.

Everyone who watched this movie noticed how bizarre and obnoxious Sam's behavior has become. He starts out mellow, but quickly becomes an irrational, horrible bag of misplaced machismo and rage. The problem is that everyone understands that Allsam is a horrible, unlikable person - but barely anyone asks *why*.

Obviously, I can't expect anyone to come up with the idea that he's been replaced by an ancient robot artifact stealing his shape and personality, but even when Sam was still Sam, *Revenge* made it pretty clear that his personality has been degrading throughout the movie as he was absorbed more and more into the absurd myth-world of the transformers ("kill him, Bee", remember?). So where the first movie and early *Revenge* were pretty genuine in presenting Sam as a real person and an object of our empathy, *Dark Moon* holds no such delusions.

Then there's Carly. She takes a while to really develop, but the thing that's noticeable right away is the way she's treated cinematographically. The instant we see her for the first time is the most completely shameless, screen-filling butt shot probably anywhere in cinema. It comes completely out of nowhere right after the title screen, and the way it's shot is *completely unsexy* - she's immediately ridiculously objectified, but not in the "sex object" sense Mikaela was. It's objectification for objectification's sake. What's further curious is that this objectification happens at two points in the movie, once now and once when she's compared to a car... *And then never again*. It's like they just kind of checked off "objectified" on her character traits list and then stopped bothering. Even better, while in *Revenge* all female characters were to some degree purely sexual, this movie's other female-bodied characters... *Aren't*. It's right back to the first film's idea of objectifying Sam's girlfriend and *only* Sam's girlfriend.



It all started when Allsam received a medal from what the movie makes absolutely no mistake about is a poorly-chosen stand-in actor for President Obama. "I got a medal from Obama!" is one of Allsam's self-identifying traits, but the Obama who gave him a medal is a fake, same as Allsam is a fake person. The real Obama doesn't deal with murderous space robots,

he has much worse enemies: Republicans. (oh god no please don't turn this into political humor)



Well, I might try to avoid political humor, but I won't be able to avoid politics in general, because this is the most political goddamn movie I've ever seen. A barely-past-college secretary surrounded by the POTUS' sigil as if it were a halo? Are the filmmakers trying to say that the U.S. President is a girl? 🤔

(Actually, yes they are. I'm not even kidding. Look, I'll get there, alright?)



Does Shia Labeouf remind anyone else of a younger, more awkward Christian Bale in this flashback? I'm thinking *American Psycho* (2001) and *Batman Begins* (2005), mainly.

Payndz posted:

No, but Liev Schreiber, on the other hand...



He tries to act all suave and flirt with Carly, and this scene is just so perfectly silly, I kind of love it. Notice how in drawing attention to his extended manhood (here, instead of Bumblebee being the medal), he covers his own face in shadow.

Philo posted:

Oh man, I watched this movie on Netflix the other day and since then I've been waiting for this update so I could say something about that scene where Sam and his parents are coming out of the oval office. Sam has fallen behind and his parents are walking in front of him and his mom says "What a gorgeous box!" at, like, the exact moment Sam sees Carly for the first time. It is the one shot where Sam, his mom, and Carly are all in the same frame at the same time, and while it is clear that Sam's mom is looking at the actual box that the medal came in, the position of the camera makes it look like she's looking at Carly.

It is such a brief exchange, but it made me super uncomfortable before I could even really think about why. And I'm still not sure where I'm going with this but. After watching this scene, the only line that I could clearly remember was "What a gorgeous box!" I still feel kind of weird reading so much into what seems like a throw-away line, but the more I think about it the more deliberate it feels. I'm vaguely familiar that 'box' is slang for vagina, but more than that it feels like it's saying "Look at this gorgeous thing. It is very pretty but it is also empty and ultimately inconsequential." Which doesn't end up being true, but still.

Thulsa Doom posted:

It's a running gag that Sam's mother is kind of an asshole about bugging him about sex. In the first movie she wants to know if he's going to fuck Mikaela the first time they meet, and so on. She says something bizarrely sexual every time she's on screen.

It's always very uncomfortable. Now, you might think that it's unintentional, that it's just bad writing with stilted delivery by an unlikeable, unfunny actress with poor comedic timing.

And you would be wrong.

Sam's mother's obsession with sex and talking about sex is part of the symbolism of Bay's Transformer's universe. She is the

Thulsa Doom cont...

discomfort of hearing your mother talk about sex, of getting "the talk" of that point in adolescence when the strange wonder of what lies between the opposite gender's legs and exactly how you use it becomes this profoundly horrifying and traumatizing experience of hearing someone your culture has told you never to think about in the same context as sexuality give you "the talk".

That is Sam's mom's obsession with sex, lewd comments, and sexual awkwardness. She is the child's fear of the parent as a sexual being, turned up to eleven.

Like the interview montage, it's incisive and biting commentary, and part of the symbolic language of the film, disguised as a joke. A purposely bad joke.



Back in the present, Carly notices an insect.



Ah, not an insect, but a small animal. Notice how we just had what I am fairly sure is the first Transformer POV shot in the trilogy (or at least the first one that doesn't have a strange filter over it that disconnects it from the audience) - now that Sam no longer acts as the audience surrogate, the camera is a lot more liberal in where it goes and whom it represents.



Oh hi there, Bonecrusher. The movie wastes no time in establishing that Wheelie is a dog. The interesting thing here is that the dialogue seems to refuse to admit this - Sam calls him and his new buddy Brains "political refugees" or something of that note, but yeah, they're pets. "We're not your pets, and we're not your toys!" Yeah, right.

Note: Brains never did get a toy, though Wheels did.



"Aw shit I've seen this one. It's the one where Spock goes nuts."

HEY GUYS SPOCK IS IN THIS MOVIE. AND HE GOES NUTS, TOO. WHO WOULD FIGURE.



Also, Sam's parents arrive. One of the elements in this trilogy that still completely mystify me, even in this film. I just... I have no idea where to place them.



Bumblebee has been gone on "some missions", so Sam has a new old car, and... Is that David Mann's Valiant? Well, it's not a Valiant, but it looks pretty damn similar. And, of course, it serves very much the same purpose.

Allsam is very similar to Dave in many ways, and completely opposite him in many others. But one thing remains, and that's the failing masculinity embodied by a shitty 70s car.

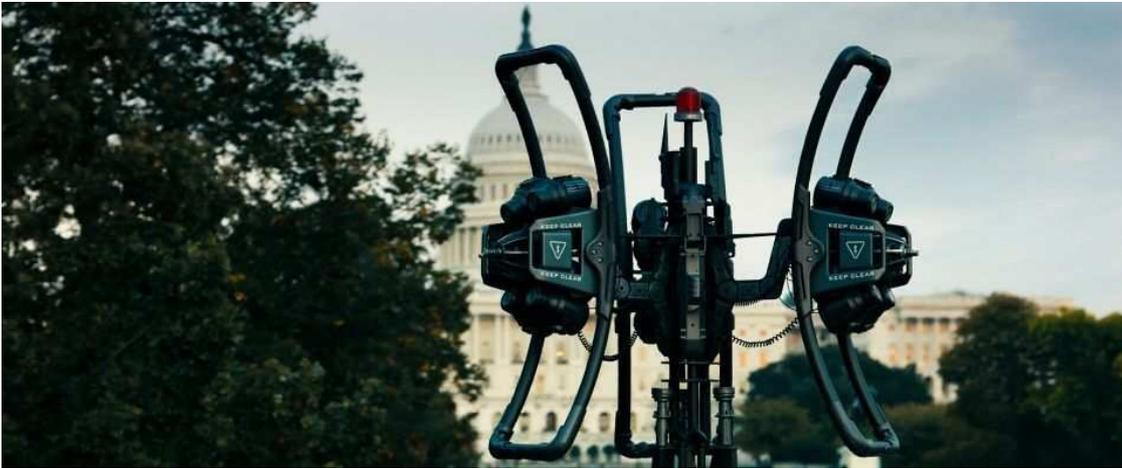
Getting his first car, for Sam, was the moment he turned from a boy to a man. When Bumblebee then turned from his rusty '74 version to the modern concept car one (you know, I forgot to note this before, but how *did* Bee stumble upon a *concept car* in some random tunnel?), it was pretty much just another huge increase to his manhood - there he was, a random teenager, riding one of the most ostentatiously American cars ever to be created with the hottest chick in town, oh and the car is also a sentient robot sidekick, and well, over the last two movies he kind of let it go to his head.

And now both Mikaela and Bumblebee are gone, and now what he has is once again this old 70s... Thing. DOTM calls back to the first movie by having the car stalling be a dramatic element, but where before it was a conscious act of another living being designed to bring him closer to his love, here it's just an apathetic act of god (who is still dead) that doesn't seem to accomplish anything but insulting him. Yeah, Sam does NOT handle this well.

Interestingly, while before Mikaela was responsible for keeping the car in check, Sam never, ever involves Carlie in his car problems, even though she probably knows cars (as shown later). It's kind of interesting how in spite of being clearly just a

trophy-girlfriend for Sam, she does nothing assuage his insecurity.

Also interestingly, while Sam clearly suffers from Bee's absence, he's never seen giving even the slightest bit of blame to the war machine who took him from him in the first place. So, where *is* Bee, anyway? Well.



Okay, here comes the fun part. Optimus starts narrating again, and tells us that people have straight-up put surveillance cameras all over the world to look for Decepticons. It's OK though, they aren't actually cameras, they just detect Energon radiation, so it's fine! Really! See, if the military wants to spy on you, they'll just hack into your phone instead.



And then there's... This scene. I, uh, fuck. This fucking scene.

I already love just the establishing title - just "middle east, illegal nuclear site". It doesn't bother telling us which country or anything, just that it's armland and there's a bad thing there. "Now we assist our allies in solving human conflicts", Prime explains.

Oh, you know exactly where this is going.



Yes, one of the Autobots actually scanned the defense minister's car and is now *impersonating a government official on a questionable military mission*. It's not quite up there with literal genocide, but it gets worse.



There's also a new Autobot, but he's pretty much just an Italian Sideswipe. He doesn't even have a toy because of licensing or something. When I first saw this scene, my first thought was, "is he seriously baring his weapons at a bunch of defenseless guards?" Oh, I was not ready.



Yup, Bumblebee, the good buddy, Sam's dog from space, just straight-up blows up a whole bunch of people. No explanation, no mercy, no consideration, nothing. Just a ridiculously ostentatious symbol of American Might carving bloody swathes through screaming, innocent men. And that's where the scene ends. Yes, really, that was it.

People came away from this movie thinking it was pro-America.

What the fuck movie did you watch!?

Thulsa Doom posted:

Ah, Carly. My favorite character in the entire series.

Going in cold, I expected her to be Mikaela 2.0, as you said. I'm also amused that the very first thing you pointed out is her resemblance to Alice from *Revenge*. I think that the movie builds off her resemblance there. We're meant to think Carly is a toy. She isn't. She's an educated, intelligent professional. Her objectification is put front and center so she can defy it. It's reiterated later in a scene that's supposed to make us squirm a little; Sam's objectification of her is identified with a villainous character who does the same thing. We're meant to sympathize with her and resent this obviously intelligent and thoughtful person being reduced to her tits and ass.

Thulsa Doom cont..

That contrast is intentional. The one thing about Carly is that her relationship with Sam makes absolutely no sense. She somehow takes an interest in this dork who gets her in trouble at work and makes an ass out of himself at every opportunity. Not only that, but he ends up shacking up with and mooching off of her. Sam is living the dream, here. He lives with a rich supermodel who pays his bills while he sits around watching Star Trek reruns.

Yet, he gives no fuck. His only interest in Carly is an ownership relationship. AllSam, as it were, wants arm candy to show off, doubly so because rich men whose station Sam undeservedly believes he's been cheated out of covet her.

Carly's presence in this film is a continuation of the themes of childhood regression versus adulthood present in its predecessors. Adulthood is *right there*, but Sam can't see it. He'd rather have his toys. The oncoming job interview montage softens the blow a bit; Bay is more sympathetic to the manchild audience in the post recession world than he was in *Transformers*, which came out when there was still a reasonable expectation that every young adult's life wasn't going to suck, but it's still there.

kefkafloyd posted:

I always found it funny that Bay uses Obama in these movies, when in the past he was always pretty clear about how he handled Presidents as characters (Nameless, faceless old white guys) according to the Rock and Armageddon commentaries.

Thulsa Doom posted:

Normally, movies like this avoid any semblance of reality. What Bay is going for here is to highlight the absurdity of what's going on by trying and *deliberately* failing to root it in the real world. Faceless old white men are one of the tools that filmmakers use to maintain the suspension of disbelief in a story like this, to help make it "timeless". Part of suspending disbelief is forgetting the real world a bit. We pretend that the President is the faceless man on the phone the same way we pretend there are giant robots.

Bay's films contrast the real with the unreal to highlight the absurdity of the latter. Not only do rubberhead Kennedy and Nixon and Obama coexist with giant robots, they coexist with Simmons and Frances McDormand's character. Think about that.

Jonny Angel posted:

So there's exactly one thing worth criticizing about DotM, and that's the [relative] lack of Linkin Park. I say this not because Linkin Park owns (they do though, Linkin Park owns), but because of the trend established by the first two movies.

Transformers featured a song called What I've Done off their Minutes to Midnight record, in the soundtrack, in marketing, and at two points in the film: at the start of the end credits, but more importantly *on Bumblebee's radio* as Sam's dropping off Mikaela at her house. Bumblebee's practice of sending coded messages through the songs on his radio is well-known at this point in the thread, cf. the songs he plays when it's *Alice* that's being given a ride home (Superfreak, Brick House, am I missing anything?). Sizing up potential mates for his master is kinda a thing.

Jonny Angel cont...

So what's What I've Done about? Well, mostly acknowledging the tremendous gravity of one's past mistakes while making a pledge to unilaterally beyond them: "Today this ends, I'm forgiving what I've done." So why the hell play that as Sam's dropping Mikaela off? Sarcasm is a possibility, facetiously comparing Sam's #firstworldproblems to the global catastrophes and exploitations referenced in the What I've Done music video, but I'm not really convinced. Keep in mind that this is still a very early Bumblebee, when he's still the adorable loyal dog Transformer and not Optimus's favorite battle hound.

Here's the thing though: if it's sincere, that just makes it worse. This is Bumblebee expressing joy on behalf of Sam's good fortune, but he's choosing to express it in this hyperbolized form that calls less attention to the good news ahead and more attention to the fact that sam, pre-having-a-Bumblebee and pre-having-a-girlfriend, was a tremendous fuckup. Bumblebee is literally comparing Sam's earlier life to genocide and he doesn't even conceive of it as an insult.

So onto *Revenge of the Fallen*. This time, Linkin Park straight up wrote a song for the movie, called New Divide. What's more, the recurring movements in Jablonsky's score are actually just orchestrated variations on New Divide, meaning that at any given time what you're listening to is likely Linkin Park. I think the song itself is also just played at one point, but it's been three years since I've seen the film and it was with the loudest, awesomest crowd I've ever had in a theater (Shanghainese people *fucking love* Transformers) so a lot of the subtlety was admittedly lost on me.

The best part of this all is the actual content of New Divide. It's got a rousing, heroic guitar line to it, and it follows perfectly that you could use an orchestral version to signal a film about giant robots plus the military fighting other giant robots, but Christ, the lyrics. Two things are clear: that it's a sequel to What I've Done, the same speaker reflecting on the results of his pledge to leave his sins behind, and that he's *utterly failed*. There's apocalyptic imagery, there's begging for his fears to be proven wrong, there's lashing out at a hypothetical "you" for complicity in these failures, and there's the recurring doubt before each chorus: "Did I get what I deserve?" Fuck!

This is absolutely the song to be playing during *Revenge of the Fallen*. The freedom, safety, and personal growth that was promised by the Autobots' victory at the end of *Transformers* (remember what song was playing at the start of the end credits?) never materialized, so there's all the reason in the world to be afraid and lash out. The most reasonable guess for the identity of "you" is a lover, and... remember Sam's indecisive, manipulative, neglectful behavior towards Mikaela? Yeah, this is the song that's constantly playing over a movie that has an ostensible arc of its protagonist growing the courage to commit to his girlfriend. This is actually what he's thinking.

Sadly, *Dark of the Moon* dials back on this a little. In its defense, it still contains a song from their fourth record, A Thousand Suns, called Iridescent. Wikipedia says the song's in the credits and "playing throughout", but I saw DotM before I heard that record so I'm unable to comment on its specific use as much. Honestly, I was hoping for the expansion of Linkin Park's role to continue, for actual film composer Mike Shinoda (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Raid:_Redemption#The_Raid:_Redemption_score) to write its score, for Chester Bennington to appear in a cameo role, something to barrel further towards the idea that the Transformers films and Linkin Park form a cohesive unit. Alas.

I will say though about Iridescent's lyrical content: it's even more apocalyptic than New Divide, but this time it's the *audience* rather than the *speaker* who's in that state. The speaker is just there to narrate the utter shit and devastation that "you" have been through, all the emotional wreckage, lack of support systems, etc. He offers one piece of advice: "Let it go". This is not the triumphant self-reinvention promised by What I've Done, or the terrified defense mechanisms of New Divide. This is just looking at at a fundamentally broken person and telling them "Let [all the sadness and frustration] go".

UrbanLabyrinth posted:

This [...] just reminded me that on the album that contains Iridescent, there's an intro track (Wisdom, Justice, and Love) that leads directly into it. It's an adaptation of a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>) on the subject of the horrors and injustice of war.

"I come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice.

A true revolution of values will lay hand on the world order and say of war,

"This way of settling differences is not just."

This business of burning human beings with napalm,

of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows,

of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane,

of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged,

cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love.

Cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love."

As the track goes on, it becomes more and more mechanical, with the voice transformed into a noisy robotic drone.

Intentional? Probably not. Interesting? Definitely.

Part 3: "God is on your side? Is He a Conservative? The Devil's on my side, he's a good Communist."

Music, comrades! (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Earthly Conflicts / Discovery Chernobyl
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyjqMWk4n8Y>)



Well, the movie certainly wastes no time setting the scene this time. CHERNOBYL, the Cyrillic proudly proclaims, while a radiation warning looms just at the corner of the screen. I was actually born near Chernobyl and affected by the disaster, so this is going to be extra fun for me.



HiriseSoftware, is that you, second from left?

HiriseSoftware posted:

Yep, that's definitely me! You're treated to my ass in exactly the same way as you are introduced to Carly's ass! They had me carry a genuine Russian newspaper, can you tell? We did that one little shot in at least 10 takes. Stand in a position – walk forward, rinse, repeat. I got to see Michael Bay get mad at one of his crew 😊

Best 10.5 hours at \$8 a hour ever!

This is actually the Fisher Building in Detroit, by the way.



The contractor for this particular mission is one Mr. Voshkod, whose last name is literally “east” in Russian. (“Sunrise”, actually, as Xander77pointed out. *Vostok*, the actual word for “east”, is derived from *Voskhod*, though.) *Dark Moon* is a return to the first movie in many ways, and one of those is the way all of America’s “enemies” are lumped in together into a strange monolithic whole. They’re just The East, which in modern culture has become pretty much synonymous with The Other.



Speaking of lumping together into monolithic wholes, in this movie Pripyat and Chernobyl are literally one place (IRL, Pripyat is about 4 kilometers away from Chernobyl). The movie warps space to condense a real location into a single movie set.



The interesting thing is that in spite actually being kind of tense, this scene seriously *downplays* how creepy and terrifying the real Pripyat is.







Seriously, check this Silent Hill shit out. (<http://villageofjoy.com/chernobyl-today-a-creepy-story-told-in-pictures/>)

It gets even stranger when they start talking about the Radiation. “I hear it won’t be livable again for another 20 000 years”, Lennox exposit, and then starts bugging Voshkod about how he’s not wearing security equipment, to which the man just sighs and replies he’s dying anyway. Ukrainians are bleak fucking people, the movie certainly got that right. Thing is... Pripyat is *not actually all that radioactive anymore*. Most of the shit that was spewed there from Chernobyl were short-lived isotopes that broke up within 30–40 years. At this point the radiation level in Pripyat isn’t that much more scary than it would be, say, in a particularly highly situated mountain town. The biggest reason it’s still labeled unlivable is, well, the exclusion zone kind of unintentionally formed a pretty awesome wildlife reserve. Yes, that’s right, animals live there.

They offer *tours* of the damn place.

So the movie paints a picture of Chernobyl the way Joe Ignorant American might paint it based on hearsay and stereotypes, and the whole thing starts coming apart at the seams the instant you do even the *littlest* bit of research. But here's the funny thing: While they make some pretty blatant and horrible mistakes, you can't say they *didn't* do their research, because they actually did get a lot of the *details* right. Some of the buildings outside are modeled pretty perfectly to real buildings, and there's a lot of nods to actual set pieces in Pripyat (the dolls, the gasmasks, etc).

But the biggest and most important difference between movie and real life is the way these set pieces are *placed*. In a movie, the director has full control. See the doll in the last picture from the movie? It's very deliberately placed where it is, orderly on the table, right in the center of the screen. It's clearly artificial, and, considering it's one of those creepy forgotten dolls, remarkably inoffensive. See the terrifying thing about Pripyat is not the creepy dolls or bodiless masks, it's that it shows us a world where *man no longer exists to control it*. The people have left or died, and nature and entropy have begun taking their due. It's not the doll that scares us, it's the fact that it is just kind of lying there on the destroyed floor, a place where it should not exist, in a state in which it should not exist. Looking at the picture of the doll in the hallway challenges our very ideas of what dolls and hallways *are*, or, in other words, it represents an encounter with the good old Lacanian Real, the sphere that exists beyond symbols and abstractions, a pure world that the human mind was never built to handle.

But the movie is not interested in the Real. It abandons the disruptive reality of the actual thing and turns Pripyat into an abstraction, a construction built from an artist's mind. It once again underlines its own constructed nature, stopping only short of showing the wood panels that hold up the building facades and a boom mic in the shot. Lennox and Voshkod are not navigating a simulation of the real Pripyat, their Pripyat is merely a symbol - an idea.



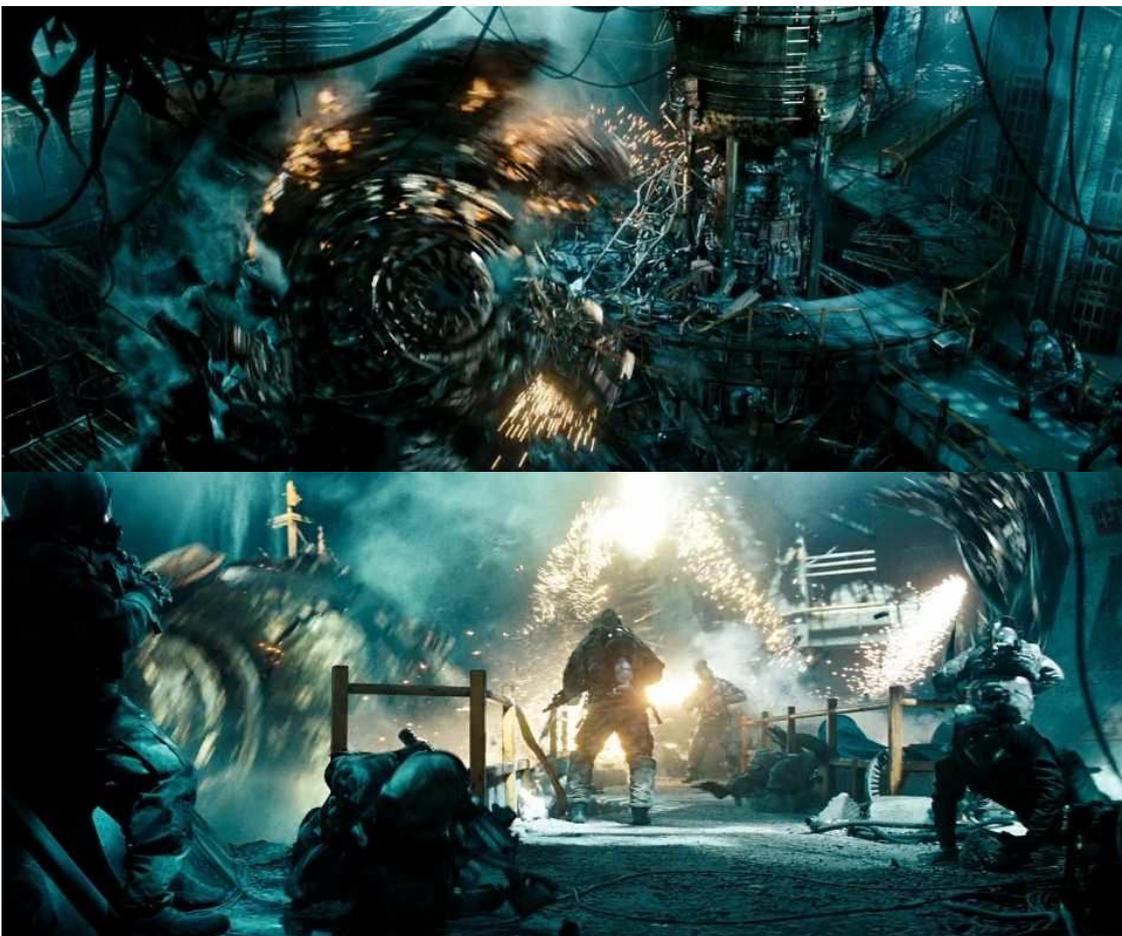
Oh, and, quite timely, here's some CGI. Meet Laserbeak, who Voshkod seems quite perturbed by. Laserbeak is... Quite the character, certainly.

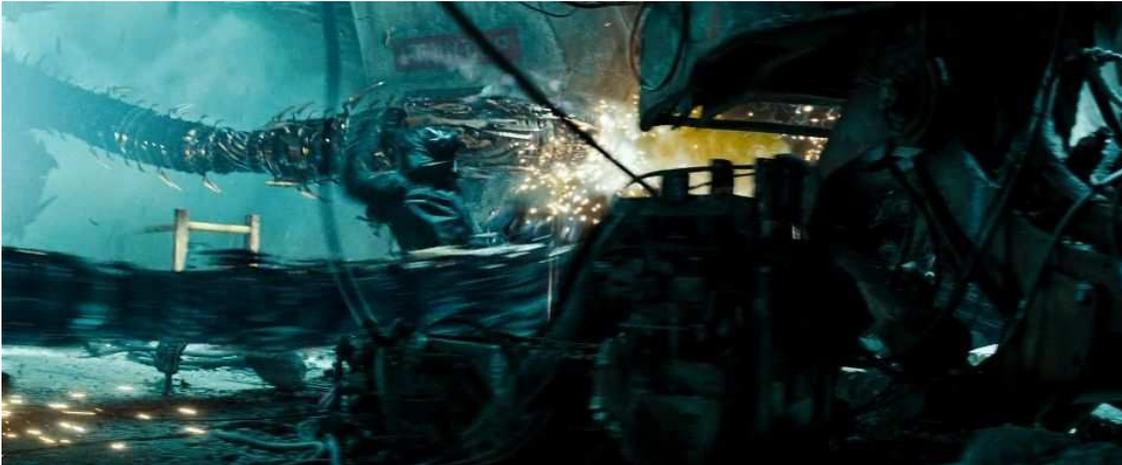


Of course, the reactor is nothing like the claustrophobic, flooded tunnels of the real deal either. Well, remember what I said about Pripyat being mostly harmless? Yyyeaaah, Chernobyl itself, not so much. All the really heavy stuff didn't make it far from the reactor core, but it's here to stay, so it'll be a couple thousand years before a human can really set foot in there again. Even with radiation suits, you can't just waltz in and make yourself at home - visitation times are strongly limited, and mostly you're not going to get much farther than poking around the outside for a bit. Because really, the greatest danger is not the radiation, but simply the dilapidated state of the building, which could crumble over your head any second.

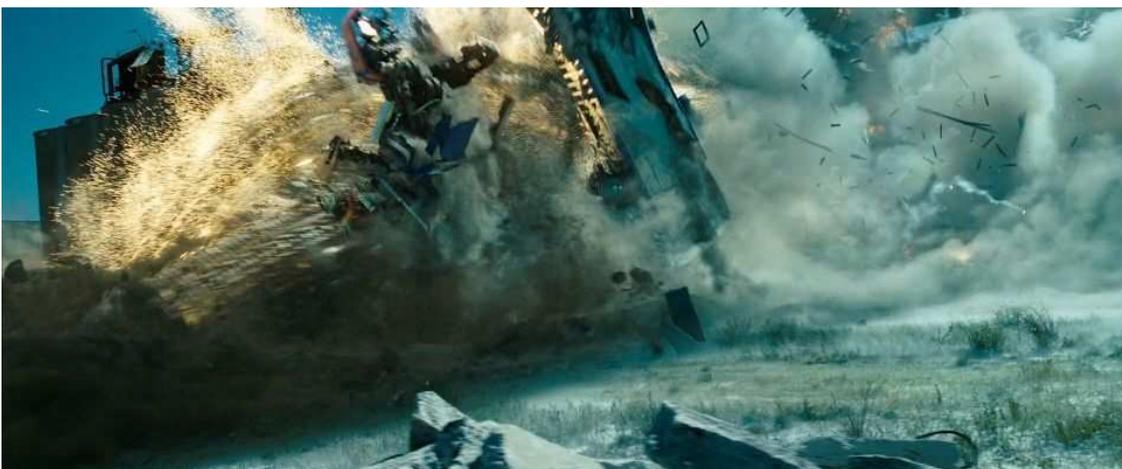
Still, that raises an interesting element. The first film made a pretty clear connection between radiation and the transformers - they used Geiger counters to locate the things originally, and that element is back in full force with the Energon/radiation detectors on every street. It makes perfect sense: Radiation is an invisible, unknowable, pure entropic force that can only destroy. In some ways, it is the *ideal* that every Autobot aspires to: Notice Skids and Mudflap wanting to be ninjas, the alt mode disguise being a way of “disappearing”, and the constant, uncontrolled destruction they cause regardless of their intention. The Decepticons also actively use EMPs as a weapon.

So now we're at the site of one of the greatest nuclear catastrophes in human history, *the* greatest if you don't count acts of war. The movie did not take us here for no reason. Surely the movie will need some way to personify this total, senseless destructive force, the perfect summation of what a transformer is and can be?





Oh, uh, yeah, that. (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Optimus Arrives at Chernobyl
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRI2WMkP2wQ&>)



Meet pure anarchy and chaos, the blind spirit of destruction. This is our return to the trilogy's roots as a monster disaster movie. The thing is so fast and massive it even throws Optimus across the screen.



Making the most hilarious “WHARRGARBL” noise, Optimus lands and oh look, he got a new toy. (Note: The Weapons Ring never actually did get a toy.)

Dark Side Moon features a strange new departure from the other movies. Where previously all weapons the transformers used grew straight out of their bodies, now suddenly we see a surge in hand-held weapons. Obviously brought about by Hasbro’s toy line mandate, but the Filmmakers were never people who let Hasbro get in the way of their themes, so they decided to roll with it and go... Uh, very strange places with the idea. The transformer no longer becomes a living weapon, but the weapon becomes a separate extension of their character, in a sense becoming *them*. Bored with just two guns and two swords/hooks for example, Optimus got himself a ridiculous arsenal of increasingly murdertastic weaponry, stored away in his trailer.



Of course, out of the bazillion guns to choose from, Optimus takes... The sword and the shield. One might think the purpose of this arsenal is to always have the tactically appropriate weapon on hand, but nope, he’s gonna fight the dragon old school. It’s kind of a hilarious thing in this movie how Optimus always chooses not by what makes more sense, but by what makes him able to kill shit more impressively.



He cuts one of the worm's tendrils off, making it drop the doodad they originally came here for.



Then the thing's owner presents himself: Shockwave.

Alright, Shockwave. So he barely has any screen time. And you know what? Sometimes, you only need a couple of minutes to say everything there is to say.

Shockwave takes all the pointless meandering these movies are prone to and kicks it square in the face. I don't think I have ever seen a more *efficient* character than him. In fact, to explain him I need to backpedal a little.

Most Transformers represent some sort of ideology. Optimus Prime obviously is the very American "life and freedom for everyone, except for people we don't like!", Bumblebee represents false-empowerment-through-capitalism (get a bigger car, be a better man!), the Decepticons are assorted foreign values, and Shockwave is, well.

Alright kids, this is where things get complicated.

Chernobyl, as an event, is pretty much one of the ultimate expressions of Stalinist thought (even though Stalin was already dead at the time, his policies remained). The entire thing was predicated on the idea of doing better than the Americans in terms of nuclear power, safety be damned - the disaster was caused by an ill-timed test to make the reactor run more efficiently followed by a hilarious conga-line of human error. The government's solution to the disaster? Throw bodies at it, of

course! Yeah, I don't think I need to elaborate that one. You Americans have your heroes in the troops, and we have ours, who died pointlessly trying to fight an impossible, invisible force of pure destruction with nothing more than gasmasks and shovels, never more than 15 seconds at a time because any more would cause radiation poisoning to kill them instantly. Kids, I don't care that some movie trilogy represents both your toys and radiation with the same thing, never play with nuclear power. It's only going to end in tears.

Oh, and the kicker? Soviet Ukraine having been what it was, they of course decided to keep the whole affair a secret, pretend everything is fine, and then start wondering why people in Kiev were falling sick from eating irradiated vegetables.

Yeah, Chernobyl is a grim fucking affair. It's only fitting then, that out of the film's Chernobyl erupts an uncontrollable force of destruction, more terrifying even than the actual *gods* we've seen in the previous film. And so, Shockwave presents a very American terror: A hateful being born from the ashes of its fathers' ambitions, a silent, vigilant dictator controlling a shapeless, writhing, seemingly endless war machine that moans under the endless pain of its own tarnished existence. Shockwave is every cold war fear distilled into purest form, a being that represents nothing but the burning hatred that Russia's people have felt for their unspoken enemy.

The movie handles him absolutely fantastically. Initially, he is just a signal on a crewmate's Geiger counter - much like real radiation, completely invisible and unknowable, only making itself noticeable once the level reaches a certain point. And when you do notice it, *it is already too late*. The creature *tears* itself through walls and floors, seemingly totally blind and completely without coordination or direction, and yet its tendrils seem to specifically seek the teammates and ram into their exact centers' with an unholy precision. Upon registering Optimus, the dual creature exposes its single eye, assesses the situation for a second, and then... Leaves. No pointless fighting or bumbling around, no empty conversation or silly faked comic relief. Shockwave appears, destroys, assesses, and leaves. The perfect efficient war machine, the best and most terrible the Decepticons can offer.

The movie establishes all of this in, oh, about half a minute.

Except then the fact that this is a franchise movie ends up throwing a wrench in the works.

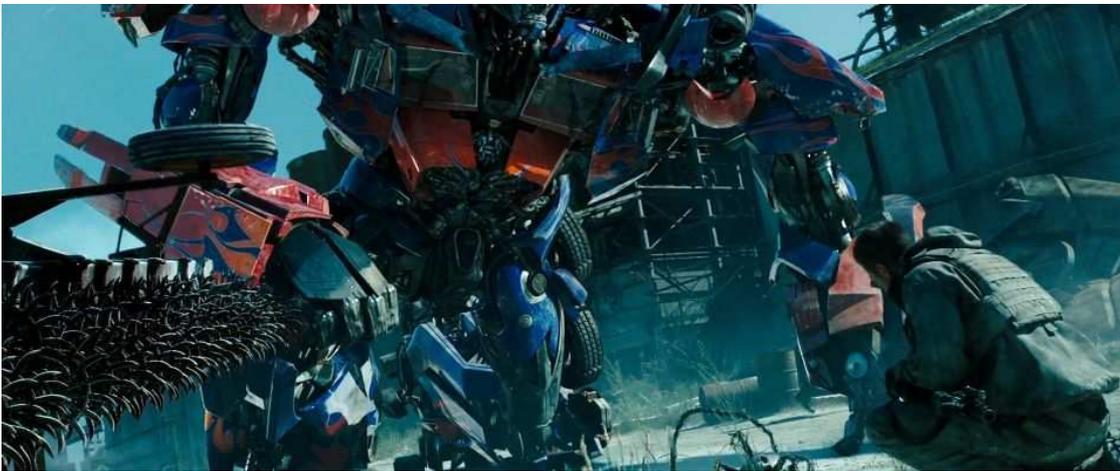
The character of Shockwave, as he appears in *Dark Side Moon*, rests heavily on this initial impression. The movie rests heavily on the idea that all we have to go by as far as Shockwave is concerned is the one scene of total anarchy and a single look, which forces us to fill in the gaps and, of course, inevitably come up with something more terrifying than the movie can show us. Except... It's Shockwave. Everyone who watched the G1 cartoon knows who Shockwave is, he's the purple guy who stayed back on Cybertron and has an inexplicable English accent. This fact allows the transformers fans among the viewership to instantly place the character into an existent wiki-framework and check off another slavish G1-homage. As a result, the impact of the scene is diminished to near zero, and that's why you get so many people complaining that Shockwave was useless in the film.

Oh, and have some more EU bullshit: The EU actually claims that the wurm is a separate being from Shockwave, a native life form of Cybertron that he domesticated. Except when Lennox asks "what the hell was that thing?", clearly talking about the wurm, Prime just replies "That is Shockwave." The movie pretty clearly doesn't treat the two as separate beings - the wurm acts as a weapon for Shockwave, and this movie repeatedly treats weapons as extensions of the characters. *Of course* Shockwave is useless when you basically discount his entire acting arm. It's like counting Optimus' body as a separate character from the head and then complaining that all he did in the film was expositing.

Strange Matter posted:

I absolutely love Shockwave's introduction, especially for how Optimus reacts to him. Just the way he says "That's Shockwave" as the the Decepticon rises from the writhing mass of his pet/weapon/whatever makes it seem that this is character whose presence leaves an impression even on Optimus. He's one of the few Decepticons whose name is not only acknowledged by the film, but by another, rival character. Like for all Optimus cares Bonecrusher and Blackout and Grindor and the myriad other Decepticons who were killed in the preceeding movies might as well be interchangeable. But not Shockwave. He *recognizes* Shockwave, and says his name in a tone that seems at the same time antagonistic and reverential. He shows such utter disdain for every enemy he faces throughout the three films, but something in Shockwave prompts a different response. Maybe it's fear? Or maybe admiration for a warrior who demonstrates the same bloodlust and savagery Optimus takes pride in?

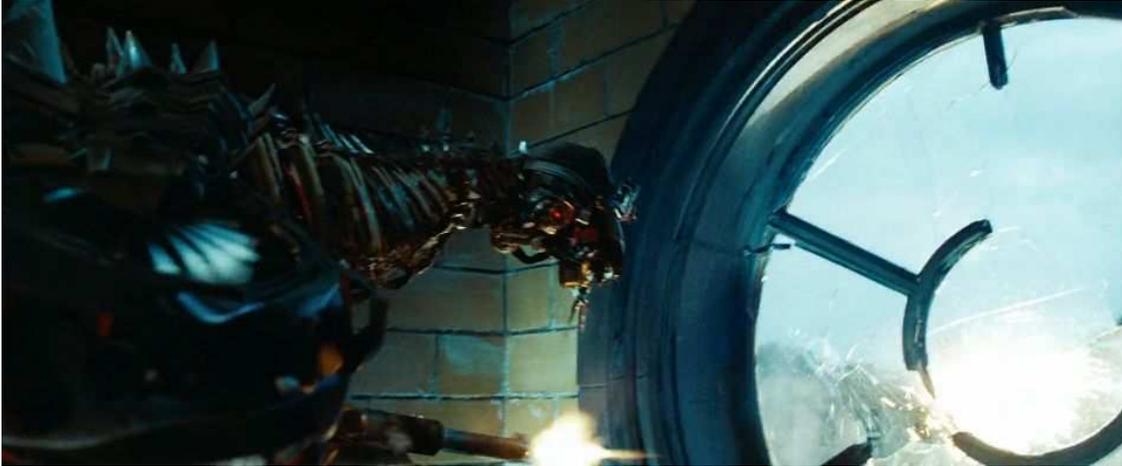
It's also significant that Shockwave doesn't have a proper face.



One last bit. Optimus determines that the thing both they and Shockwave were after is a piece of the Ark, the last hope of the Autobots that housed a superweapon which could have won them the war.



Meanwhile, Mr. Voshkod is not having a good day.





...Yyeeaah. Laserbeak? Not a nice fellow. What's striking is just how *personal* this scene is. Voshkod actually received a good bit of character development for only having three scenes, more than some main characters have in the entire previous films. When someone died in those, it was always very... Detached. Usually it was just a shot of a faceless person being thrown into the air. Even Sam received relatively little dignity in his final moments. But *Dark Moon* takes care that we know its victims. The camera follows Laserbeak as he guns down the man's car, and there is an eerie silence in spite of the heavy soundtrack and the loud gunshots, as though the sound of this violence dispelled all other little ambient noises you would expect to hear. And finally, the corpse is tastefully darkened out, which paints this man as someone the filmmakers respected enough to leave his dignity untarnished even after death.

The final touch is the cross hanging from the rear view mirror. Ukraine is an extremely religious country, and these crosses are given to practically every child, to be worn on their person for their entire life. To remove it from your body means to remove your mark of faith, and god's protection (practical occasions such as showers don't count). In other words, this is a man who has lost faith in god.

Perhaps Voshkod was a surprisingly wise man. After all, *Revenge of the Fallen* showed us that, no mistake, god is dead. God is dead, and we have killed him. A man cannot keep his faith in the cold, uncaring nightmare world these films have built.

And yet... He still keeps the cross close to him, and within view. Perhaps even as he lost his faith, the *symbol itself* meant something to him. Perhaps he knew it was the last thing he would see, and perhaps he just wanted to make that final prayer before the reaper would take him.

And perhaps, that prayer may mean more than one would think.

Part 4: "Being a kid and growing up. It's hard and nobody understands."



This fucking scene.

Alright, so there are two types of people in *Dark Side Moon*. There's humans, and there's robots. There's employers, there's victims, and there's buddies.

No, I mean.

I think the biggest problem people ultimately have with *Dark Side Moon* is simply a case of broken expectations. When you go into the theatre expecting to see robot punch each other (clearly not having learned from the first two movies, but alas), I suppose you would be somewhat irritated when the movie turns out to be an insanely involved existential horror tragicomedy.

No wait, that's not it either.

Let's talk about a little something I should probably have brought up during the previous movies but never found a good point to do, something I call the Individualist Superhero Escapist Fantasy. It's a subgenre of classical action usually, but not always, starring superheroes that has really come into vogue in recent years with all those comic book adaptations, grown out of the 60s "rogue cop" genre with which it has many similarities.. They key trait of the ISHEF is that it, fundamentally, arises out of a dissatisfaction with the structured order of modern society - with the way states and organizations have totally assimilated and suppressed the individual. Usually, it stars a super-human who has surpassed the bounds of authority and is truly functioning on his own terms and morality. There's some key factors to it:

- Official organizations are always either evil or incompetent. The government just constantly gets in the way of things, the police is apathetic and weak, etcetera. As a consequence, these movies usually have a very strong libertarian bend.
- The genre chastises caution, and rewards direct action. Excessive thinking is what paralyzes the state, but as an individual, you have the liberty to just *do*. The fists are stronger than any world-spanning military network. As a consequence, the hero rarely, if ever, has any sort of long-term plan.
- For some reason, these movies always seem to downright worship masculinity. Perhaps as a result of the above points, traditionally masculine traits like strength are always portrayed excessively positively, while traditionally feminine traits like

nurture and empathy are seen as weak and restricted to damsels in distress. As a result, women are only of worth when they take on masculine traits, becoming “strong” and “kicking ass”, while men doing the inverse are reduced to joke material. As a consequence, sexism, homophobia.

– Also for some reason, these movies usually have an incredibly strong nationalist, pro-American bend. It doesn't really make a ton of sense, but it's probably just a result of the general right-libertarian mindset pervading them. As a consequence of all of these above things, it all adds up together to create a really disturbing ur-fascist

(http://www.pegc.us/archive/Articles/eco_ur-fascism.pdf) subtext. This is never actually noticed or commented on unless the hero in question is Batman.

– One of the strangest things about the genre is that the superhero practically never is actually also the audience identification character. There's almost always some kind of youthful, scrappy sidekick to watch the hero do things, but it's usually also this sidekick who allows the fictional entity of the superhero to *exist* - such as Coulson dying to let the Avengers band together. This works on a sort of meta-level in which the actual audience calls the mimetic superhero into existence through their need to see the world change, even if only in a fictional capacity.

Obviously, *Transformers* fits the genre to a tee - not being a classical action movie at all aside. We have the Superhero of Optimus Prime, the audience character who gave him life, and Ironhide pretty much only exists as a nod to the rogue cop genre. In the first two films, we also had Lennox - breaking all authority in order to do his own thing. Interestingly, while the movies put the emphasis on Lennox' own heroism, aside from killing Blackout, all he does is make the decisions, while the military does all the *actual* work. Yeah, of course *Transformers* criticizes a lot of concepts present in this genre. So what does this have to do with this scene? Not that much actually, I don't think. Really, at this point I'm just trying to put this off because I have no idea where to even *start* talking about this scene.

There's really no starting point to be found. It simply *is*.

This is from a later scene, but I think it's appropriate. (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) - The Ark <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfAiLf8FqCA>)

In case you haven't seen the film: This is where Sam starts looking for a place to work. We see a montage of him visiting various ridiculous interviews, intercut by that image of him just sitting in his parent's car while they say abhorrent things to him. It's... To say that it's clumsily written and directed would not even *begin* to scratch the surface. I struggle to even call it something that was “written and directed” *at all*. It's a totally anarchic laissez-faire approach to filmmaking in which stuff just kind of happens, things that vaguely resemble jokes are said and everything just drowns in this endless waterfall of lurid misery. Compared to the later parts of *Dark Side Moon*, in which every tiniest detail has been meticulously put in *just* the right place, this scene is certainly... An experience. There's something almost primally disturbing about it.

And that's no mistake.

This scene is perhaps best described as “robots trying to re-enact a political cartoon”. No one behaves the way they should, nothing looks the way it should, everything is just stretched and warped and *wrong*. With Alice, the films have started putting under question who is and isn't human at all - and the funny thing about *Dark Moon* is, it doesn't do away with this concept at all. *It simply never shows its pretenders shedding their disguises*. From the very start of this scene, we understand that none of the actors involved is actually playing a human being. Even Sam himself is a CGI space cube wearing the human skin of a boy trying to save the world. The comic thing about this scene is not the one CEO looking really young or Sam's parents being really nasty, horrible people, it's just how *distorted* a mirror to a real-life problem the movie shows us. People aren't people at all, the world hates you, god is still dead, and all that remains is the bottomless ennui and depression of the lost generation Y. Meanwhile, the completely aimless direction makes the entire scene appear completely decayed beyond control, the filmic equivalent of a hallway in Pripyat.

It's a warped mirror image, but it's a mirror image of a *real thing*.



Have you ever lived without a secure foundation for months? Knowing of your talents and your worth, yet still rejected by a world that does not need you, in which everyone is nothing but either a cog in an immeasurable machine built to reward the rich and fortunate, or simply trash that may as well lie in the street and starve like a worthless rat? Cursed everyone and no one because you did not know at whom to direct your frustration at all, yet belittled by those around you, implying with their every word that the only reason you suffer is because you are Just Not Good Enough? Well, the movie says, this is you. You are that doll. This is all your ideas and all your self-worth and everything you want to accomplish, broken and abandoned, lying away in some decaying corner while the world slowly falls apart around you. Why should we even attempt to portray your rotten life with any dignity, or concern, or meaningful art?

This particular scene comes from a school of thought that I'd probably describe as *millennial dadaism*, though I'm sure there's an actual term for it I don't know. If you're not familiar, Dada originally came upon during the first world war, as a movement of "art without meaning". One of its defining statements was: If humanity is capable of such boundless cruelty invoked in this world spanning war, who are we to pretend that we are capable of expressing anything truly great, who are we to decide that those shapes and symbols we bring to paper are actually *meaningful*?

Of course, the war is long over, and the one that came after that as well. Today, the people who still remember this kind cruelty even taking place anywhere in the western world are few and old, and our society's failings have taken on newer forms. This new generation, who only knows of war from history books and news channels, finds its existential dread simply in the fact that there's no place in the world for them, being torn between dull routine and feeling like they're trapped in a bottomless pit hanging onto a single string, with no perspective or hope for betterment. The idea then is: "If humanity is

capable of such total apathy and ignorance as to let this happen, who are we to pretend that we have any actual perspective of the world worth sharing?"

The reason I asked about reactions to this scene is because frankly, I personally found it frighteningly effective. It's just this perfect mix of bleak suffering with sheer nastiness and apathetic trying to play it all off as a series of ironic jokes that it genuinely ends up getting under the nerves and confusing and frustrating on an innermost level. It's pure existential terror, and it really drives home just how completely nihilistic the world ROTF set up is - and how it still relates to ours.

But, well, I'm still not that fond of the scene, simply because it's *absolutely nothing like the rest of the movie*. I understand that they needed to really set up Allsam's struggle with himself and the world and you gotta have despair before you can have hope and so on, but, well, *this is still a giant robot franchise film*, even if no actual punching is involved. Asking the audience to accept all this shit is just way more than a filmmaker should ever do unless he's literally Lars von Trier, and as a result it just comes across as genuinely mean and awful rather than making light of its mean awfulness.

Its second problem is that it's just too damn early in the film. It takes place far before DOTM really establishes its signature style of total insanity controlled down to the last detail, so coming off ROTF it only feels like more total ineptitude instead of a scene that is genuinely supposed to contrast with the rest of the movie. Then there's the fact that it completely discolors the film's mood and intentions. I'm going to go right out and say that after the grinding nihilism of *Revenge, Dark Moon* is actually a pretty fucking optimistic and uplifting movie, but this scene just completely dulls our ability to even *look* for anything pleasant and positive (since as always, those aspects are hidden behind the pro-America action movie facade). If a horror movie has actually managed to scare the audience into turning the film off, it may have succeeded as horror, but *has it actually succeeded as a movie?*

So in short, much like large parts of *Revenge*, I feel that this is actually a successful scene (I struggle to say "good" because it defies qualitative judgments like that), just presented in the completely wrong context. It's kind of a shame how much this hounds the trilogy.

So to return to the actual significance of the scene, what is the actual cause of this horrible situation? Well, most of the workplace idiocy that goes on nowadays can pretty much be tracked right back to the ills of neoliberal capitalism, which these films have already been pretty much established to consider their main enemy. The interesting twist is that Sam is clearly seen suffering from these very ills... But still supports Optimus Prime and Bumblebee, the very *embodiments* thereof. In fact, it goes further than this: Remember what I said about the audience allowing the superhero to exist? Sam actually called Optimus back into life when he died, and gave the artifact of life to the Autobots, sacrificed himself do so, no less. So in a manner both literal and metaphorical, Sam gave his life and happiness in order to allow capitalist values to prosper. Why would he do this? Well, when (lower class woman) Mikaela questioned his motive, all he could say is that there *is no other option*. He never considers the possibility of there being *another* way to continue existing.

And honestly now, do *you*?

This is the terrible scenario that these two movies focus their mirror on: Sam is not the only one making this sacrifice. We are too, constantly. Every item we purchase is an implicit acceptance of capitalist values. Every payment for rent or food is a tribute to the grand forces that have twisted things we take for granted for their own profit, every hour you toil away is noted off in some person's checkbook, every ticket for this movie you paid is more labor and value fed into the blind machine that is the entertainment industry. Hell, you're reading this on a forum where you need to pay \$10 just to *post*. I'm not even going to *start* about the actual toy collectors in the audience (hello, Chinese slave labor!). And that's the real paradox and comedy of this scene, no, life in general. We're constantly, unthinkingly offering up ourselves for this unimaginable, almost quasi-sentient gestalt *thing*, and there is *absolutely no alternative*.

I'm sorry if I'm starting to sound like a socialist leaflet, what with not actually being much of a socialist, but *that's just the language the movies use*. A movie that shows the risen proletariat being torn apart by a military superweapon while ostentatious symbols of wealth slaughter themselves through untold numbers of innocents is not going to throw up its arms and go "yeah, actually, modern life is pretty OK!"

Man, this update is depressing. Maybe John Malkovich can cheer me up. (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Accuretta Interview http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_4HGBE0cRg)



"Sit."

And with that simple little command, it takes Mr. Malkovich about oh, point 3 of a second to make Allsam his bitch. Look at the guy, he's the king of the universe, the entire world spinning and blurring around him at its centre as every single thing we see is perfectly aligned to act on his every whim with maximum efficiency. When it comes to establishing power and authority, *Dark Side Moon* does not fuck around.



This scene is... Weird also. Less weird than the previous one, but watching it, I honestly get the impression of it being a part of some educational programmer of what to expect during an important job interview. Malkovich calmly and politely explains what it means to take on a career path, and then says “it all depends on how you respond to my next two words: ‘Impress me’”.

It’s kind of fascinating just how open and honest he’s portrayed as being. He goes through Sam’s credentials (or rather, the lack thereof), and just waves that right off. Instead, he establishes right away that it all only, and *only* comes down to what impression Sam makes.

I mean, when you’re an employer, you have to sort through dozens and dozens of applications, and are you honestly going to carefully weigh all the credentials and choose the applicant who’s objectively most fit for the job? *No, that’s why you’re a human being and not a robot.* You’re just going to pick whoever sticks out the most in your mind.

I mean obviously, this leads to all sorts of issues like preferential treatment of white dudes and picking the guy who can best sell himself rather than the one who can actually get the job done, but the film is actually surprisingly kind and positive about Malkovich as a character, and by extension employers in general. It seems to make the statement that even they are just human beings and not evil Randian robots, and places all blame for the shit they end up causing squarely on the system itself, which simply ends up bringing out the worst in even the kindest, most intelligent people.

Sam totally fumbles his way through the conversation, but eventually tries to paint himself as confident by saying he’s “a killer, a Viking, a barbarian”. Smooth going. Really the entire portrayal of Sam in this movie is basically it asking “peeps, do not be this guy, okay?”



"We are not looking for that here".

Okay, so that's where it gets fun. Malkovich uses this photo of himself to exemplify the archetype Sam paints himself under, and then exclaims it to be undesirable. What he's doing is setting up a *puzzle* for Sam.

Notice how many things are on the table that suggest vision and "true sight". A pair of glasses (with a thick, black trim, a reoccurring motif), a pair of binoculars, a crystal ball. None of those things are set up in a way that Malkovich himself could see through them directly; Instead, they appear to connect *the back and front halves of the room*, inviting Sam to "see" *behind* his potential employer, both in figurative terms of seeing through to his motives and in literal terms of *actually looking at what's behind him*. So what is behind him? Another picture much like the one he just put on the table, and a little bonsai tree.

The two images are seemingly near identical, but you know what they remind me of? Those pictures psychologists sometimes show to autistic children, on which an actor is in a slightly different pose on every one, to see how good they are at interpreting body language. Body language is a funny thing, and often subtle differences can have a huge effect on our subconscious. The front picture is practically a still of an action scene: Fists are flying, a face is contorted into a barbaric shout, there's a sort of frantic kinetic to everything about it. A killer, a Viking, a Barbarian. And yet, there's something strangely clumsy about it as well. The punch he's throwing appears to have barely any force or technique behind it, the way he holds his torso is just completely shapeless, and really, it's not a fighter, it's a kid pretending to be one.

By contrast, look at the image in the back - Malkovich's arm is folded in front of his body, his head is tucked in slightly, and there's a much more focused, compact form. No punch is being thrown - it's a *defensive* maneuver, clearly braced for an oncoming impact. The bonsai tree next to it, meanwhile, suggests an inner tranquility, and thus an ability to deal with the

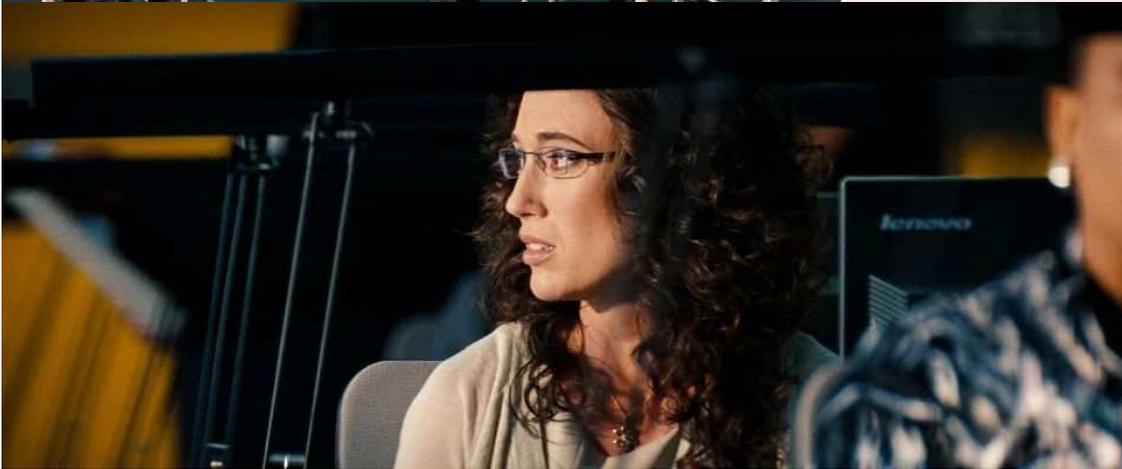
oncoming attack and retaining your composure. Meanwhile, the actual John Malkovich leans forward, toughens his features and clearly shifts into an aggressive position, resting the entire weight of his authority on Sam. And then waits for a reaction: Whether Sam will attempt to attack, or do the right thing and go on the defensive, testing his ability to make the right choice when confronted with something stronger than him, his ability to spot subtle details and intentions, and his ability to play his cards right even if he *does* make the right choice, all in one fell swoop. “Impress me”, indeed.

Did I mention I love this movie? Because I fucking love this movie.

Obviously Sam totally and completely fails the test, but this is the point where things get really strange again. After saying goodbye to him at the end of the last movie, the camera hovers over his shoulder and then switches to a straight-up POV shot from him, essentially reclaiming him as his vessel.



Malkovich suddenly loses interest in his little game, and turns his attention to the room at large. Someone appears to be using a red cup... **IN THE YELLOW ROOM! OH NOOOO!**



Welp, we appear to be back in political caricature land. Wait, didn't the movie *just* establish that Malkovich is a human being, and now all of a sudden he's turned into a robot whose circuits fly when he encounters an irregularity? That's... What? I mean, I guess you could take this as part of his game, the sobbing worker being just an actress (after all, it *is* pretty perfectly timed), but I think I have a bit of a different take on it. See, the camera in this film very sparingly seats itself into Sam's view... But every time it does, something incredibly weird and probably totally out of character for everybody else happens, something that *just so happens to align with Sam's subconscious thoughts and fears*.

What we see portrayed in this little snippet is a picture of the world that nearly destroyed David Mann. A completely rigid and structured society in which concern for others is nonexistent and the individual is slowly reduced to a robot, unable to deal with any situation that escapes the norm. This plays into another idea that stands behind this film's entire portrayal of Allsam: *He is terrified of becoming Dave Mann*. He constantly tries to buckle the pressure of society in petty ways just so he doesn't lose sight of his masculinity and his "heroism", he defies any and every attempt to put his life into a solid structure, and when something *does* equate him to Dave, such as the ratty old 70s car, he immediately completely flips his lid. If you look at any other scene in the film, you realize that his fear is completely unfounded. Accureta is *full* of interesting and quirky people with varying degrees of machismo. Look at the lady on the right in that shot with the red cup, *she could kick your ass*. So why would the film suddenly give a completely different image of what Accureta Systems is like just for this one scene? Well.

See, at the end of the last film, Sam ascended to godhood, or rather, the Allspark descended to Samhood. I already told you

about how the audience directly affects the movie, and while Sam only partially represents them at this point, he still has shades of this. The camera aligning itself with Sam means that he has control over where it points and what it sees - in other words, he takes control of an extra-diegetic element. Now, if the audience has so much power over a movie - *Why would Allsam only be able to affect its camerawork? What about the writing, the direction?*

Yep, that's right, Allsam's omnipotence shows itself in *him actually controlling the film's narrative*. And this is once again just an ability that audiences have in real life. A movie can present us images and symbols, but that's only *half* the narrative - because the *meaning*, the *actual* content of the film, is generated in the audience's mind. When a writer on TFWiki notes down that Shockwave's weapon is a separate creature, then that's how it is. When I say that Devastator represents the Proletariat, then that's how it is. When Sam figures that a workplace is an oppressive robot society, *then that's how it is*. This particular scene is a fairly innocuous use of this bizarre element, but as with everything else in this trilogy, it *will* get worse.



In the end, Sam decides to take a path that Malkovich could not have foreseen: He flees. "I have done shit that matters and I just want a job where I matter again." There's a lot of emotion in Shia LaBeouf's delivery, and for one second Allsam does seem like a human being again. I mean, consider: He was born in battle, forged by the heat of explosives and arose from the remains of a sacrifice. His first act in life was to defy the rules of life and death, remaking one life to destroy another. And there he is, in a situation that could not be more mundane and yet has crushed as many souls as any war, in which no one cares and yet everybody despises him. Allsam is not a sympathetic character, but you can see him fall into depression right there on the screen, and it's kinda hard not to feel a *tinge* of sympathy.

Maybe, much like Dave, Sam can become a better person as well. A traumatic encounter with Megatron would help him none, but perhaps merely settling in and realizing what modern life is actually like could help him get a better perspective on things. Perhaps he could realize who his real enemy is, and what he actually values.



In the end, it's the employer who ends up having to convince the employee. It's not entirely clear why Malkovich suddenly takes such a liking to Sam - but he says "When I look at you, I see a younger me." As evidenced by the photos, Malkovich was also a fighter once, but with age has calmed down quite a lot. Perhaps Sam *did* impress him after all - maybe it was his choice, to give up, to *let go*, that John seems to see something invaluable in. And maybe now that he has a mentor, an authority figure who *isn't* a nasty person or a murderous psychopath. Maybe, the healing can begin.

Well, could begin, were this everything. It isn't. Things are only going to get worse.

Pierogi posted:

I think you skipped a bit on the use of color in the Malkovich interview. A couple of things to note:

For the employees the room does not seem all that yellow. Most of the color is behind their back. It's only Malkovich that sees the true nature of the room. And more importantly the only color that the employees see is from the red photos on their boss's desk. Notice how in the zoom screen cap the red cup stands out while the yellow cups are pretty much invisible? The woman unbeknownst to her took the spotlight from Malkovich and therefore must be punished. She can't fully grasp how her red cup interferes with the room because she literally lacks Malkovich's point of view. Maybe she even chose her cup's color to play well with the only other color she noticed in the room? To go even further maybe Malkovich doesn't realize that his photos interfere with the room because they are behind him, and he doesn't look at them at all?

Terry van Feleday posted:

Nice observation! The curious thing is, Malkovich's little section is not "part" of the yellow room, being not just completely cut off by glass walls, but also being completely white (which is to say, *all the colours*). Additionally, while he wears red in those images, his suit is just plain, colourless grey. So in a sense, he wants the visitor to take note of those images, even willing to compromise the colour coordination of his desk for it.

The thing about the red cup stealing the spotlight: The weird thing is, we will see very clearly later in the movie that Malkovich clearly doesn't mind having his authority questioned or compromised. It really is completely out of character for him.

Triskelli posted:

So Terry, just something that stood out to me: What, if anything, do Malkovich's set of golf clubs mean? Because they look incredibly out of place, especially if the inference is that he golfs regularly. A full set like that is quite heavy, and it would be a hell of a lot easier to leave them in the car. Malkovich isn't going to be needing anything between a 1-wood to a sand-wedge in his office, and the directors could have just as easily put a putter and ball in the room, to give a classic "CEO putts ball into cup" scene later.

Agent Interrobang posted:

Taking a completely wild guess here, but it could be more 'toy' symbolism. It contrasts interestingly with the ruined doll, the shitty old Valiant, the way Sam treats Mikaela in the previous movies and will treat Carly in this one. If we assume, as Terry seems to have done, that Malkovich's character is an 'old warrior' who let go of his anger, then a set of well-cared-for golf clubs takes on even greater significance next to Sam's rage and antipathy towards what he perceives to be his own, inferior playthings. It's more stuff stacking on top of Sam's perception that despite everything he's done, he still isn't getting the credit he DESERVES, and into his growing jealousy of everyone and everything around him.

The true irony of course being that unless he lets go of his rage and envy, everything he touches IS going to get broken and fucked-up, because he's still an immature kid who doesn't appreciate his toys. He wants, but does not care for; he desires, but does not love. He covets EVERYTHING he doesn't have, but the instant he has it, he doesn't want it anymore; he needs something BETTER.

It'd be interesting to assume this is more of the 'Transformers and humans are bad for each other' theme. Would Sam's personal priorities be so desperately fucked-up if his first car hadn't been a magic robot hot rod from space? Would Sam be quite so desperate for recognition and outward shows of status if he hadn't been skewed so much by getting something too much for him to handle, far too early?

A bit more 'golf clubs' commentary: I think it's interesting that while the clubs take up a large amount of real estate in the shot, they're also not central. They're placed off to the side, and slightly back from the desk. Perhaps suggesting that Malkovich both cares for his toys, but doesn't let their presence or lack thereof dominate his mental landscape(because that's what his office is); again, a nice contrast to Sam.

Dawnfire posted:

Taking a swing here, but these actually seem to be another display of aggression to me. Look at their distinctive black color, and compare it to the rest of the room. Everything is white besides that solid black calendar and the golf clubs. I never noticed the clubs until you pointed them out, but now I can't miss them. They're obvious and huge.

They also lean in specifically toward Sam, as if they were some other interviewer to accompany Malkovich. They even match Malkovich's leaned in stance. Not only that, but each golf head looks like a face with those covers. A large set of dark, aggressive faces staring intently at Sam. Leaned in, ready to strike the moment he falters.

Remembering that this is a movie about giant robots fighting to enslave humanity, and that the clubs themselves are most likely metal, could be another not-so-subtle bit of foreshadowing. I won't discuss what it could allude to anymore than that, but those who have seen the rest of the movie may understand what I mean.

Or maybe he does just like to golf. 😊

well why not posted:

That shot of Malkovich's office is actually genius-level efficiency. Almost every element of it speaks of the characters in play.

Point by point on the elements I see :

- White. It's clinical, efficient and speaks of an extreme cleanliness. There's no clutter that most work would generate.
- Bonzai. Takes patience, lets you know this guy has likely travelled a long way - looks exotic.
- His golf clubs - they're obviously expensive. They're a trophy. He's clearly a financial winner and either an avid golfer or a phony. As above, they probably don't get a lot of use in the office.
- His fake tan. Fake being the operative word.
- His computer's not plugged in. For a series that takes on technology in such a big way, this likely isn't an oversight.

Does he do work on that thing?

- The photos. The fake tan is cranked up to the max. Unusual attire for martial arts. It looks more restrictive and fancy. It's what someone who watches martial arts films might think would be worn in reality. The photos are red to draw our eyes an expectancy to them, they're so visible we know they're going to be mentioned from the moment they're on screen. Is that a martial arts pose? It looks to be silly, like he's faking it.
- YELLOW. Has connotations of efficiency, wealth, cowardice and sickness. See all that black & yellow in the Yellow room. With all those workers? It's a beehive. It's fort knox. It's a warning.
- His socks. Yellow again.
- His shoes. Those aren't a businessman's shoes. They could be golf shoes - however they're pristine and look 100% clean. The guy either replaces them all the time (cos he's rich) or never actually golfs.
- As mentioned, the Monday starting calendar. Unorthodox, business centric way too timetable.

So, is this guy a controlling, Jobs-like genius, a Richard Branson action man/billionaire or someone who faked it till they made it to the top?

Acht posted:

Could this somehow be tied into the masked theme again? As if the "impress me" is a taunt to Sam that says "show me that you can look beyond this facade".

DoctorWhat posted:

Beyond a facade. More, perhaps, than immediately meets the eye.

PeterWeller posted:

Notice how the golfbag stands on those two legs like a mortar tube. They substitute for a weapon, reinforcing the "soldier who has settled" image.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:



As a minor example to those who think the thematic consistency of the series is just an illusion: Malkovich's crystal ball makes an appearance in the previous film.

Psalmanazar posted:

And the robot looks straight at it, while the humans look away from it.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

What I love is that (All)Sam clearly represents an entire generation raised by media like Transformers. Literally: he was raised by the transformers. A lot of fans assert that Optimus Prime was like their dad (!?) and, here, it is pretty much the case.

Of course, fans do not 'actually believe' that transformers are real, and that they're the protagonist of the world – but nonetheless, the messages do get internalized. (Underlining this, Sam has a Bad Boys 2 poster on his dorm-room wall in the previous film. It's *highly doubtful* that he appreciates it as a satire of race relations in the US.) So, where the first two films are subtly about how the 'average' Sam is gradually indoctrinated into Autobotism, Dark of the Moon is entirely about the result. And of course, the result is a directionless, impotent rage and a sense of entitlement.

Sam's 'average' home life was already pretty fucked up from the beginning, which is why he is so easily absorbed. Without his mother's vaguely incestuous ex-hippy sexual liberation rhetoric shoved down his throat, for example, you can bet Sam wouldn't be so neurotic about normal human relationships. And it's not just Sam: *everyone* is predisposed to accept Optimus Prime as their overlord and god. Optimus doesn't need to come up with schemes to fool everyone, because he slips into the capitalist system as though it were a soft glove.

timeandtide posted:

Trautman: You did everything to make this private war happen. You've done enough damage. This mission is over, Rambo. Do you understand me? This mission is over! Look at them out there! Look at them! If you won't end this now, they will kill you. Is that what you want? It's over Johnny. It's over!

Rambo: Nothing is over! Nothing! You just don't turn it off! It wasn't my war! You asked me, I didn't ask you! And I did what I had to do to win! But somebody wouldn't let us win! And I come back to the world and I see all those maggots at the airport, protesting me, spitting. Calling me baby killer and all kinds of vile crap! Who are they to protest me? Who are they? Unless they've been me and been there and know what the hell they're yelling about!

Trautman: It was a bad time for everyone, Rambo. It's all in the past now.

Rambo: For **you**! For me civilian life is nothing! In the field we had a code of honor, you watch my back, I watch yours. Back here there's nothing!

Trautman: You're the last of an elite group, don't end it like this.

Rambo: Back there I could fly a gunship, I could drive a tank, I was in charge of million dollar equipment, back here I can't even hold a job **parking cars**!

-Transformers: Dark of the Moon (2012)

Milky Moor posted:

But, really, given that Sam is the closest thing to an Autobot/Human liaison, I think his resentment is understandable. I saw Sam as the equivalent of twenty somethings who have come out of University with one or, in a lot of cases, two degrees... and promptly find themselves working in call centres, fast food or, yes, the mail room. Sure, there's nothing wrong with it, but when you're raised to think that everything will sort of fall into place when you pass through college and get experience, no wonder he's upset applying for something demeaning. Why even have done everything he has just to end up there? I think it's a very common sentiment.

Even if Carly doesn't care, that's not what matters. Sam, throughout the film, gives off the impression of someone who has fallen into a rut. Carly might provide for him, but he doesn't seem happy about the arrangement. His ego doesn't help but he *should* be working with (for?) the Autobots, especially given their history. And his history... Well, there's the two Autobots who live with him and make things difficult. Then there's Bonecrusher, Mikaela's dog, who somehow seems to have ended up with Sam. The past keeps hounding him and reminding him of what he used to have.

Sam's life is completely out of his control. It remains out of his control throughout the rest of the film and nothing he has done in the past (saved the world, earned a medal) matters and, in fact, makes people hostile towards him ('We're Republicans here') and yet he's somehow expected to grow up and be a man when almost all of his adult life to this point as been at the behest of the government and/or murderous alien robots. You have to wonder if Optimus said anything to try and get the man who saved his life something nice or if he just let him go without so much of a 'see you later, thanks for the save'.

His parents seem like they've profited pretty well out of the deal. Sam doesn't seem like he has. That's where the sympathy comes from. Sam might not be very good at trying but I think he's certainly putting his best foot forward, all things

Milky Moor cont...

considered, and getting rebuked. Pretty much every other character has prospered from their involvement with the Autobots – Lennox is like a secret agent, Simmons has his whole thing later on, Sam's parents have been covered. And Sam gets college and thrown out into a horrible job market (Remember, Transformers is essentially set in the present as-is as much as possible).

I didn't know about the whole 'towing a car with a motorhome' thing. In Australia, I see caravans much more than motorhomes.

In fact, maybe it's the result of an Australian perspective more than anything. In Australia, there's a pretty high frequency of government assisted tertiary education (what we call Commonwealth Supported Places). That might be why, to me, the fact that the government gave Sam a college degree doesn't seem particularly impressive.

Tuxedo Catfish posted:

Yeah, in America most people Sam's age and class would either have to work their ass off for scholarships or sell themselves into a lifetime of debt for that. Often both.

Sam's obviously a pretty broken person, but he's a product of a society that produces Sams and has absolutely no use for them. I would be pretty sympathetic with him, except for one thing -- even as a victim of neoliberal capitalism, Sam has direct access to the Alien God-King of Neoliberal Capitalism and his response to the hostility at the bottom (well, more like the lower-middle, he's not a dehumanized third-worlder) isn't "this is hideous and fucked up," it's "I deserve to be at the top."

Agent Interrobang posted:

That's pretty much exactly it. Sam isn't REJECTING this system; he's whining that he isn't being given the credit he believes it owes him. This is what makes his rage and anger so bizarrely alienating, despite the deep resonance it has with this generation: we've ALL been in a situation where we have to justify our continued existence to vague corporate paymasters. But Sam isn't complaining that he shouldn't have to prove his worth to masters he will never see, he's upset because he believes he should already be one of them.

Rather than angered by the injustice of the system he is caged by, he is angered that it is not he who serves as its arbiter. It makes him seem... well, something not quite human, which is really entirely appropriate.

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Count Chocula posted:

I think that's a pretty common point of view, especially for teenagers. It's wrong, but it isn't 'inhuman'. What's that quote about how Americans see themselves as 'temporarily embarrassed millionaires'? Everybody watching a robot punching movie wants to identify with the biggest badass, whether it's Prime or Malkovich.

Agent Interrobang posted:

It's specifically the WAY he puts it. Let's be honest, the American Dream is pretty much 'someday I'll be rich enough to lord it over everyone who was ever mean to me.' But Sam, for all that he claims otherwise, has lived EXACTLY the life he wanted, with cool cars and giant robots and a hot girlfriend and the military begging for his help. He just came from the FUCKING PRESIDENT giving him a big shiny medal for his efforts, if he had any sense at all he'd find some way to leverage that. He could at the very WORST have a public-speaking gig with a five to six-figure income for the rest of his natural life as the hero who saved the human race from alien doombots.

But to Sam, no amount of success or wish-fulfillment is ever ENOUGH. He is an emotional and psychological black hole, endlessly hungering for more respect, more adoration, more power. Sam's issue is not that he has looked at the world and said 'it isn't fair; I deserve better.' He looked at the world and said 'it isn't fair; I want to go back to my toys.' Take a look at the scene with the Valiant and the sheer, mind-bending rage he displays for it, not because it's just a shitty car, but because it isn't as cool as his LAST toy. He's still a child, playing at being an adult, half-formed, incomplete, and unable to distinguish signifier from signified.

Part 5: “Heroism by order, senseless violence, and all the pestilent nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism – how I hate them!”



America has literally become a fascist surveillance state. The film makes no secret about it. *How did people not notice.*
(Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Director of National Intelligence (Part 1)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAPCKcexOrs>)



Meet Charlotte Mearing (Frances McDormand), our *other* blonde female one-off character for this movie. Except she's actually American for once! The movie wastes no time establishing who she is: The big wig, the grand authority, the hand of the government. She's the Director of National Intelligence, she doesn't like to be called "ma'am", she's a human, and she's very, very important.

One part of the above sentence is not entirely true. You will *not* guess which it is. (Actually Pick totally did, but sshhh!)



She directly confronts Lennox about the shit they pulled in the middle east, and he tries to... I'm not sure *what* he's trying to do to excuse himself, but I have no idea how it didn't get him straight into a court for trial.



Meet our new Autobot du jour, Que. It's interesting that they decided to design him after Einstein, considering he's very much the *anti*-Albert. I mean, he *is* kind, friendly and approachable, except oh, he's an immoral arms manufacturer. Yep. Notice how his head, just viewed ever-so-slightly differently, looks more like a *skull* than Einstein's head. Phew, we almost had a likeable Autobot for a second, crisis averted.

One thing of note is that while the movie never actually tells us, his alt mode is a Mercedes Benz E550, a fairly middle class (I think?) German car. Between the German and the Italian guy, there's a bit more of a sense of cosmopolitanism to the Autobots in this film, where in *Revenge* the only non-GM manufactured car was the Decepticon Sideways. Of course, both the new guys barely play a role throughout the film... Though Que is probably the most important out of the various Autobot additions.



Optimus Prime, meanwhile, is in a bad mood, and decides to express this by... Curling up into his alt mode and not talking to anyone. Mature, much?



The reason for his sudden temper tantrum is... The fact that the presence of the Ark's parts was kept secret from him. Yes, that's after he came under fire in the previous movie for keeping things secret from humanity and *waved it off*. Holy shit, how childish can this "wise leader" *get*?



In order to clear the situation up, Mearing invites... Holy shit is that Buzz Aldrin!?



Yes, yes it is, the actual real-life Buzz Aldrin, playing himself. I love that the filmmakers made this happen, because this part is amazing: Buzz Aldrin himself proceeds to tell a CGI-truck man that the moon landings happened because secretly they were looking for alien technology on the moon. It's... I can't even add anything to that. It's just *perfect*.

HUNDU THE BEAST GOD posted:

I can add something to this: Buzz Aldrin is famous to our generation not because he landed on the moon, that is a foggy anecdote in a history book. He is famous to us because of this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1wcrkxOgzhU

Punching a guy in the face, in real life, because he had the audacity to suggest the moon landing was faked. This makes an already incredibly surreal and audaciously disrespectful moment in the film ten times crazier. It would be like casting OJ Simpson as Ghostface in *Scream 4*.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

Focusing exclusively on the 'plot level', this *is* transparently absurd. That's the film's satirical strategy.

When Bumblebee assaults an Iranian nuclear reactor, for example, we are not to believe that actually-existing transformers influence America's foreign policy. However, it's obvious that Bumblebee and his actions serve as a *metaphor* for American foreign policy. That's in a pretty straightforward economic sense – the 'freedom' to buy a sexy yellow sports car is imposed on other nations by force.

One great detail is that it doesn't even matter what kind of sports car Bumblebee is. He can shift effortlessly from one make or model to another. Bumblebee represents 'sports car' as a purely abstract concept. And underneath the product being advertised, its specific qualities irrelevant, there is this *thing* with its alien agenda. I compared this to *They Live* earlier in the thread, and it still applies.

Likewise, when we have Megatron being exploited as the source of all technology since the industrial revolution – and, consequently, the entire history of the automobile – this is to be read as a metaphor for industrialism itself.

SuperMechagodzilla cont...

When the mountain dew dispensers and x-boxes come to life as primal creatures and start attacking people, they pose a danger to the Autobots by being too overt and honest about their logic of domination. Optimus requires the pretense that he is a liberal humanitarian fighting for 'freedom' – carefully omitting the word 'economic'.



Welp, back to Sam.



Women are bitches, etcetera. However, notice how the shape of the hallway narrows on Sam's side, making him look compressed and diminutive compared to the tall, slender woman on the high side of the hallway. This is actually foreshadowing for the finale.



well why not posted:

The concept of 'drawing the eye' is a big part of photography & cinematography. It relates to how the eye follows lines throughout a still image or video shot. Our eyes instinctively pay attention to the centre, the thirds and follow curved lines along their path.

Look at Carly in this shot, with all the curved lines converging above her. There's arrow shaped cutouts in the walls pointing towards her. She's illuminated by the giant window behind her. Checkout the beam of light to the left of Sam. It's even leading towards her. 'Angelic' is what I'd use to describe it. The curves are almost like her wings.

Almost Everything in the shot is screaming 'look at her', but Sam is way more into the toys & the neato building.

What interests me the most is how the car is in front of everything. It's ostensibly a shot of the car, with some people behind it. It's like the camera & Sam are both engrossed in the wrong thing. There's even a tiny statuette of a woman on the front of the car.

Party Boat posted:

Angelic's a good choice of word – aside from the flashback to the Oval Office we've only seen Carly dressed in white so far. This is something that's worth bearing in mind.

WebDog posted:

It's an Bugatti Type 35C #4634. Generally known for being a very successful race car back in it's heyday of 1928 – 30. Basically; rare and expensive as there were only 50 made.

That shot could be read as despite Carly being the center of attention, nothing gets Dylan's rocks off more than rare cars. It's supposed to be setup as Sam and Dylan having a tiff over Carly.

As mentioned earlier, Bay could be clever by having Sam read into the tiniest things out of jealousy, suggesting he has to learn how to mature over the course of his character arc.

Sam may have died and gone to heaven (again). (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Meet Dylan Gould
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGvPqKiUWjo>)



Meeting with Carly, she introduces him to Mr. Dylan Gould (Patrick Dempsey). Man, what a friendly and charismatic fellow! I'm sure he'll be a great friend to Sam and



Oh.



Of course, long before that little plot twist is even *implied*, Allsam is already completely intimidated by the guy. He does try to keep it together, though, and comments on how the building looks like the Starship Enterprise. Guys, remember Spock is in this movie? He totally is!

WebDog posted:

Also with all the Trek references, you have to remember that Leonard Nimoy is related to Michael Bay. Nimoy's wife, Susan Bay, is his cousin.



Mr. Gould tells Sam a bit about himself and Carly. Apparently, they started out with relatively little, but together, they built themselves a small empire. And here's where we learn a very important thing about Carly. Think back to Mikaela. She was born into a lower-class home, had to fight for survival to the point of criminality, and her entire life revolved around simple mechanics work, building motorcycles. Carly, meanwhile, is *bourgeoisie as fuck*. Look at her, she's taller than Sam, elegant, confident and has shit completely under control. She's practically *angelic*. She's still a bitch, but she's pretty well up there by human standards.

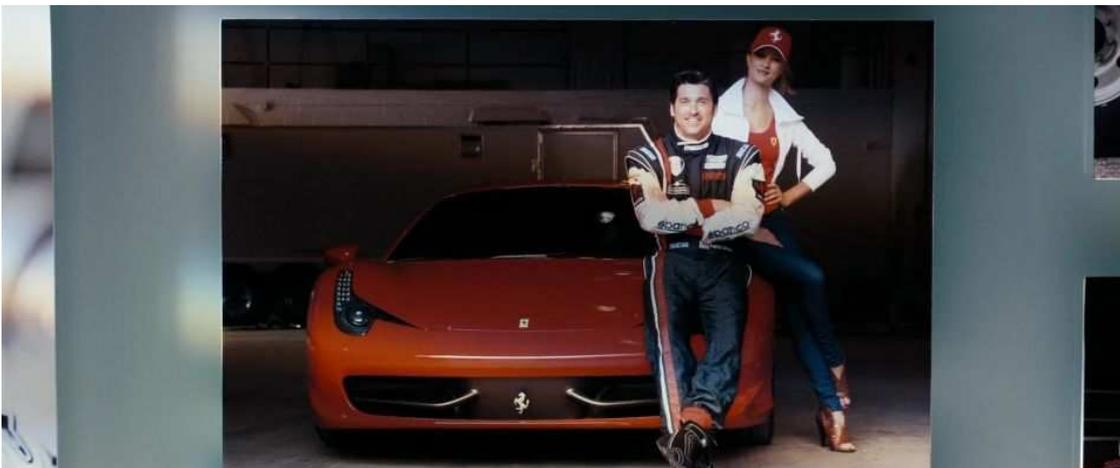
Remember the Man in Black shot? The little girl in that one was defined by her class - and by extension, Alice is, and by

extension from *there*, so is Carly. Gould even calls her the “Duchess”.



Things start getting weird when Gould calls attention to one of the cars. “Look at the curves. Elegant, isn’t it? Beautiful. *Sexual*. Built to evoke the body of the ideal woman.”

The camera lingers on Carly during most of this sentence, because objectification of course. But the strange thing is that Gould himself only looks at her during the very last part of that quote - in particular during the oddly-emphasized “sexual”, his gaze *remains affixed to the car*.



Gould himself is a libertarian *dream*. He explains that his dad began with a 10-dollar desk, but now they’re the largest accounting firm in the US - a ridiculous stretching of the archetypal “rags to riches” story that is blatantly bullshit. But he and Carly, man, they go way back. The two are practically *made* for one another, and this does not go unnoticed by Sam. Oh boy, this is not going to end well, is it.

Yeah, of course he immediately starts rivaling with Gould. But one thing never occurs to him. If Dylan and Carly know each other for so long and there are sparks flying between them, *how come they aren’t already a couple?*

And here’s the funny part. Mr. Gould is a remarkably asexual presence, really. Aside from complimenting Carly’s body, he never even as much as *implies* any sort of attraction or sexual interest in her, or any woman for that matter. The only thing he ever refers to as actually sexual... *is a car*. Sam’s vendetta against him is completely moronic, because Dylan poses no threat to his relationship. He’s *carsexual*, and not in the car-as-in-Carly sense.

“See, collecting cars helps me keep my sanity.” There is a lot to him that we do not know yet.



Sam’s piece of shit car doesn’t start, and he completely loses his shit. Shia LaBeouf can be such a fantastic actor sometimes – he plays this total explosion of impotent anger and misdirected machismo with such a conviction that you can really get a feel for his completely out of control emotions. Even worse, he finds out that it was Gould who got him the job at Accureta – an amazingly kind gesture that Sam should be infinitely grateful for, but you know. It’s Sam.

“You’re a lucky man”, Gould tells him, and Sam just looks even more pissed. He’s not even *remotely* aware of all the privileges that he’s enjoying.

Interestingly, after Gould asks him what he’s doing, Sam says that the car is part of his little restoration project – that he intends to *alter* it. This is a complete lie, but it reminds us of something important: A car is an object. If it is not to your satisfaction, you can simply *change* it. Sam suffers so much from it, yet he never considers actually improving it, in favor of constantly just thinking about getting Bumblebee back.

SchwarzeKrieg posted:

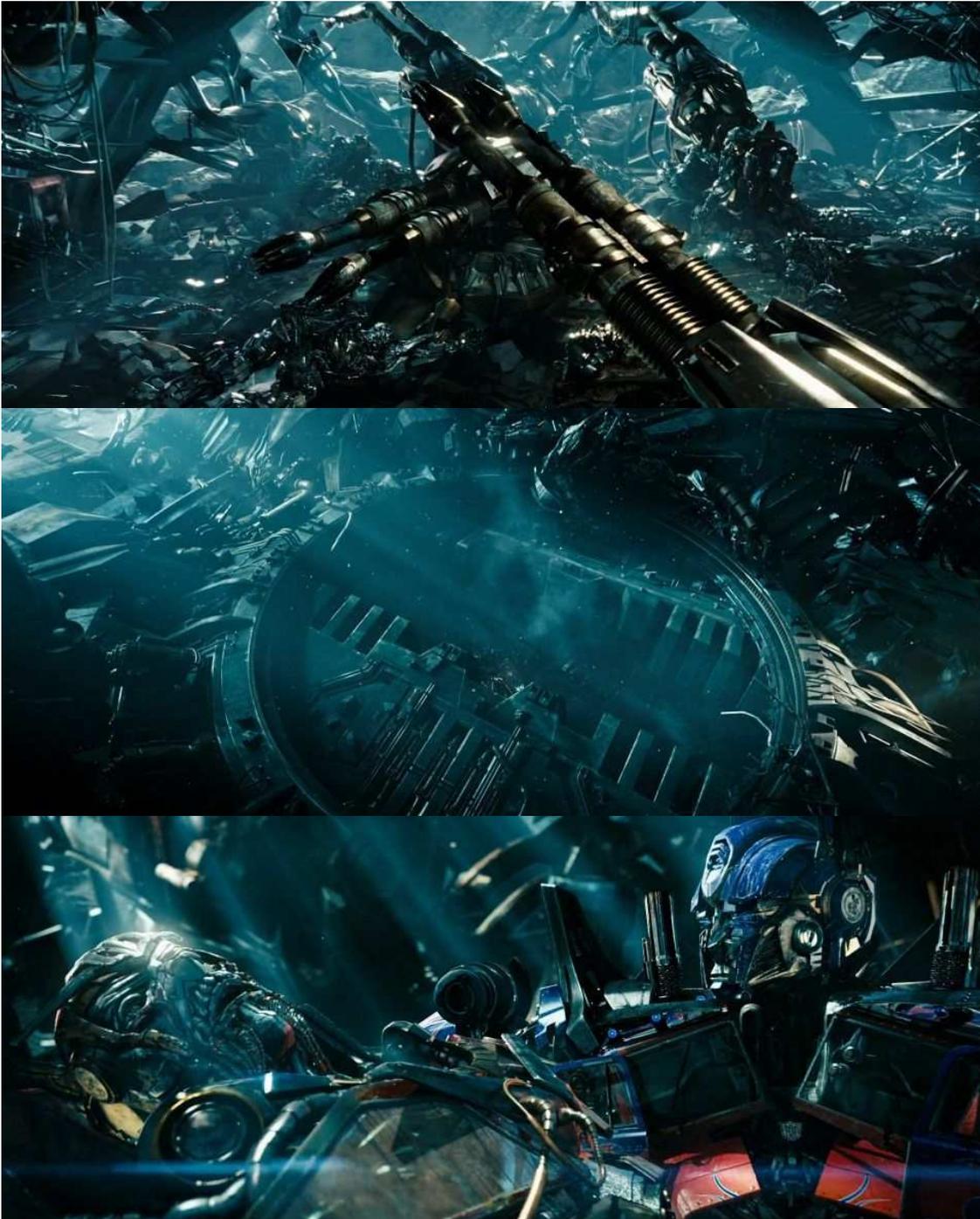
It's also worth noting that Sam's "piece of shit" car is a Datsun 510 which, while not exactly as rare and desirable as Gould's cars, is a relatively hard to find car with a pretty big enthusiast following. This implies that Sam actively sought out this specific car, likely spending the same amount of money as he would have on a perfectly serviceable econobox, which he obviously has no interest in. He's also pretty clearly not a car enthusiast of any sort, and his cries of "this is a collectible!" are his way of justifying the fact that he spent more money than he should have on a piece of shit simply because it reminds him of Bumblebee, and his refusal to let go of his past and grow into a normal, responsible adult.



Meanwhile, the Autobots' bizarre CGI-parody of a space shuttle has arrived at the moon.



The giant god-machines and humanity's tiny robots being on the same screen is just an amazing effect. And notice that, even with the total liberty of CGI, the filmmakers *still* insist on not portraying any sort of actual moon gravity or kicked-up dust. The thing with comedy is that it's at its best when the comedian isn't actually trying to be funny. Rather than relying on cheap gags and dumb characters, *Dark Side Moon* just lets the absurdity of its story and images speak for themselves, and ends up easily being the funniest of the three movies for it.



And so, they find Spock, former leader of the Autobots, and take him back to earth.

Effectronica posted:

[In response to questions about the Allspark] ...It blatantly breaks the principle of "no size-changing" the rest of the first movie essentially upholds (I mean in obvious ways like Megatron going from Starscream's size to a pistol fitted to Starscream's hand, not in the spergier sense). The Allspark is divine. It can create life ex nihilo. It endows knowledge beyond what even the most knowledgeable of the Transformers has. Tiny pieces of it can revive the comatose. It can even bring back the dead with just an extension of itself. The machines are granted sparks and articulated robot forms by the grace of the robot-god.

It is important that the god of the Transformers is a repository of information above all else, and we can perhaps draw a little upon Gnostic traditions to understand AllSam and Allspark. Some Gnostic traditions hold that the primary reason for the flawed nature of the material world is not the malevolence of the Demiurge, the creator, but rather the Demiurge's incompetence and inability to comprehend things greater. The Allspark, when Sam dies, tries to rebuild him as a mask, but fails. Its material creations, its child Transformers, are animalistic creatures, lashing out instantly in violence. It is itself, so far as we can tell, a repository of material knowledge, not of art or culture or philosophy. It is significant beyond "this is from an alien race" that what Sam starts spouting is superphysics and then just the location of the tomb of the Primes.

The Primes are the truer gods, the Aeons to the Allspark's demiurge. They numbered thirteen, and removing the Fallen, the primal evil, makes them twelve, and twelve are the number of the Gnostic Aeons that formed from the union of Anthropos and Ecclesia, man and church, humanity and religiosity. The twelfth of these, Sophia/wisdom, is what created the Demiurge, but here I think things start to break down somewhat with what the movies so far have given us.

But since Bay has made steady and deliberate use of the general Transformers artificial mythology in his movies (the Matrix of Leadership is used to revive Optimus where it was originally generated by his death, the Allspark is a cube where its original form Vector Sigma was a sphere), I think that this will either become more extensible or fall apart completely with Transformers 4.

Part 6: "Nothing beside remains, 'round the remains of that colossal wreck..."



Oh hey, we're in Africa now. (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Megatron in Africa
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5CL8B11bN0>)





Elephants, bison, zebras and



Oh fuck. !!!BROKEN LINK!!!



It's been a while, Megatron.



He looks... Sad. Man, he really has a reason to, too. Look at the poor fellow. Now robbed of his signature arm cannon, he lugs around a suitably Mad Max-esque shotgun. He draws it and growls his signature growl to scare off the animals, establishing himself king of the fauna. Interestingly, while he threateningly shakes the thing around, he does not fire it - a

clear contrast to the arm cannon that only even became visible when it was time for it to kill.



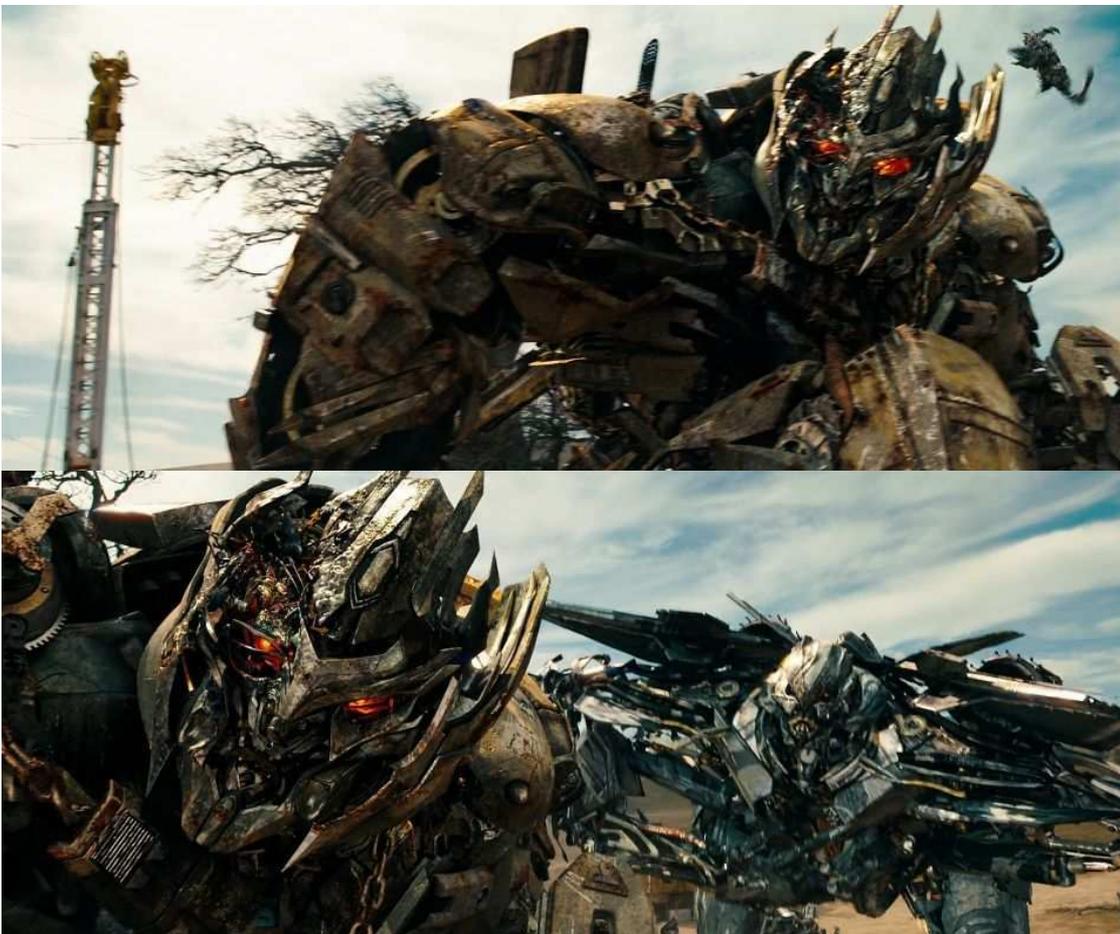
“All hail Megatron”, he whispers to himself. “My marshter, yes marshter”, a strange, mutated, slaving little green creature greets him. It is all that remains of the Constructicons - the head of one of theirs, taken on a terrible, helpless half-life.



But the tiny speck of ground, all that's left of what that the once-godly leader once called his empire, holds more life as well.

“Ah. Don't be greedy... My fragile ones.” With an unusually kind face, Megatron extends his hand, and offers the pile of mewling Decepticon kittens their feed. What is he feeding them? He has found no source of Energon. All he has is the energy conferred to him when he was killed, and the shard stuck in his chest... Oh no. He's literally feeding his children parts of himself.

I just. There's no way I can even remotely describe this scene. After 30 minutes of military posturing and worthless machismo, the movie shows us... A pitiable creature, down on its last legs, feeding its starving children with the last rations it has. After the pointless, frothy nihilism of everything that came before, the sheer genuine *emotion* of this scene hit me like a train. There's no ever encumbered subtexts or political overtones here, just an instant showing this terrible life the constantly beaten and abused "villain" of the trilogy has been reduced to. I feel terrible that I'm only devoting like half an update to what is probably the second-most important scene in the movie, but ultimately, there just isn't much to say. It's just perfect as it is.



As Starscream arrives to pity him, Megatron's face hardens once more. He still carries the scar of his last battle, a festering, disfigured hole in his head crawling with parasites, draining his will and sanity. Even as his left eye attempts to shift into his usual angry scowl, the right one belies this faked expression, and exposes the terrible weight of his depression.

“Oh my poor master! How it pains me to see you, so wounded, so *weak*...” Starscream almost sounds like he's enjoying

Megatron's suffering, but nope, that's just how he talks. Comparing his emotionless drawl to the *weight* of Megatron's every word gives the latter even more of an emotional presence.



“Spare me, you gaseous sycophant! You know what you are told, which is *nothing*.” I’m going to keep including close-ups of Megatron’s face, because god, his facial animation in this movie is *fantastic*. It’s like some kind of horrid, twisted version of Pixar.

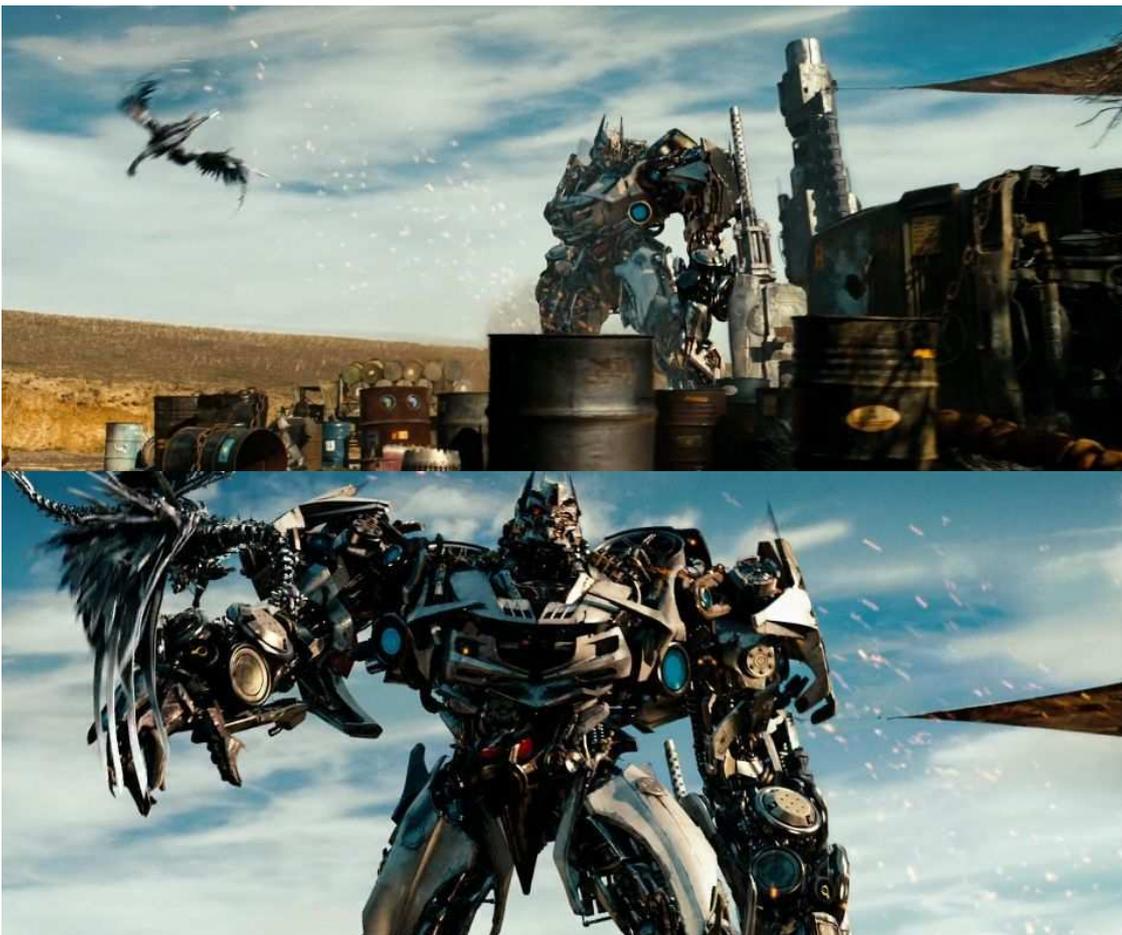
Hewlett posted:

I think this is one thing that the sequels, in particular, try to explore; in most action films (or films in general), we root for the underdog, who is constantly trying to beat the odds against a vastly superior force for the sake of a virtuous cause. Whether this is true in the first TF film is debatable, but it's at least more comparatively true than in the sequels. However, after you beat your villain, what is left to root for? The villain is defeated, pitiable; likely unable to get revenge on you except for the sake of a newly introduced MacGuffin. However, it seems that the Decepticons are just struggling for survival in the wake of their defeat, and mostly only strike back because of continued reprisals from the Autobots and NEST. Instead of giving the audience that feeling of beating the odds, of balancing the equation between perceived good and evil, the good guys (and the audience by extension) become the bad guys, taking their crusade overboard to the point of genocide.

And poor Megatron; his inclusion in any form in the sequels really hammers home that pitiable nature of the defeated villain; he is replaced in both sequels by new primary villains, becoming a henchman in his own schemes. Not only is he injured and emasculated, Bay continues to rub Megatron's nose in it right in front of us, adding to that discomforting feeling. If Megatron had just been left alone after his initial defeat, the sequels would be much more straightforward in their plotting.



Laserbeak comes flying, and guns down a bird. Just for fun. Contrast with Megatron baring, but not using his shotgun, Laserbeak's guns are hidden in his body, but used constantly. Really, Laserbeak is nothing but a weapon itself - an extension of a different character.



Soundwave. He's finally come down to earth, and you just know that cannot mean good things for *anyone*. His design is very different from the strange satellite of the last movie - he's humanoid now, but... Not really. Even turning into a car, one of the most average transformations you can think of, his proportions are strangely twisted and give him an odd image. The gaunt form with incredibly broad shoulders and overlong arms combined with the icy silver-blue color scheme bring to mind a sort of technological Nordic Jotunn, a malevolent giant who wars with the gods. The usual electronically modulated speech associated with the character has been foregone in favor of a grim, deep growl. Soundwave is a monster from start to finish - and his gleaming cleanliness of a sharp blade puts him at a sharp contrast with the helpless, rusted Megatron.



“Your human collaborators have served their purpose well... It’s time to eliminate loose ends”, Megatron states. Soundwave’s reaction?

“Laserbeak. *Kill them all.*”





"With pleasure." (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) - Kill Human Collaborators
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDPWxt2kUDc>)





"Is your daddy home?"

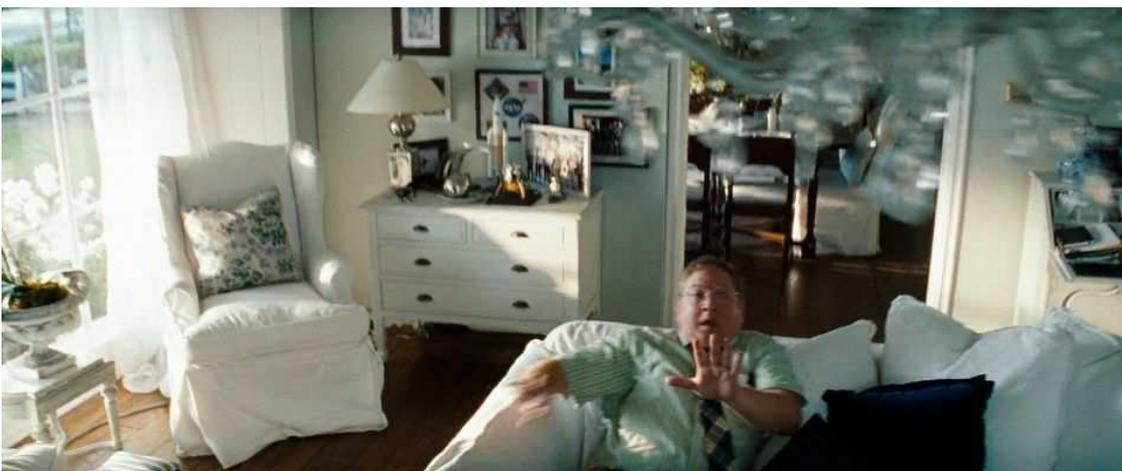




Cut to black.



Cut to black.



"Just visiting."

Cut to black.



The movie just lingers on this shot. The music fades out, no screaming, no sound. Just this image, and a shadow slowly moving on the wall.

Slow fade to black.

I love these two scenes, and they may be among my favorites of the movie. They're genuinely really fucking well directed, the animation is great, and Hugo Weaving and Keith Szarabajka (Laserbeak's voice) are just really shining here. After the rapid montage of completely distanced, matter-of-fact deaths, we're invited to a nice, pleasant, unthreatening neighborhood, when Laserbeak arrives, appearing as a black, bladed mark on the idyllic image, and he transforms into a strange parody of an image we're all well familiar with. It's just comical, seeing this bright-pink Bumblebee sitting with a little girl while she reads him from her book, but it doesn't last. The creature uncurls and opens up, turning into this... Hideous winged centipede, and with an unnatural shriek, it jumps up and toward the innocent mother. This is where we cut to black - where the movie lets our imagination take over. We remember Laserbeak gunning down Voshkod and the bird, apathetically, with no hesitation; In just a couple of seconds, the little girl he sat with will be an orphan. The cut-to-black is a common horror movie maneuver, and aside from the whole imagination aspect, it also signifies a release of tension. "The scary stuff is over". But this release doesn't last. Just a tiny scene of Laserbeak attacking the mother - he's not using his guns. There's nothing apathetic or impartial to the way he attacks her. He's *enjoying this*. Suddenly, we remember Reedman, another of Soundwave's servants - and how he killed people by simply jumping into them with his razor-blade body. Another cut, and again, the movie lets our imagination take over. It was the man he was after, not the mother. She didn't have to die.

And finally, after another clip establishing his target, and one final chilling line, the movie just shows us this diorama of moon landing miniatures, and a photo of four men - all of whom have undoubtedly already become Laserbeak's victims in much the same pointlessly cruel manner. Instead of cutting to black, we exit the scene with a *fade*. Ultimately, after pretending to release the tension a few times, this slow fade has a lot less *finality* than another cut would. Laserbeak's rampage isn't over yet.

As it turns out, one of the four men is yet alive.

Cinnamon Bastard posted:

Yeah, so, every time we've seen a Decepticon in any form of disguise or alt mode, it's still had it's Decepticon logo.

Here we see Laserbeak, disguised as a diminutive, pink, feminized Bumblebee. Look close at the forehead. He's wearing the Autobot logo.

Laserbeak and Soundwave are something new. They are beyond ideology, beyond "sides". They're not *loyal*, they're independent. Soundwave has no face, and is some how part of a massive sinuous beast of destruction. Laserbeak takes on new altmodes and changes his logo without effort or compunction.

They're without an externally defined identity.

This is why they are dangerous.

Let's return to Megatron, because this scene is one of those that have shown an important progression throughout the trilogy. Let's take a closer look at Megatron's actual *design*.

I'll be using the toys for this, because the designers of the smaller toys actually knew what they were doing, and exaggerated a lot of very subtle design cues present in the movie models to be more clearly visible.



The first movie's Megatron is nothing short of angelic. In his big shot in the first movie, he had an actual halo and was surrounded by clouds - and his toy actually adds literal *wings*. He's hardly the friendly image of a Renaissance angel, but then again, neither is the actual Metatron, who is described as "a pillar of fire with 36 wings and innumerable eyes". In a sense, first movie Megatron presents a mixture of a Renaissance angel, a biblical angel, a skeleton and the usual spiky, monstrous look of the Decepticons. His altmode, meanwhile, does not resemble *anything* - it's a completely utilitarian flight mode. Even his head is still visible, crowned atop the unusual form.



The second film's Megatron presents a strange departure from this. After his unnatural marriage with Scrapper, who has become a pair of massive, weighty, treaded feet, all of the elegance of his original form was lost. Megatron 2 is bulky, clumsy, and does not have a hint of the angelic - notice, while the core shape is not too dissimilar, *his wings are gone*. Even his altmode is now this curled-up, turtle-like thing that looks more like him retreating into a shell than an actual spacecraft. His head is still visible, but now it's crouched below, as though he was trying to hide it away. He looks almost *scared*, which is only too fitting, considering the second time he transformed, it was during the Airstrike at the end of the movie. Even the gleaming icy silver-blue has been replaced by a much more muted color, here for some reason represented by bright green. Megatron 2 is the very image of a fallen angel, clipped wings and darkened heart. However, the bony image from before has gone away in favor of a much more muscular build - more than just being a pair of legs, Scrapper's parts have given Megs a much more workmanlike appearance in general.

But then there's another odd little detail... His hips appear to have widened, while his shoulders and waist narrowed. Huh?

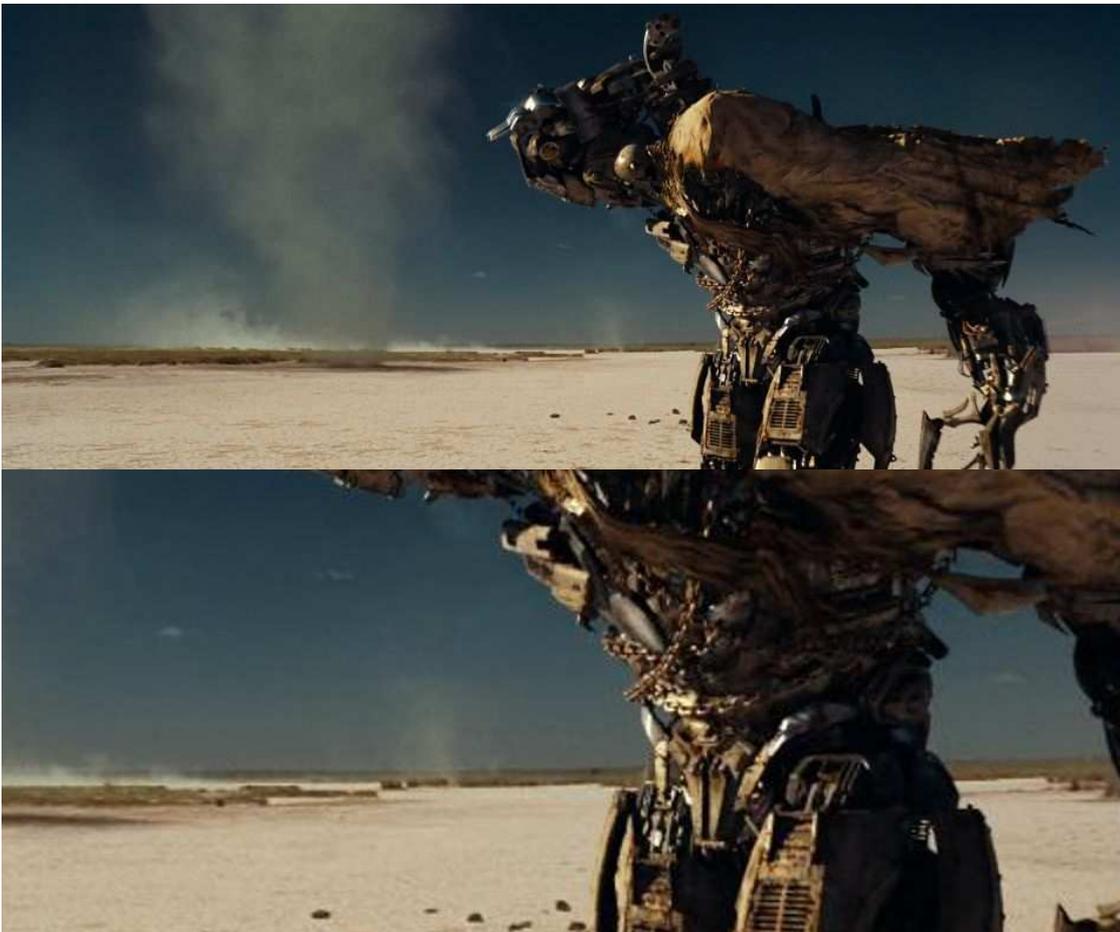


And then we get to DOTM. Finally, Megatron is forced to adopt an actual earth mode - not for ideological reasons or politeness, but simply because *he actually has to hide*. He wears a tarp over his head and shoulder, a sort of second layer of cloth - but again, for purely utilitarian reasons, simply to protect his grievous wounds from the elements. He's rusted and

gnarly, and having an earthmode, his head has completely disappeared from the alt-mode's appearance. And, well. He's a truck. He ended up choosing nearly the same alt-mode as his nemesis, the man who instigated his murder, Optimus Prime. But in spite of taking on the same symbol, it means something very different this time. After all, Optimus' truck mode is a lie - he's not a blue collar worker of any sort. But Megatron? Well, remember, *he still carries Scrapper's remains with him* - in a sense, he has *become* a Constructicon himself. In that sense, his truck mode is every bit as genuine as all the other Decepticons' uniforms - well, all others *except Soundwave*. Megatron has allowed himself one little lie, however - in his self-loathing desire to paint himself an unapproachable and amoral, he took on the form of an oil tanker. But it's not fossil fuel he transports, not a substance mired in death and misery - but food, *life*.

And this is where things go a little nuts. Notice, his hips have widened even further, while his shoulders and waist became even thinner. Although he has become even more obviously muscular, his body steeled by its constant punishment, he now has an actual bizarre *hourglass figure*. He's staying at home, raising and caring for his children, while Soundwave and Starscream are out doing things. Megatron has been *feminized* - again, remember the transgender/intersex imagery of Devastator, whose legacy Megatron carries. He's also a Mack truck - the same company that made Mixmaster's alt mode, whose logo is a *dog* - so now Megatron has officially, fully become a bitch.

In fact, if we take another look at his movie model, we can also see ano





MMMMIIIIIIICCCCCHHHHHAAAAEEEEELLLL BBBBAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!!! 🤖🤖🤖

Yonic Symbolism posted:
I feel like I should comment here but I'm not really sure what to say. I'm relevant.

revtoiletduck posted:
One thing that stood out to me in this scene is Megatron's transformation is pretty laborious. It's almost painful to watch and sounds awful.

Rex Deckard posted:
Sounds like childbirth.

I have not seen the movie, but have followed this thread since the start. Without having heard it, transformation & labor + feeding parts of one self all fall into the Mother interpretation as well.

Armyman25 posted:
I think that you're overlooking some of the visual influences on Megatron, namely the Mad Max series.

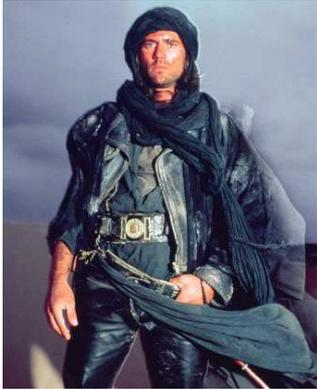
The tanker truck he turns into looks very similar to the rig in The Road Warrior,.



Which was a fuel tanker that didn't actually carry any fuel.

Armyman25 cont...

And as far as Megatron being emotionally damaged, traveling the wasteland/desert, and carrying a shotgun, well...



I'm not sure the significance of all that, but it looks to me that Bay is making reference to the most influential post-apocalyptic movie of the 1980's.

Microcline posted:

His race is gradually dying, he's been foiled twice in trying to save his planet, and Earth is ruled by a group of anarchic, hyperviolent thugs led by a physically huge (you might even say *humongous*) leader. For Megatron, this is a post-apocalyptic setting. If we view energon as "fuel" for the transformers, the downfall even came for the same reason.

They cover themselves in spikes and leather to scare off the dangers of the setting. With both Max's police leathers and Megatron's Decepticon armor they wear the tattered remnants of when they fought to protect their dying civilization. Max has been broken down by his inability to protect his family and friends in the first movie, just as Megatron has been broken down by his failures. Even the car combat has similarities--they're fighting with the dwindling, decaying remains of a dead civilization, the means of production lost. Max and Megatron are both grizzled loners who find it in them to protect the defenseless. The difference being, that while Max is able to help the settlers to escape, allowing them to form the "Great Northern Tribe", meaning that while technology is lost, mankind has not fallen to barbarism, Megatron is not the protagonist of this, dooming him to failure.

Dr. Notadoctor posted:

Shockwave and Soundwave are both in this movie and both different characters who have the same colors. It's confusing.

Speaking of colors, let's talk about them. Specifically I noticed in the cut from the Buzz-scene to the Megatron-scene, that the colors shifted. In the Autobot scene everything is blue, cold, calm, metallic. In the Megatron scene, it's orange, hot, angry, bright. Anyone who knows basic color theory can tell you that blue and orange are complimentary colors, and so therefore opposites.

Also, I just watched the Megatron scene again. Focus on the sound. You *know* that Megatron says "All Hail Megatron," because he's the only person there capable of speech. But if you watch the scene, it zooms in on Megatron's voice and we here the roar of a lion...and then zooms in on elephants raising their trunks, where we hear "All hail Megatron!" Almost as if Megatron, for that scene, became incapable of speech and only was able to roar like a lion, and the animal kingdom gained the ability and bowed down to the king of beasts. I honestly interpreted it at first as though Megatron was hallucinating that the elephants were pronouncing his kingship. I'm still not sure he's not. (I just rewatched it, the elephants almost look like they're giving a nazi salute. I'm serious!)

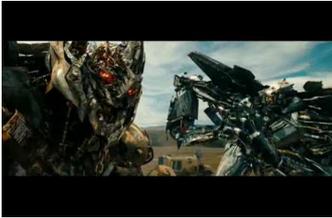
Not to mention that the cloth he wears over his head looks like, among other things: flowing hair, or a mane.

Shanty posted:

It starts with that low pitched growl, and then about halfway through the transformation there's an audible roar as the transforming truck cabin kind of pounds the ground like an animal. At this point it could even be said to be a quadruped, since the wheels are gone, and it's certainly not standing on two legs. It gives the transformation sequence a really *primal* vibe. As Megatron transforms from vehicle to robot, there's a glimpse of this *third* thing, the animal inside.

Dr. Notadoctor posted:

Then Starscream shows up, and let's talk about color again.



"Oh my poor master, how it pains me to see you so wounded; so weak."

Look how much BLUER Starscream is compared to Megatron! And look at the sky and ground too! The once highflying Megatron has been grounded, reduced to the beastly and feral orange Savannah, whereas Starscream still soars in the air, blue as the sky, and still cold and efficient. Megatron is close to the audience, and we feel the sense of isolation and defeat that he feels. He wants to fly again like Starscream, who comes in from the background, and despite Starscream's concerns, it feels mocking to him. The composition of this shot is actually incredible.

Also in most of the shots Megatron is in, sands of the desert are coming more into view, whereas with Soundwave and Starscream, they are receding.

Megatron is now a beast who wishes to rise back to the levels of the machines. He wishes to retain his kingship over his faction. He feels that despite everything he's done he is constantly being mocked by those who claim to help him. It wasn't supposed to be like this, he was supposed to be recognized. He was supposed to be king. He's the MAN! Why is he so feminized? Why is he so



wait what?

edit: actually I'm not done. Look at the similarity between those two shots. Sam is pissed that his car (which resembles an Autobot, just like Megatron's alt-form resembles an Autobot) isn't starting, and so kicks it viciously in the foreground, until a man who has more power than him, is more successful than him, and is more of a "man" than him, shows up to offer help. Both Megatron and Sam react very negatively to these offers, as the offer of help is, in itself, feminizing. There are a few key differences however. The biggest and most noticable one is how they're reversed. Megatron is on the left while Sam is on the right. See, American audiences read from left to right, so we're conditioned to put what's on the left before what's on the right, giving it more importance. It sort of downplays the "threat" of Dylan and puts forth the notion that Sam is being COMPLETELY paranoid about this kind rich man who just wants to help him out, whereas Megatron is justified in his paranoia about Starscream taunting him.

This is really really fucking ironic for reasons that will be obvious later in the movie.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

Like Devastator in the previous film, the sequence of Megatron in Africa handily combines imagery of feminization, race, animalism and general social abjection. They even throw mental and physical disability in there. It reminds me of nothing more than the inferiorized aliens from District 9.

The reference to Mad Max 2 is, I think, pretty straightforward. Megatron is effectively in the apocalypse, an African shanty that the film doesn't even dignify with an actual geographical location. I mean, Mount Kilimanjaro is right there in the background, but obviously he's not hiding in the middle of a Tanzanian national park. The film is using Kilimanjaro as a pop shorthand for 'Africa' in the same way it uses imagery of the moon landing as pop shorthand for 'history'. It's like if exposition told us Megatron was hiding somewhere in Italy – and showed him riding a gondola through the Venetian canals, past the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

The inauthenticity is the entire joke. It's the hyperreal experience of seeing the Pyramids juxtaposed with the Eiffel tower in Las Vegas. Bay is actively mocking the audience's inability to tell the constructed, filmic cliché of 'Africa' from the real thing.

This is 'desert of the real' imagery, which may be familiar from The Matrix. And, in fact, the themes of Transformers seem to be all but based on Slavoj Žižek's Welcome to the Desert of the Real (<http://www.lacan.com/desertsymf.htm>). As Wikipedia helpfully summarizes:

"Žižek shows how today the fundamentalist terrorist plays an analogous symbolic role to the Jew during the Holocaust, the excluded "other" whose alien presence legitimizes measures of internal discipline. Although Americans were victims, so were the attacking terrorists, and therefore neither side was justified in their violent actions. In fact, the attacks were already libidinally invested by a series of Hollywood catastrophe films, showing that it was exactly what Americans secretly wanted, i.e., their ultimate spectacular experience. The false perception of a purely external threat allowed the system of global capitalism to go essentially unchallenged, functioning to indefinitely defer discussion about alternative socioeconomic futures. The only real "other" to global capitalism is a renewed form of socialism, because the "others" of capitalism (those excluded from capitalism's benefits) are almost everyone, even though they are all formally extended the promise of liberal rights. While the USA claims to be standing for democratic rights and principles, it actually suspended these same rights at home and legitimized torture in order to fight the war on terror. Rather than seeing these as real exceptions, Žižek identifies them as central tendencies in liberal democracy, a system inherently susceptible to corruption and unable to universalize its own rights. Changing conditions of war further erode any distinctions that could be made between a state of war or exception and a state of peace, central distinctions in democratic ideology. Because the democratic system is always generating new states of emergency to justify the negation of its ethical principles, the future of emancipatory politics cannot be contained within a liberal democratic framework (including notions of human rights, the rule of law, and constitutionality)."

Apply that to the film as you will. But, while the Autobots are clearly aligned with global capitalism and liberal democracy, the Decepticons are much more ambiguous. Return to Shockwave for a moment. He is not simply a specter of the USSR, the radiation of Chernobyl given a physical body. Shockwave is, rather, something that persists *after* the total failure of the USSR – an undead force that survives in what the film has explicitly presented as a pop-mythological dead zone. This is thematically linked, of course, to Megatron shambling through the post-apocalypse in Mad Max 2 regalia. The film defines the apocalypse not as a cold-war-turned-hot (as literally happens in Mad Max 2's plot) but as an socio-economic apocalypse, where there is seemingly no alternative to capitalism – but where there is some hope at the margins.

SuperMechagodzilla cont...

"If there is any symbolism in the collapse of the WTC towers, it is [...] the notion that the two WTC towers stood for the center of VIRTUAL capitalism, of financial speculations disconnected from the sphere of material production. The shattering impact of the bombings can be accounted for only against the background of the borderline which today separates the digitalized First World from the Third World "desert of the Real." It is the awareness that we live in an insulated artificial universe which generates the notion that some ominous agent is threatening us all the time with total destruction. [...]

Whenever we encounter such a purely evil Outside, we should gather the courage to endorse the Hegelian lesson: in this pure Outside, we should recognize the distilled version of our own essence. For the last five centuries, the (relative) prosperity and peace of the "civilized" West was bought by the export of ruthless violence and destruction to the "barbarian" Outside: the long story from the conquest of America to the slaughter in Congo. Cruel and indifferent as it may sound, we should also, now more than ever, bear in mind that the actual effect of these bombings is much more symbolic than real: in Africa, EVERY SINGLE DAY more people die of AIDS than all the victims of the WTC collapse, and their death could have been easily cut back with relatively small financial means. The US just got the taste of what goes on around the world on a daily basis, from Sarajevo to Grozny, from Ruanda and Congo to Sierra Leone."

(That's foreshadowing.)

Part 7: "We want everybody to act like adults, quit playing games, realize that it's not just my way or the highway."



We're treated to a bit of a montage of Sam in his new place. There's still an undertone of the aggressive nihilism from the last montage Sam got, but it's comparatively toned down, and you sort of get the impression that Sam finally found his place and can start rebuilding.



Oh hey Que, is that you? Nope, being that it's Carly driving it, that's a, much, *much* more upper-class model. Why suddenly have one of your heroes drive around in a Mercedes, usually, they always use Ameri-



Oh. Right. I have to say, were it not for the toy line, this would be a pretty neat thing since it is cleverly foreshadowed in the scene with Megatron, where Soundwave's chest is hidden in shadows so you can't see the big Mercedes symbol, but there's

still a number of subtle similarities observant viewers may notice (the vents and such).



Meanwhile, someone is stalking Sam! Hey, it's the guy from the photo (Ken Jeong)! Well he certainly won't die any time soon.



While Sam complains about his job, Carly plays with a little colorful ball. It's one of those little things; Most characters in this trilogy are streamlined down to the last note, playing only the part they're given and not an itty bit more - even Sam. I mean, think about it. What have we actually seen of Sam *as a person*? We don't know his hobbies, or his likes and dislikes, or how he spends his time when he's bored. Everything he said and did in this film was in the service of underlining that he feels unjustly treated for his accomplishments, and as a result he feels very robotic and clinical (as he should). And here his girlfriend, who was reduced to an object in her very first appearance, just kind of throwing a ball up and down to amuse herself while listening to her prick boyfriend whine. It's a little like Mr. Voshkod's cross, just this little humanizing touch that makes her feel closer to the audience, and I cannot understate how important these are in this film.

Sam calls her "my angel". She's not just a very human, but also an explicitly *angelic* figure (I wrote this part before people said it in the thread, okay?). And remember who the other explicitly angelic figure in these movies was? Oh yeah, this is going places.



Carly lets slip that Mr. Gould gave her the car, and Sam immediately becomes quite nasty. He moves away from her, sits down behind the computer screen in the most authoritative position possible, and with a judgmental gaze begins to grill her over what kind of car it is. Man, of all the big unanswered questions in DOTM, “what does she *see* in the guy!?” is probably way up there.



After he flips out that there’s no way he could ever afford a \$200 000 car, Carly takes it easy and tries to calm him down. “You’re frustrated. I know, I’ve been there. Good things will happen!” She *knows* what she’s talking about. Just like John Malkovich, she’s at the top of the world, but she had to fight to get there as well.



And Sam is doing a pretty good job, all things considered. “The man who makes this company run!”, Malkovich proudly exclaims, even though Sam has only been working here for a couple of days.



Carly plops down a red pot with sweets(?), obviously as a nod to that one bizarre event a while ago... But aside from a bit of an awkward moment for Sam, no one seems to care. Malkovich himself seems much more interested in curiously examining Carly as she leaves.

Milky Moor posted:

I don't know, moustache man (that's Sam's direct supervisor, by the way) in the background there seems pretty shocked. It's clear that Carly knows a lot about what's going on at Sam's work. She openly manipulates Bruce, immediately taking control of the conversation, doing it all seemingly for Sam's benefit – by coming up with a false compliment and attributing it to Sam. This isn't the last time we'll see her using her mind and her ability to read social situations and power structures to think her way out of a situation and it's such an interesting contrast when much of this trilogy revolves around direct power and violence.

Milky Moor cont...

We see Bruce objectify her, in the shot where he bends his head over to presumably look at her rear, but, once again, the camera does not.

Now, the song that plays as Sam is handing out the mail is called 'All That You Are' by the Goo Goo Dolls. Much like Linkin Park, these lyrics are pretty relevant to Sam - I'll be including the few bits I find interesting but I encourage you all to check out the whole sheet. As far as I'm concerned, this is Sam's views on Carly and kind of encapsulates the growth of their relationship throughout the film. In a way, DOTM is a film about Sam learning to love the life that he has.

"Yeah all the things that you are
Beautifully broken,
Alive in my heart
And know
That you are everything
Let your heart sing and tonight
We'll light up the stars

...

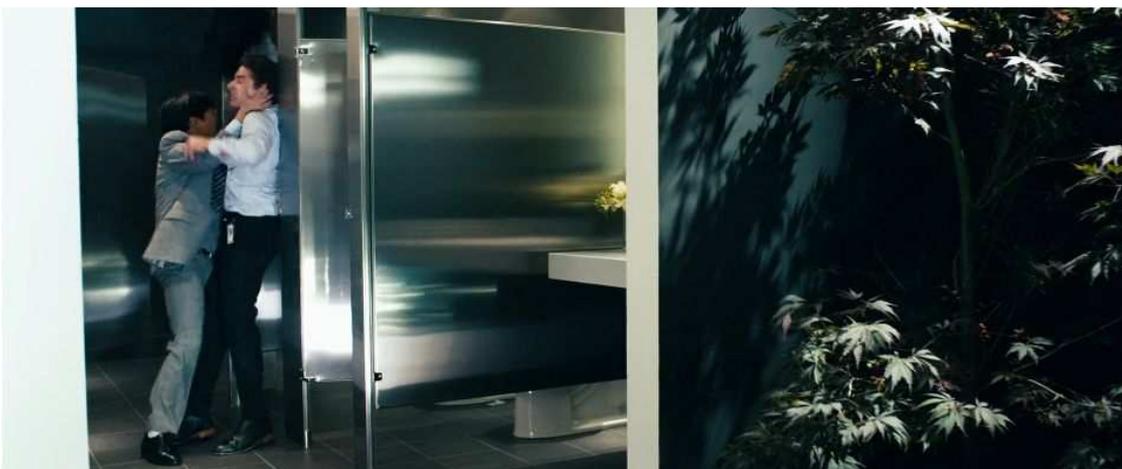
I feel wrong
I'm so human and flawed
I'll break down even though I'm still strong
And time... will make fools of us all
Build us up and then laughs when we fall
You... pull me through
When I'm alone in the dark and the fear is my truth

...

You're the sound of redemption
The faith that I've lost the answers
I'm seeking no matter the cost
You opened the window now I can see
And you taught me forgiveness
By giving your love back to me"



Sam's stalker follows him into the elevator, and it turns out... Uh oh, it's Laserbeak! The Pretender stalking Sam has the exact same mannerisms and nearly the same voice as the murderous bird we've come to know, and he just *assaults* Sam.



Under the ominous music, they dance(?) into a bathroom stall, and Laserbeak begins his work eviscerating Sam...

No. Uh. Um. Yeah, it's not Laserbeak at all. Well he is, but not in the *direct* sense. Instead of eviscerating Sam, he just kind of goes nuts all over him for a while and tells him there's some moon conspiracy or something. It's... Very strange.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:

This is actually a sort of director trademark for Bay: an intimate brawl in a men's washroom. When it occurs in *The Island*, it's explicitly a gay "joke" – a character walks in while Ewan Macgregor interrogates Steve Buscemi and thinks they're gonna fuck – but that subtext is pretty clear here too. I mean, look at that screenshot.

In *Bad Boys 1*, Martin Lawrence's character is attacked by two men while he uses a urinal (http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xhqx46_bathroom-brawl_shortfilms) in a strip club's washroom. One man brandishes a knife, while the other tries to suffocate him with a plastic bag over his head, combining imagery of penetration and (erotic) asphyxiation. Pointedly, Martin Lawrence's gun is knocked out of his hand and lands in one of the piss-filled urinals. If you want imagery of debasement and emasculation, there you have it.

What unites all three of these scenes is not only their content (straight characters attacked by 'queer' criminal weirdoes), but their context in the narrative. These washrooms are places where conspiracies are brought out into the open. Even on a basic level, Martin Lawrence realizes that the man beside him isn't *just* interested in taking a leak (wink wink).

Bay is directly equating a homophobic fantasy of illicit homosexuality with entertaining movie criminality. And this 'humor' is pointedly bad – especially in *The Island*, where it's an obvious distancing effect. You can see two dudes rubbing all up against each other in a washroom while reassuring yourself that 1) gays are still icky and 2) these guys aren't *really* gay anyways. They just look gay because they work for robot terrorists or whatever.

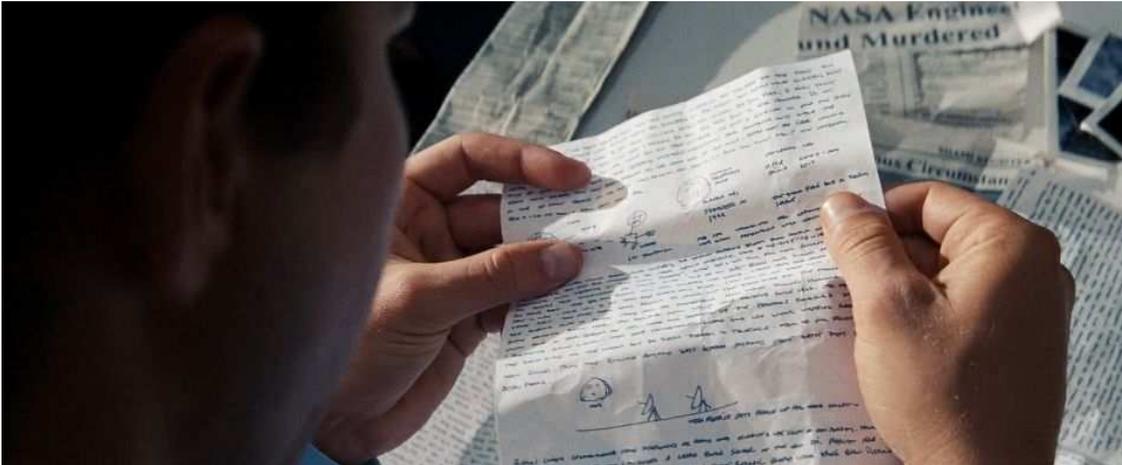
(Remember how Laserbeak turns into a diminutive, *pink* version of Bumblebee? (Bumblebee being, of course, Shia's robot life-partner.))

Like the digital neo-blackface of the twins, this can be (and is) easily misread as idiotic gay-panic humor, and not commentary on the same. The bad humor is actually 'meta'. Bay is satirizing the homophobic's obvious fascination with homosexuality, couched in hysterically overblown 'revulsion'. Think of how your typical anti-gay pastor will obsess in detail over all the many elaborate sinful behaviours those gays are ostensibly up to. The gays have all these secret codes and behaviours, you see. It really cuts to the heart of why people watch crime movies as 'escapism'.

That's not necessarily to say that Allsam is a robo-/homosexual – but there is undoubtedly an aspect of that in himself, that he disavows. The scene with "Deep Wang" (a reference to the historical Deep Throat, himself referencing the hugely (in)famous oral-sex porno film.) is hugely reminiscent of the gay-panic scene in *American Psycho* – meaning Allsam is totally this film's Patrick Bateman, right?



Malkovich stumbles upon their little scene, and “Deep Wang” goes nuts on him instead and challenges him to a man-off or something. He chases Malkovich into a corner, declares a staring contest, then hits him (?), to which Malkovich just responds by apathetically looking down on him. I am so lost. The only thing that’s clear from all this is that Wang has no idea how a human being is supposed to behave.



Sam takes a look at the bundle of papers not-Laserbeak handed him, and it's mostly nonsensical scribbles somehow concerning the dark side of the moon. It's your bread-and-butter conspiracy stuff, newspaper clippings and all.





I find it cute that they used CGI for the little gripping arms here. They could have easily gone for a practical prop, but, consistency!

Sam confronts Wang about it, but he's clearly having a bad day. This scene reminds me of Dave in the café - Sam gets all up in Wang's nose about how he attacked him, but he has no idea of the circumstances *surrounding* the attack, and is more interested in petty "justice" than actually finding out what this is all about.





What is it about then? Well, here's the actual Laserbeak to tell us! Wang has been working for him, but...



"I'll do whatever you want me to do!"

"I know... But my superiors want me to... Suicide you."



muike posted:

It's so fucking bizarre for an office worker to dual wield handguns in self defense. It's so self-evidently ridiculous.

Thulsa Doom posted:

It's doubly bizarre that a person like him in a presumably secure building in Washington, D.C. would even *have* handguns.

Maarak posted:

You don't even need to bring up the building, DC itself has some of the most strict gun laws in the nation. Until *District of Columbia v. Heller* in 2008, it was illegal for civilians to even possess a handgun in the district, and even that just enables people to keep ones in their home.

Maarak posted:

Hrm...



Man-Thing posted:

Guys:





Did I say I have no idea what to make of the bathroom scene? Well, scratch that, I have no idea what Wang's deal is in general. I mean... Right.

So let me get this out of the way first: Wang : Laserbeak :: Reedman : Ravage. Yep, this bizarre ostensibly comic relief character is an extension of one of the most strange and alien *things* in the franchise. And in a way, this is not so surprising, because Wang is anything if not alien and bizarre. Watching him, you get the impression that he's a robot who learned human behavior by watching the trilogy up to this point and never asked himself *why* people act the way they do. He actually copies Leo's behavior almost 1:1 in the bathroom scene, but then there's also hints of Sam and Simmons and other movie action stars and I-don't-even-know. His narrative role is to act as an extended arm for Soundwave - he sabotages networks, just as Soundwave himself did, and leaks information to Sam (and thus the Autobots) just as the Decepticon's EEEVVVILLLL plan demands. While he thinks he's going to be murdered because he said too much, Laserbeak makes abundantly clear that the real reason is simply that he's no longer needed - Laserbeak explicitly refers to *suicide* before the killing. He's purging a part of *himself* that is no longer needed. This also plays into Soundwave's general loyalty issues, but those will come up in the future.

But then what's with the confrontation with Laserbeak? Well, here's the sort of weird thing. While we know Ravage, Reedman and Laserbeak are extensions of Soundwave, we don't actually know how *distinct* they are from him. Are they all just a single hivemind? Are they separate, individually sentient creatures with a psychic link? Something in-between? Because we are

never told what it is, we also don't find out how capable they are of *rebellion*. Wang raises his guns at Laserbeak, but it seems to cost him great difficulty to do so, and he fails to actually pull the trigger (note: Another gun that is presented, but not fired!). I don't... I don't even know. I mean, I can muse on this all day, but really, *I have no idea how Wang actually fits into the context of the film*. He's just this bizarre side-track that ends up mattering in some subtle aspects but mostly just wastes our time? So I guess he's this movie's equivalent of, oh, most of *Revenge of the Fallen*.

Yeah, not a big fan of this scene.



Suddenly, Laserbeak attacks!



He basically completely wrecks the place, and chases after Sam, who manages to escape.



He takes Carly to the not-so-secret secret military headquarters, where all the soldiers make fun of him. Oh, that poor little guy.



There's a huge mess as Sam and the soldiers try to out-abhorrent each other. Aside from being another contrast with *Duel*, where Mann was terrified of hurting his car and moving through fences but Sam just intentionally gets it wrecked trying to *break through* a barricade, it's also a callback to the scene of Sector 7 confronting Sam in the first movie - they use their gun-toys to intimidate Sam, whose car-toy just isn't up to scratch for out-toying them. But of course, as with that scene...



Well, I'm sure no one was looking forward to *this guy's* reappearance.

Philo posted:

Oh man, I just wanted to say that Sam in this scene is just absolutely FUCKING INSANE. I don't even remember anything the soldiers said because Sam just becomes completely unhinged, especially when he snaps and straight up tackles one of the armed soldiers. I'm not sure if this was supposed to be humor or what, but I found it uncomfortable to watch mostly because I felt like I was witnessing someone suffering from a mental break. Going with the AllSam theory, it's like this one moment where his veneer of still being human gets really thin and unstable. But then once they decide to let him in the headquarters he snaps back into acting normal as if he wasn't going off the deep end a couple of seconds before.

Thulsa Doom posted:

Look at the way Carly is looking at him.

Dark of the Moon is a horror film, and Carly is the protagonist. We're just not seeing it from her perspective.



Inside the building, Sam tells Lennox what he knows. “But why would Decepticons want to kill humans? I thought their war was with the Autobots”, Carly wonders. “Sentinel was the Einstein of his civilization”, Charlotte says as she decides to put the prototype technology they found with him under lock and key, then interrupts herself with “Who’s the chick?”

She immediately starts making a fuss about what the hell some teenager is doing in their secret headquarters, but Lennox waves her off (again).



Hmmm... Blonde hair bound into a ponytail, slightly rounded glasses with thick black rims, suit... Where have we seen that look before...?

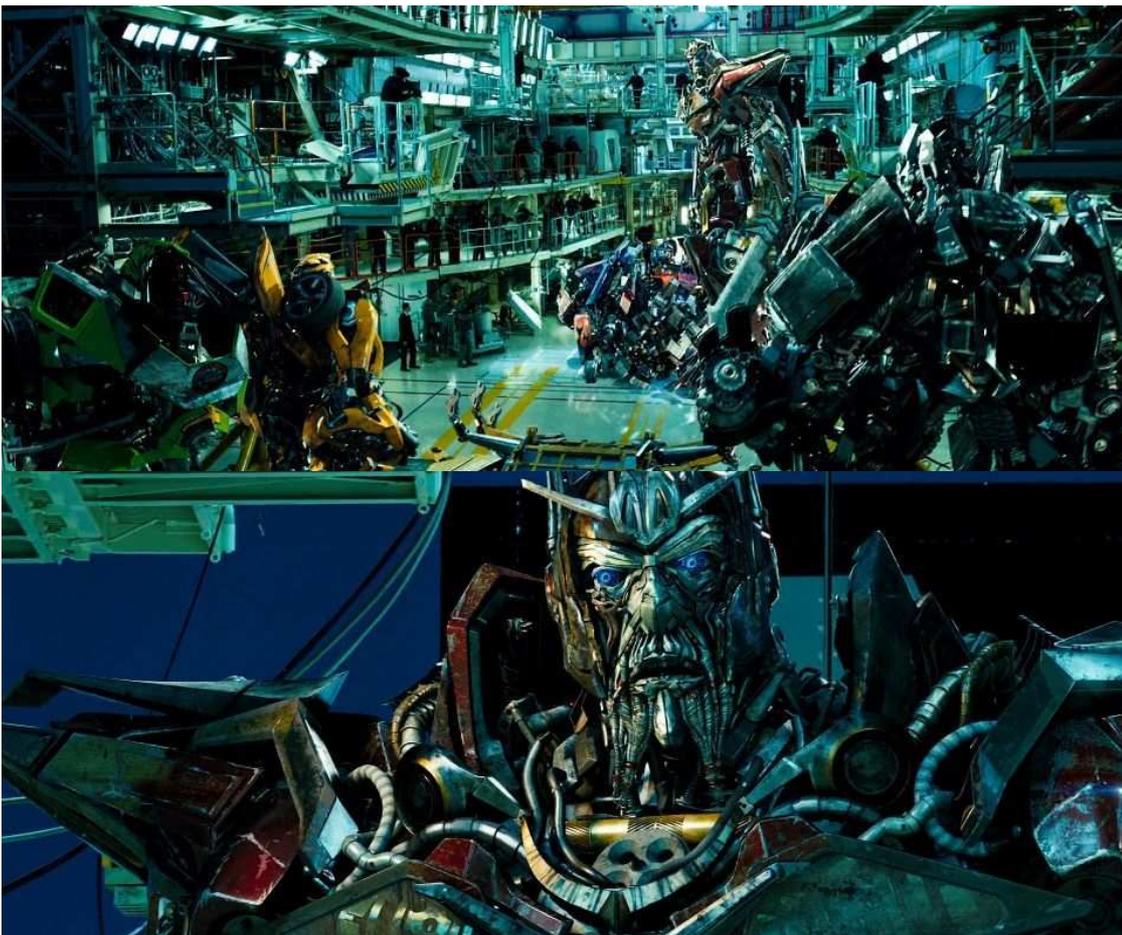
This time however, Mearing takes none of Lennox’ bullshit and puts her foot down. “We don’t entrust national security to teenagers.” Once again, Sam is confronted with a no-bullshit authority.



Now in full company, Prime finally gets around to reviving/waking up Sentinel Prime.



Sentinel immediately goes apes and attacks Prime - holy shit, Leonard Nimoy out of nowhere, providing his voice! (GUYS HE'S SPOCK) - as Bumblebee showed in the first and Megatron in the previous movie, Transformers can get *very* cranky when awoken rudely. Interestingly, he is the *only* Transformer to actually attack *another Transformer* in this manner rather than his surroundings or humans.



Optimus and the other Autobots manage to calm him down, and he inquires about the status of the war. “The war was lost”, Optimus straight-out says. No one of the humans seems to realize what he just said. Sentinel then asks about the “pillars” that were with him on the ship, and Optimus says they’ve retrieved five - out of many hundreds. Whoops.

Sentinel then finally explains what this secret technology, the Autobots’ greatest weapon, is - a space bridge. A gigantic teleporter that warps and breaks the laws of physics to transport massive amounts of matter through the entire universe. The film is taking its disregard for time and space to a whole new literal level.



Mearing does *not* like this answer. Optimus tries to keep bullshitting his way around her by saying that it’s supposed to transport refugees and resources, but she has none of that and immediately reasons that its main application is to transport *troops and weapons*. Now Sentinel tries to wave her off by saying that it shouldn’t concern humans what they do with their technology - but she just returns that as long as the Autobots trample around the earth, what humanity says, *goes*.

It’s kind of amazing - Charlotte is the first character in the entire trilogy we see actually, for-real stand up to the Autobots. One of the big themes of this film specifically is the pissing contest of authority, and how the bigger person with more status inevitably wins. But look at Charlotte here. Yeah, she’s basically the highest human authority we see in the films - but what is she compared to Sentinel? He’s an enormous firetruck robot the size of a building, a genius beyond any imagination, his will breaks time and space, and even the godlike Optimus Prime bows before him. He’s the undisputed god-king of an entire *race* of gods. He’s Zeus, he’s Odin, *you don’t fuck with him*. And Charlotte? She wears silly shoes, she has too many bags, and while she knows perfectly that Lennox and the Autobots are pulling all sorts of completely indefensible shit, she lacks the will and power to actually put a stop to them. And in spite of all this, *she’s wiping the floor with Sentinel*.



"You can't just bring weapons of mass destruction into our atmosphere... Kinda have to clear customs first! A little formality called paperwork, kinda separates us from the animal."

Sentinel is pretty pissed, but lets her live for now, leaving a warning: The Decepticons must never get the hands on the pillars, or it would mean the end of the world.



Sam and Carly follow her to her office so he can keep whining to her about how he totally matters.



Brains tramples all over her books while he explains how he could totally tell her everything about everything he knows, but she had it with the Autobots' shit, and shoos him off using her gun. Yes, really. She just takes out her gun and loudly puts it on the table.

Interestingly, it's clear she doesn't actually intend to *use* the gun - she just puts it on the table, not even aiming at him or anything. Once again, a gun is presented, but not fired. It is used as a *communicative measure*.

Right. So I debated about whether I should talk about Charlotte in this update or at the end of the movie, but I figured that since I couldn't say much about Wang and already put off Sentinel for later, I might as well now. So Charlotte is Carly from the future.

Yes.

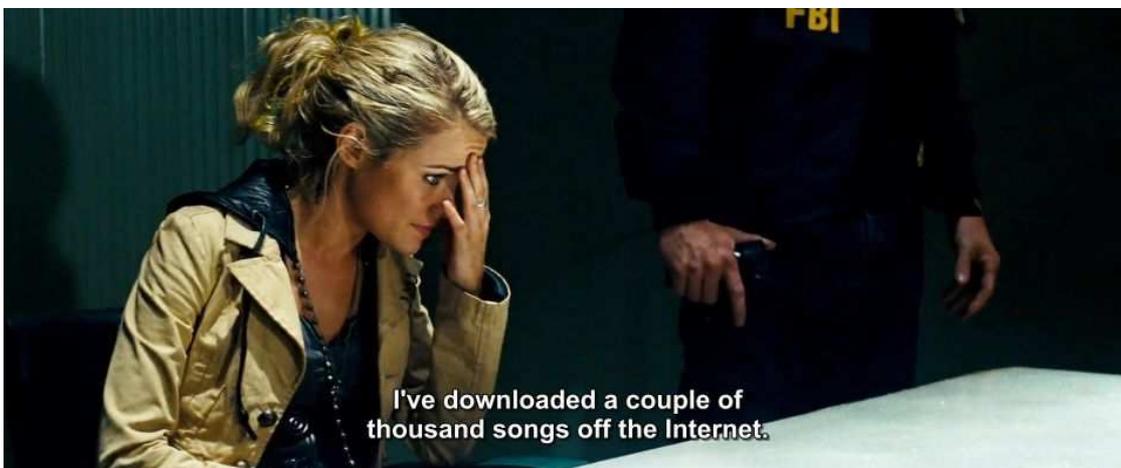




Well we had Malkovich as a potential future scenario for Sam, so why the fuck not? Just looking at the pictures, if you were to tell me that these are young and old versions of the same character, I'd totally buy it. As Charlotte first notices Carly, she seems a little exasperated, and specifically calls her a *chick* - something we take as a condescending remark towards a woman, but in actuality it's a word underlining her *youth*. With all the timebending this movie does, why the fuck not?

Compare the two appearances directly. Carly is a bright and shining young star, wide grin and eyes burning with positive naiveté. Her shirt is a bright and pleasant blue, and her large circular earrings enhance the openness of her disposition. Her framing herself in the halo of the presidential seal implies a strong ideology and ambition, and in spite of her overall somewhat silly appearance, the squared spectacles and cleanly swept-back hair speak of a sense of focus and professionalism. Charlotte, meanwhile, definitely bears the marks of her age. Even the tired frown aside, her shirt is significantly darker and more worn (much like the glasses with black rims being a reoccurring motif, dark shirts are used in this movie to show ennui and hopelessness - keep an eye out for that), her earrings are still golden circles, but they have shrunk down significantly, creating a very "closed up" impression, her hair is carelessly bound in the back and mostly unkempt, and her glasses actually seem to have weakened and malformed with time. And behind her? No ideological symbols, no ambition, even the patriotic flags in her office are carefully placed out of this shot. There's only an indistinct brown office wall, showing the dreary reality of her situation.

Actually, let me go a bit further back.



Remember Maggie Madsen? Well I don't blame you if you don't. She was a simple college student, hired by the military to help decipher the Decepticon language. The entire movie, her deal was that she wanted to find out more about the Decepticons - their language, their methods, their intentions. She was the first to catch on that there was more going on than foreign military shenanigans, and really, was competent *far* beyond her field. By all rights, she should have been the protagonist of the movie, but because of her status as a woman, people constantly refused to pay her any mind, and in the end reduced her to nothing more than another ant in the hive. Even at the end of the movie, when everyone had their little moments of heroism, all she was is another member of Simmons' idiot brigade. We know nothing about her as a person or how she feels about any of this - as a character, she remains mostly a mystery.



Then, in the second film, we had Alice. She was also a college student, and there was also a strong implication that she was primarily driven by the attainment of knowledge. However, instead of finding out more about the Decepticons, she wanted to find out more about *the cosmos at large* - she holds this symbol of the human knowledge of the stars in an almost angry manner and burns the library's meaningless and infinitely petty books in her pursuit of Sam and his total cosmic wisdom. But of course, no one around her figures any of this. From start to finish she is reduced to her status as a woman, to her body, to a literal *object*, by characters and audience alike. She's not part of the human ant hive - if anything, she is infinitely lonely. And once again, we never find out anything else about her. No one wonders about where she came from, what she does in her life. What she enjoys, what she wants. She's a woman and a robot, and clearly, all they ever want is to consume and destroy.

In earlier parts of this commentary I made reference to the idea that Alice re-appears and Carly, and Maggie as Charlotte. However, upon my 4th rewatch of the film, I realized I wasn't quite right. *All four* of these characters are fundamentally interrelated. When we meet Carly, she's fresh out of college, having left behind the troubled and difficult times of teen age and looking forward to the bright future. "You're frustrated. I know, I've been there. Good things will happen!" All her youth, Carly has been devalued and ignored, felt a constant pressure and frustration that Sam cannot even *imagine*. But she kept on living, because *good things will happen*. Through all of her difficult times, she helped build an empire, and attained everything our culture considers a mark of feminine success. Wealth, status, a famous husband, powerful friends. But the problem is: *She will never gain anything more.*

How is she all that different from Maggie and Alice, even now? Has anyone, even her own boyfriend, ever thrown her a second look, ever asked her what she wants? The only person we ever see look out for *her* interests is... Well, we'll get there. Carly is a bright drop of empathy and humanity in a dark and nihilistic world... But that's only because it has not yet succeeded to wear her down. But as Charlotte's existence shows, that is an inevitability. Why does Charlotte wear goofy

shoes? Who cares, she's just some woman who doesn't support the Autobots. She doesn't matter, she's the enemy. If you want a picture of the present, imagine a boot stamping on a woman's face - forever.

So why is this important? Well, this is where things go completely batshit. I told you this was a very political movie, so let's politics!

Carly's iconic image I keep re-using makes no secret of her great ambition: *Become President of the United States*. We see her future, and she's attained the status of "Director of National Intelligence". Except, well. This is a movie, and the role of the DONI isn't so much a literal job description as it is a narrative role. So let's abstract ourselves away from that for a second, and take a look at the development of Carly's professional role.

When the young Carly pictures herself as president, what does she imagine? She imagines herself as an angel, head surrounded by the halo of the presidential sigil. She imagines herself a powerful symbol, standing in the eyes and cameras of the public, a bringer of *hope*. "*Good things will happen*." Hope... And change. Yes, yes.

Flash forward to her future. In a sense, she has attained what she wanted: In a narrative sense, she is the supreme authority of mankind, their representative and their leader. A diplomat, a ruler who decides the fate of nations. But... There's nothing angelic or symbolic in her role. She's a miserable bureaucrat, mostly sitting at a cramped desk and trying to keep track of decisions made way beyond her control. Invisible to the public eye and ignored by her underlings. Of everything she promised herself of the future, nothing came true.

And she even changed her nationality to accomplish it, *becoming* American in a literal sense. After all, an English person cannot become the leader of the western world, just as a Kenyan cannot. Yep, no sense jumping around it at this point, *Carly and Charlotte symbolize Barack Obama*. This film's favorite thing is taking conspiracy theories and stretching their core ideas beyond belief, so now Obama is not the person he claims he is, not an actual American, but a white English woman. That's... Wow, let me even *attempt* to justify this statement.

After all, it's completely silly. We already saw President Obama, at the very start of the movie, handing Sam a medal. Well.



Compare the oval office to the establishing shots of Mearing's office above. Two flags adorn the sides of her desk, the traditional American one to her right and a different, but still suitably patriotic one on the left. A tall, vertical window reaches from the floor to the high ceiling, adorned by photos and plaques, papers are strewn around on the desk that holds remarkably little modern technology, and dark wood grain gives the place a baroque feeling. But as key as the similarities, are the *differences*. Mearing's office is tiny, cramped and dark, and its large window is barricaded against the outside world. Compared to the vacuous expansiveness of the Oval Office, it feels very *intimate* and *personal*. The film places a lot of emphasis on Carly and Charlotte being human beings, with their own wishes, their own thoughts, their own little worlds they live in.

By contrast, what do we know about President Obama, as he is portrayed in these movies?

In the second film, his only mention is that he is flown into a bunker somewhere. And now in the third, he only exists to hand Sam a medal and pose on a photo. What difference would it have made to use Bush, or Romney, or a random nondescript white guy, instead? None, that's what. POTUS is just POTUS. He's simply a thing that exists, a symbolic role someone has to fill out so he can hand out medals and pose on photos. Who cares about the man behind the position, his dreams, his thoughts? Who cares about Barack Obama, the actual person, who cares about his weary facial expression as he is forced to attend an hour-long "debate" whose only purpose it is to score political points, who thinks about the actual life this man leads, his hopes and sorrows? "He's a socialist who wants to take our guns!", cries the right, but what they talk about is not Barack Obama as a person, but their idea of a democratic president. "He's just another centre-right corporate shill who has no interest in what the country actually needs", the left laments, basing on what they know of his actions and decisions their belief of his motives and ideas. But they don't know, no one knows, except for him and his own wife. Between all the interviews, all the coverage, all the arguments and debates and hysteria, has anyone ever come up to him and asked: "So what do you, as a human being, *as a person*, actually *want*?"

Of course they didn't. He wouldn't be able to answer that. It could cost him political points.

Barack Obama, as a person, doesn't matter. He's *objectified*, reduced to his title and position which now dictate his every movement and decision in the exact sense Maggie's and Alice's and Carly's and Charlotte's womanhood affects theirs. In a bizarre twist, the "most powerful man in the world" has become an oppressed minority, limited in his freedoms and invisible to the world.

And it is that paradox that *Dark Side Moon* demonstrates. The Obama we see hand Sam his medal is a *fake*, an *actor*. It is this simulated persona of the Obama-as-President that *Dark Side Moon* places into its farcical world of CGI-gods and compressed spacetime, but this symbol is contrasted against something much more profound; In order to make a statement about Barack Obama *as an actual human being*, it shows us a character who may be quite different from him in appearance and status, but ultimately walks a much similar path and faces much similar issues, avoiding all the political baggage that comes with his status as the President and showing us the actual *person*.

...Come to think of it, that means they managed to whitewash President Obama. I... Wow. That's just such a hilariously out-there thing to do that I can't even be angry at it. So what's that statement the movie takes such ridiculous lengths to make?

Well, that comes at the end of it. 

Microcline posted:

The "Obama as a woman" thing confused me when you first brought it up. Then I thought about what other leader was turned into a woman in the trilogy. It seems to be a parody of the reactionary idea of portraying any leader who cares about their followers as weak and womanlike. Note the prevalence of the term "nanny state" and the creepy way they idolize Thatcher by portraying her as a man.

Then lets think about how these leaders are portrayed in the films. Charlotte is the only person to stand up to the transformers, while the "strong male" leader Lennox is willing to bow down and help Optimus commit giant robot genocide the minute he realizes that he's bigger and stronger. Even Optimus bows down before Sentinel seconds after meeting him. Bay is trying to show that real ideological strength in a leader can only come from legitimately caring about one's constituency, and that the naked worship of power is what produces the most ardent Quislings.

Thulsa Doom posted:

Note that one of Lennox's most prominent features in the first film, the first thing we see about any human character, is that he has a wife and child.

In the sequels, he has abandoned them to play with the Autobots. He has both rejected his nuturing nature *and* the ultimate symbol of adulthood, a stable relationship and a child.

Lennox is what Sam wants to be, a man who has rejected the adult world to live in a world of toys.

Agent Interrobang posted:

Because of the elements of the surreal and hyperreal in these films, I wanted to make a brief sidebar to talk about the concept of second-order simulacra.

Second-order simulacra, sometimes known by the term 'Stand-Alone Complex' or 'Laughing Man Effect,' after its popularization as a central narrative and philosophical theme in *Ghost In The Shell: Stand-Alone Complex*, refers to symbols that copy the aesthetics of an ideal or ideology, but fail to represent that ideal or ideology in actual usage: a bad-faith copy that gains more credibility than the thing it copies. An example might be the usage of religious doctrine that on-paper supports peace and brotherhood among mankind, but is used as a symbol by its followers as a rallying point to discredit opposing philosophies or call for violence and harassment of those who disagree with them. Within *Ghost In The Shell*, terrorists take the image and emblems of an anti-corporate, anti-nationalist hacker known as the Laughing Man, and use these emblems and symbols in the commission of attacks against whatever particular thing they happen to oppose, and are then copied by others, and still others, until it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish what the ideals or beliefs of the original Laughing Man actually were; signifier has completely eclipsed signified.

There is, in such a landscape, no way to determine what 'real' is; the copy is assumed or explained to be more authentic than the original. 'Real' has been lost; there is only simulation, and the simulacra of the simulation. Authenticity is replaced by dogma, and reality is replaced by the hyperreal.

Agent Interrobang cont...

What I find interesting about how this relates to these films is how they explore this theme on EVERY level. Transformers are people, but the humans they deal with seem like robots; Autobots and Decepticons have had their traditional roles reversed, their respective emblems now meaning things entirely different to what the audience assumes; the Transformers bear the corporate logos of companies they have stolen their outward images from; the President has his narrative role represented as a quartet of blonde women. Even gender, something we wouldn't normally associate with robots, becomes fluid and shifting and difficult to distinguish. Nothing MEANS anything it actually means, because everything in Transformers is a grotesque caricature presented as bitter, cruel, unyielding reality. Even the landscape of Africa is malleable, 'symbolizing' Africa without looking anything LIKE Africa to someone who knows what to look for.

I think the juxtaposition of the real to the hyperreal (for example, the real harshness of the modern job market, juxtaposed against Sam's bizarre, impotent rage despite his frankly meteoric climb to success) in these films is FASCINATING. In the end, everything is a Transformer, and nothing is at the same time. Old symbols are constantly redefined, altered, and reinterpreted to fit the needs of the narrative, and that reinterpretation is intentionally inconsistent and subjective even within itself. Pay close attention to a lot of the upcoming scenes involving the Decepticon's ultimate plans, and pay similar attention to what plans the Autobots and military are actually REACTING to. It's pretty mind-bending.

Part 8 "Orbiting Earth in the spaceship, I saw how beautiful our planet is. People, let us preserve and increase this beauty, not destroy it!"



Sam and Bumblebee have their little heartfelt scene, and yeah, it's sad for all the wrong reasons. Notice how Sam grabs Bee's mutt as if he were a dog. Sam is pretty messed up over the fact that Mearing told him he wasn't a hero - and of course, being an idiot, he decides the best course of action would be to involve himself in things again. But for that, they need to find an "expert" on Decepticons, and who else would that be but...





Oh boy. Yeah, Simmons is now ridiculously rich from milking his involvement in the previous films for anything it's worth. I can't say too much about him because, as I said before, I haven't really paid enough attention to his character, but here he's another character who essentially acts as a mirror for Sam: Instead of letting the state invite him to try starting a normal life, Simmons started flamboyantly waving himself in front of the media, and burrowing himself in capital. The thought of actually trying to find work and not being a useless drain on society probably never even occurred to him.



Note the scrolling text.

Alright, so here's what happens. O'Reilly starts to complain that polls show that a lot of people don't feel safe with the Autobots around, and that we should kick them off the earth like we unsuccessfully tried to do in the second film. "I feel safer when I sleep with a hand grenade under my pillow", Simmons says. "Doesn't mean I'm always right." O'Reilly then starts asking about him being fired from the government and having "severe delusional tendencies", and Simmons gets pissed and shuts down the interview.

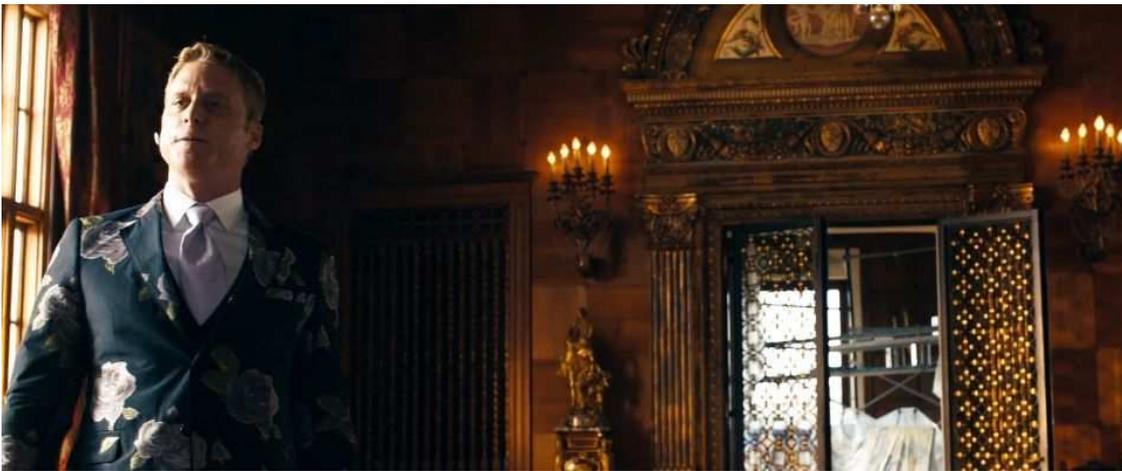
Okay, so this is pretty... Odd.

For one. Optimus Prime represents individualism, rugged freedom and anti-government views. In other words, exactly that which Bill O'Reilly holds in highest honor. And yet, *he wants Prime and the others gone* - what? And Simmons' reply is even stranger. For one, what the hell kind of statement is "I feel safer when I sleep with a hand grenade under my pillow"? A hand

grenade wouldn't be useful in case of an intruder, it would just destroy your whole room and kill you too. Wait, hold on... The whole idea of keeping a weapon under your pillow is being able to fend off an Other intruding your domain. Simmons is saying that he wouldn't hold an uncontrollable destructive force close by to defend against an unknown that he ascribes malicious intentions to... An unknown such as a Decepticon... Augh, the Autobots are hand grenade in this analogy! He *is* sleeping with a hand grenade under his pillow, but is now using that as a negative example to argue *for* the presence of the Autobots! Is today opposite day or what!?

This entire conversation is completely farcical. It's two people who support the same values saying the exact opposite of what they think, bookended (ho-ho!) by an unsubtle plug for a mass-produced commodity.

So just like modern media basically.



We also meet Dutch (Alan Tudyk), our idiot brigadier for this movie and Simmon's pet. No, really - he's the only male character in the trilogy to be equated to a dog. "You are peasant people throwing rocks at a giant!", he shouts at the camera crew, blissfully unaware of the fact that Simmons may or may not have ordered the death of a bunch of peasants in the last movie.



Sam gives him a call to invite him for some ROBOWARRING, and for some reason, he is also in a gigantic mansion now. -- Wait, hold on, what's that? That's Carly's house? Holy crap!



One funny thing about Simmons is that occasionally, we get a look at the people building his ridiculous mansion and their possessions... And it's hilariously pitiful. The guy tiling his floors in the first shot of the mansion may or may not be a hobo he picked up on the street, and the XTREME RAGS displayed here show that clearly, no expense was spared and this mansion will still stand for centuries to come. It's a subtle little jab at trickle-down and the idea of the providing upper class. Simmons has his back turned to the rags... Oh god, I can't believe they're literally placing rags behind him to symbolize his ascension in wealth.

However, while he may have left the rags behind, he will never leave behind THE XTREME!!! (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) - Simmons Back in Action <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxB7-2HNGUI>)





Tell Megatron... Let's tango!



Meanwhile, Sentinel and Optimus take a tour through Postcardland, Africa (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Prime in Africa <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUWVFukNKIo>). Notice how even on a sight-seeing tour, Optimus is actually carrying his *weapons trailer*.



It's a pretty stark contrast to Megatron's situation on the same continent... Where his scene used the developing countries he's been trekking through as an emotional backdrop for his hard life and misery, Optimus and Sentinel simply admire the countryside from a distant, tourist's world. When I say this Africa resembles a postcard, I mean it - *the backdrop is actual still images* that have Optimus and Sentinel superimposed on them. The whole thing feels even more artificial and inhuman than any other scene in the movie, again, a complete 180 from the very emotional scene with Megatron. However, it is in this setting that Optimus for the first time expresses another desire than to kill everything by bowing down to Sentinel and offering him the Matrix of Leadership, saying that Sentinel is more deserving of it, but Sentinel declines. *I have no idea why*. Considering later scenes, I just have no idea how this works for his character at all. If you do, you'll have to hold off on explaining it until we get to the Lincoln scene, though!



Sam, Simmons and Bumblebee have their little strategic meeting in which they recap that Decepticons have been murdering everyone involved in America's *and* the Soviet's space programs.



Malkovich joins them for a second as well, and admires Bumblebee.



Or... Picks a fight with him? Notice his posture, *almost exactly like on the photo in the back of his office*. This is why I concluded him as being defensive rather than victorious, because



Um



Bumblebee actually goes into full combat mode and *points his enormous gun at Malkovich*, who throws himself to the ground like a playing puppy and laughs maniacally. It's clear that he was just playfighting with the toy creature, but it's unclear whether Bumblebee understood this as well or was seriously going to shoot the man - he seems a little confused and frustrated with the man's behavior, I think. The fascinating thing is that John actually seems to understand exactly the toy-nature of the robot before him, indulging in simple boyhood play, but then *willingly puts himself into a submissive position*, prone on his back with his limbs raised up before the mightier car-man. In a simple way, this relates his status as an employer to Bee's status as a capitalist symbol - he considers capital a toy, and yet lets it dictate him and his position in life. The funny part comes in when Sam and Simmons invite him out of the room because his playing is disrupting their "high level alien intel confab" that he's not "cleared for." Didn't care much about clearance in the last movie, did you, Simmons! So here we have two random guys who were unceremoniously kicked out of military ops criticize a guy for playing a game because it messes with... Them playing detective. Yes, they're also just playing with their robot toys...



...Brains, in this case, to find some Russian astronauts and pointlessly put their lives in danger by asking them about a cancelled mission to the moon. Throughout, they're completely blind to the strange profundity of the performance art taking place in front of them, seeing it instead as just an obnoxious comical trait of Malkovich's character. Just like the audience!

Notice how Malkovich is the only one in the room wearing glasses. More than meets the eye!

That aside, sitting in their little room playing with their appliances, the two really look like a pair of kids, an impression that's only strengthened by the awkward moment of shock when they see mom coming into the room.



Well, the mom in this case is Carly, who is justifiably shocked at two strangers and a giant car robot sitting in her living room. Yes, that's her house they're using to have their little meeting.



In his surprise, Bumblebee nearly trashes the whole room. Still as uncontrollably destructive as in the first movie, I see. Come to think of it, *how the fuck did he even get in.*



It gets worse when Simmons actually orders Dutch *to search her*. If she has anything hidden. In that white dress. *In her own home*. It's absolutely clearly just a ploy to exert power over this random woman that just came in, and, well, kind of disgusting! Simmons even explicitly refers to the act of searching as sexual when he pities Dutch for not going through with this. Nope, sorry, Johnny Angel, I don't think I will ever like this guy.



Surprisingly even-handed about Sam inviting in a random set of strangers, two pets she explicitly told him were not to enter her home, and *a giant car robot* without her permission, she nonetheless gets pissed at Sam for getting involved with the Autobots again - and she has every right to, as her brother died in the previous film's big confrontation.



Notice the juxtaposition of the bird flying away with Carly leaving. Shame it's not a dove, because that would just be perfectly unsubtle.



Sam tries to talk her into staying, but is once again really petty and nasty about it. "Where are you taking my bunny? Stop! Just stop." Caring more about his possessions than about her, then giving her commands. She tells him that she couldn't sleep last night because she knew where he was going with all this - where it would end. And she doesn't want to lose another person close to her.

[Oh hi there, Linkin Park.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH4K17ibqBg) (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Are You Coming with Me?
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH4K17ibqBg>)



She gives him a simple choice: Come with her, or stay with his Autobot friends. He chooses the latter.



As she drives away, we see the gritty facade of the building Sam is standing next to, contrasted against the shining white spires in the distance. The film practically beats us over the head with the fact that Sam is clinging to all the wrong things. Simmons, in a fittingly awful-looking jacket, acts as a barrier between him and the distant beauty. In acting as a success story that Sam can look up to for all the wrong reasons, he's *holding Sam back*.



They finally pay a visit to the Russian cosmonauts, and interestingly, for the first few minutes, the movie actually takes care to get the Russian *right*. “What a bright future!”, one of the cosmonauts says, prompting the other to laugh and say “Good man!” Simmons tells them that he knows who they are, and about the abandoned program, so the lady asks the bartender “Who are these people?”, who replies “I have no idea.”

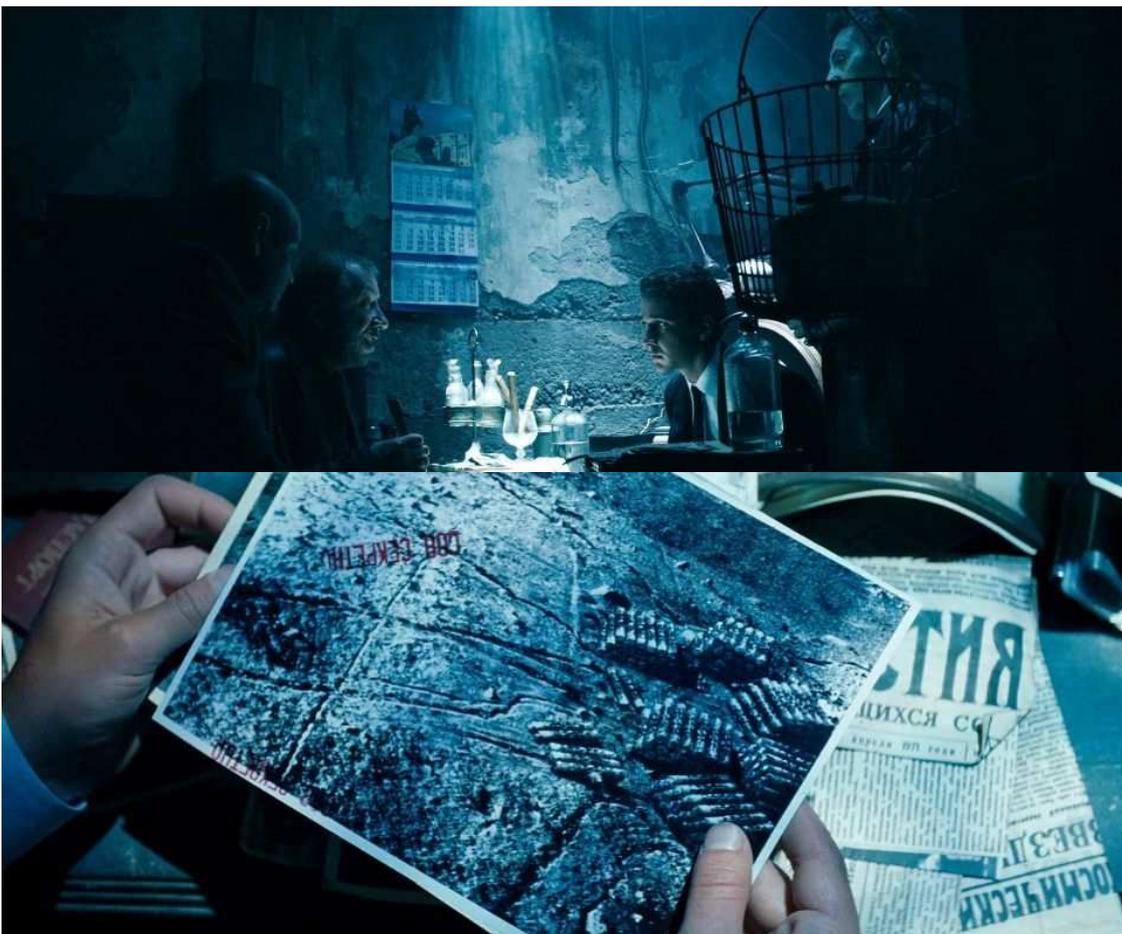
It’s very simple, first grade level Russian, but I think it’s neat that they actually took care to get it right. At least up until this point, because then things break down completely.



There’s a short bit of chaos in which random Russian words are shouted with no rhyme or meaning, then guns are drawn, and things return to sanity again. “What do you think you’re doing here? Just shut up and go away, will you? You think you know everything, don’t you? Just shut up!” More chaos erupts. It’s kind of fascinating how the movie presents this breakdown of order and nonviolence in tandem with a breakdown of language, of *communication*. Also, this scene is pretty much the apex of guns being used as a communicative measure - during the chaos, they actually *displace* the language.



Dutch causes a huge mess, so Simmons has to talk him down in what I *think* may be his idea of what German sounds like, but actually more resembles some sort of eldritch tongue. This is the scene where Dutch is reduced to an actual dog as Sam tells Simmons to “control his boy”, which makes him start shouting simple commands at Dutch. It’s kind of telling that Leo’s “comic relief” antics in the last movie were using tasers, and now his equivalent is waving around live ammunition. Things finally settle down, and the cosmonauts invite the boys into their secret bunker (or something).



Turns out the soviets knew about the ark way before the Americans did, since while the US may have put the first man on the moon, the soviets had the first *camera* on the moon. And the first man in space. And the first animal in space. And the first object in space. ...But I digress. Anyway, those pillars Sentinel Prime was missing? Turns out they were all dragged away by Decepticons in 1962. *whoops*. But what would they do without Sentinel? He's the only one who can control the pillars so... Oh no! They must be after *him!*

Part 9: "The miracle is this: The more we share, the more we have."



Sentinel and the Autobots (with Sam and Simmons) take off, pursued by three black cars.



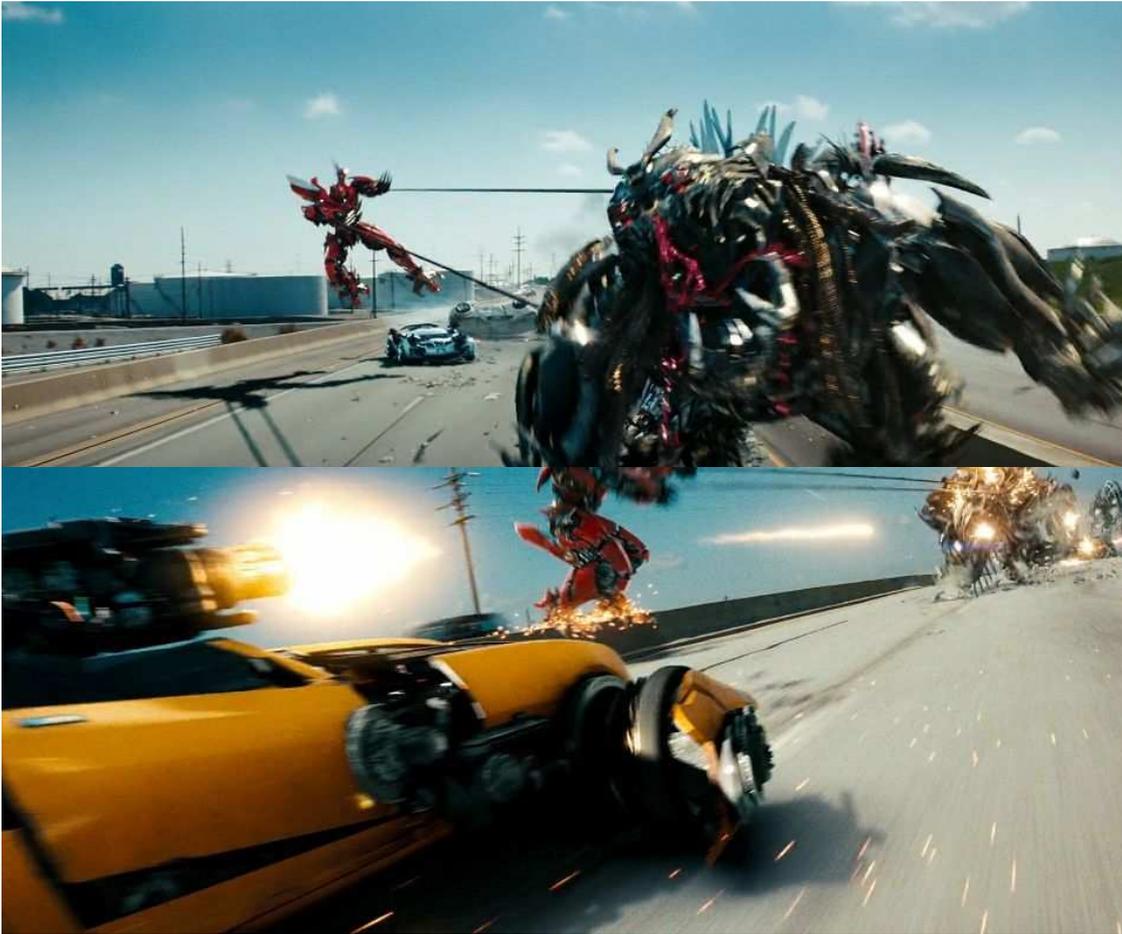
Of course, they're not just an angry Chevrolet Suburban owners club, they're the Dreads, a subgroup of the Decepticons!
(Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Freeway Chase
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ohdYcnglKY>) (Listen to this. Seriously.)



The creature grabs Simmons and launches him out of the back of his car. It's kind of funny how after all of his bravado, once things get serious he's taken out *instantly*.



Much like our last Act-1-closing action scene, this is one of the few action scenes in the trilogy that, well can actually be considered *action*, and it really works. For once the Decepticons are the aggressors, and the Autobots are actually trying to *defend* something (though why they're leading the Dreads over a busy freeway is beyond me). Except... Then there's Sam.



Sam is sitting inside Bumblebee, and there's this little snippet of him shouting "Shoot him, shoot him Bee! Shoot him!", and it's... Kind of legitimately chilling. It calls back to "kill him, Bee", at the end of the last film, but where there he was at least directly involved in things, here he's glued to the seat, actually *spitting* out this order to kill in a madly repetitive manner. The fact that he's the audience is never more clear than in this tiny scene, and it's... Really, it makes the entire scene near unwatchable, just knowing that in watching it and cheering it on, you are essentially turning into *that*.



Oh, and this bit right here? Straight from *The Island* (2005). Like, literally, they took this shot straight from the movie and CGI-ed Hatchet over it, I'm sure someone has the comparison GIF lying around. It's kind of hilarious, and it really speaks to the internet's capacity to call something "lazy" just because they don't like it. I mean come on, how long would it have taken the filmmakers to film a new shot to do this? They wouldn't even need to keep the exploding car, since Hatchet mostly covers it up anyway.

Unfortunately, I haven't seen *The Island*, so I can't tell what the context of this shot originally was.

Andrew Verse posted:

Regarding re-using the brief shot from *The Island*: when filming *Dark of the Moon*, a stuntwoman was seriously injured during the car chase scene. Rather than use footage where someone actually gets hurt, Bay elected to re-use footage from his earlier movie.



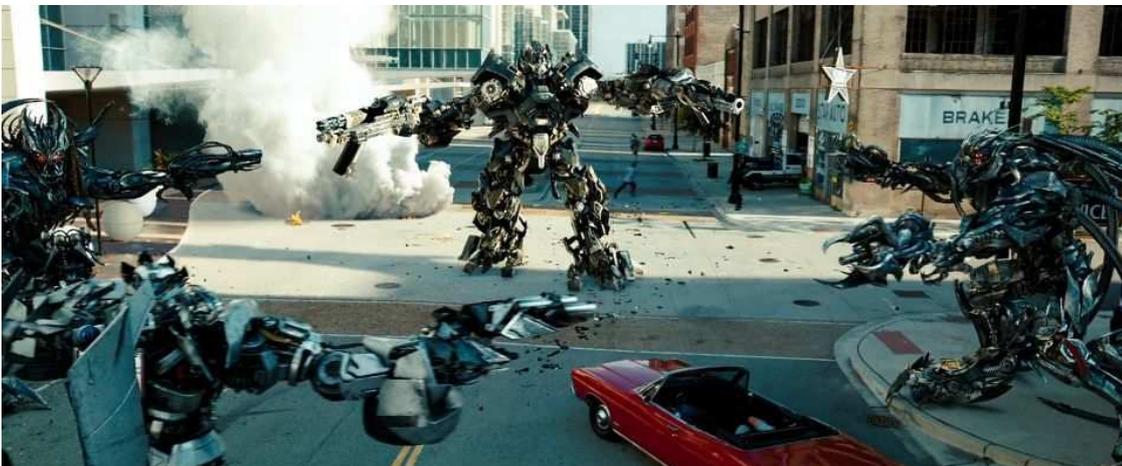
I love this scene for just how unnecessarily anarchic and destructive it is. The Dreads do this mad ballet through the freeway traffic, launching cars everywhere they see, and the bizarre split-open "attack modes" of the Autobots are virtually indistinguishable from the wreckages all around. This gets even better once we find out that this entire chase was completely pointless.



In order to avoid a thrown truck, Bee launches Sam out of the seat and jumps, and we get a slow-mo shot of them flying through the air, Sam screaming all the while. And come to think of it, does this scene not pretty much summarize his entire involvement in the movies? All he can do is sit by and shout at Bumblebee, who is the one actually doing everything, and is completely responsible for keeping Sam alive.



Arrived at NEST, Ironhide and the two remaining Dreads crash into each other, and twirl through the air while transforming in slow motion.





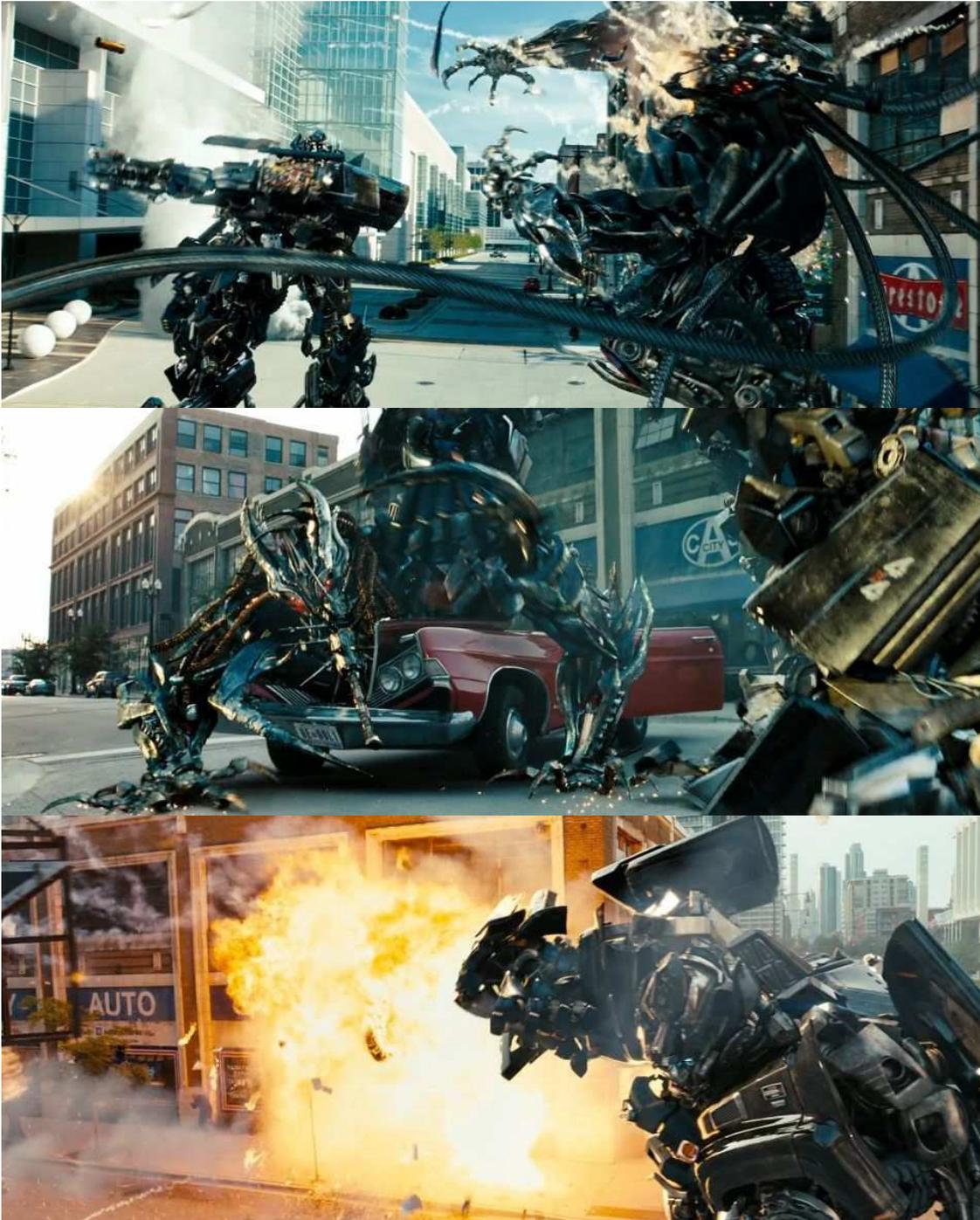


Weapons down... And we'll let you escape with your dignity.

Everyone gets tangled in a Mexican standoff, and this is actually the first time we see the Autobots being in any way decent to the enemy - they're making the right decision, giving their opponents an out, if only they stop their violence.



They don't.



And that's that.

This scene is an oddity in that well, for once, the Autobots are actually kind of “justified” in killing their pursuers. They gave them their chance, and they blew it. But as always, I think it is important to talk about the villains’ *motivation*. As we are watching this scene for the first time, we’re led to believe that the Dreads are after Sentinel, trying to capture him to force him to use the space bridge technology (somehow). As we will find out in just a second, this is false - the Decepticons

have no *reason* to chase after Sentinel. The Dreads are not acting in accordance with Soundwave's plan - they have their *own* reasons for starting this chase. Why?

Well, as with Bonecrusher and Alice, we're never told. But my guess? Revenge. One thing we shouldn't forget is that at the end of the previous movie, it wasn't just humans, like Carly's brother, that died - but Decepticons as well. Decepticons who had friends, and family, and comrades. In fact, it is completely possible that the Dreads were just the only three generics to escape from that battle - and who, since that moment, have been waiting for the Autobots to surface near them. So they begin their chase. And through it, another one of theirs is killed before them, shot and torn apart. But undeterred, they continue on, until their final stop takes them face-to-face with their comrades' killers. This is it, there is no way out from here. They drop their weapons, but there is no way to truly disarm a Transformer - they will always be able to produce more. So what are they to do now? Turn their backs and go their merry way, after what they've gone through? No. They're going to finish this. And so they are finished. And the Autobots came away the righteous ones, but it's easy for *them* - they already had their eye for an eye when they doomed the entire Decepticon race to die a slow and inevitable death. This is the cycle of violence. An endless loop of revenge in which both sides want to get back at each other for their losses. It's a simple part of human psychology, and a model of how every conflict inevitably turns out if left unchecked. And this is another important element of this movie, and comes up in the ending.

Counteresperanto posted:

The Mexican standoff isn't the first act of decency by an Autobot. Bumblebee let a beaten, helpless Barricade survive their battle in the first movie. Bee could have finished him off at his convenience, but chose not to. In the context of the whole trilogy, it's conspicuously inconsistent with the guy who sadistically dispatches Ravage and Rampage, not to mention Cockshot and the other kitchen-bot babies.

Perhaps his homicidal tendencies had waned during his isolation, only to be renewed once he was reunited with Optimus. Alternatively, since he has only begun to earn Sam and Mikaela's trust, maybe Bumblebee doesn't want to risk damaging their fragile image of him as the good guy?

Rad Gravity posted:

Did anyone else notice that during the whole Mexican stand-off there were two people in the red car, who had absolutely zero chance of escaping the giant robot coming down on them? And that right before the killing started, other innocent bystanders were fleeing into the building that Ironhide just car-bombed?

It may not mean much - us insects can be hard to notice from a Transformer's point of view, after all - but I felt a bit bad for the folks who got their day ruined because the good guy just had to be such a goddamn show-off.

BiggestOrangeTree posted:

I actually read this scene differently: It is shown in the first movie that the Autobots already understand human culture and quote cult movies etc. etc. humanity corrupting transformers. Now if in one of those movies the hero ends up in one of these situations what happens?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ue8TvvYik74#t=20s>

The Autobots see themselves as the heroes and the Decepticons know. The Decepticons were not cheating any more than the Autobots were going to. It's more like a dance and both parties are going through the motions.

SuperMechagodzilla posted:



Jurassic Park



Predator

What are the Dreads? What is their motivation? Check the contextualizing references to ambiguously-gendered 'irrational' monsters that emerge from third-world jungles, defying attempts by patriarchal institutions (the entertainment industry, and the American Military/CIA) to subdue and control them.

As elsewhere, Bay is using pop-cultural shorthand to quickly establish the basics of the conflict. The Dreads have no clear motivation because they're deliberately 'inscrutable', but the hint is that they are opposed to the same (neo)colonialism and imperialism that Bumblebee embodies in the 'Illegal Nuclear Site' scene. It should be obvious by now why these guys are allied to the Decepticons, and not the Autobots.



Sentinel arrives safely at NEST, but says something rather ominous... “What you must realize, my Autobot brothers, is that we were never going to win the war...”

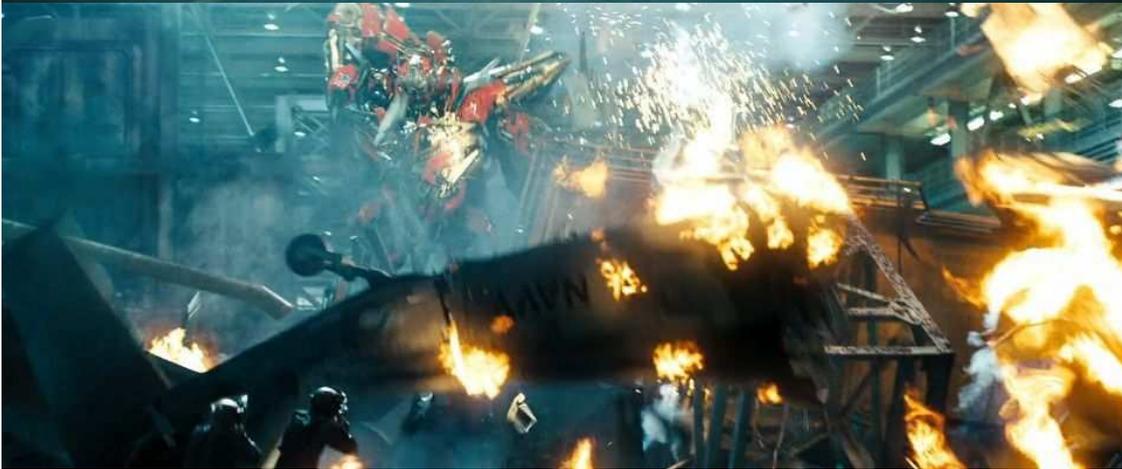


“For the sake of our planet’s survival, a deal had to be made...”



”With Megatron.”

Oh no. The beard. We should have known! IT’S EVIL SPOCK!



Sentinel completely shreds the place, then takes off with the pillars.



Optimus arrives amidst the chaos. "Take a look, Optimus! This is all on you!"



And with that, everything is in place.

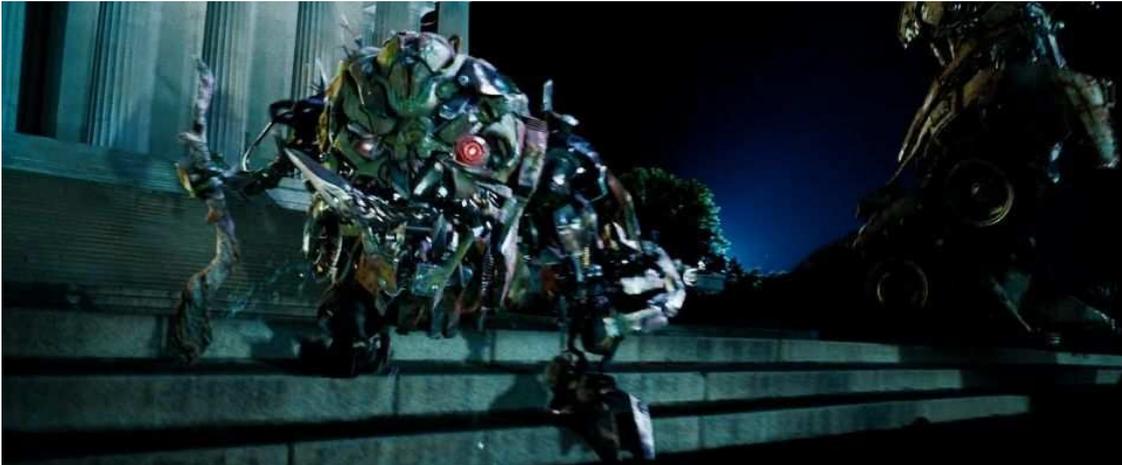
Part 10: "America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."



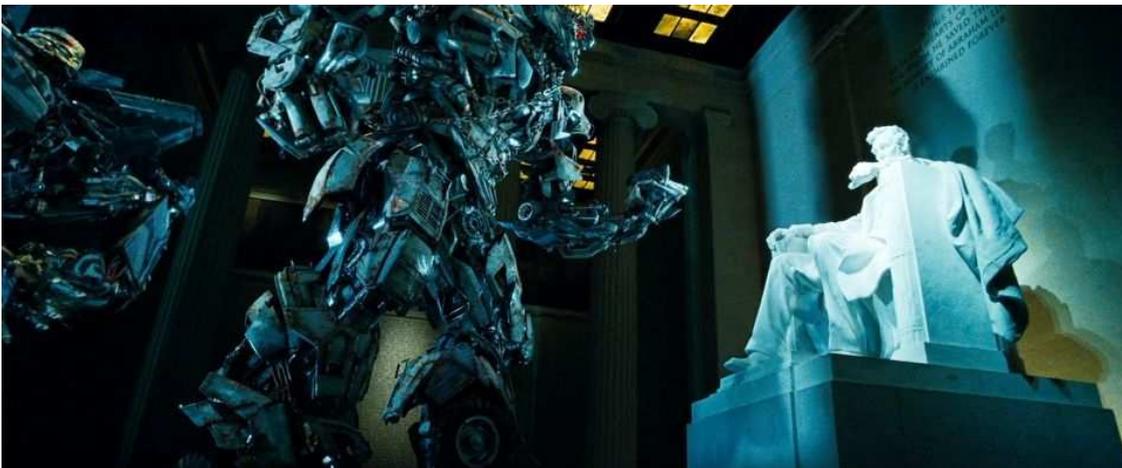
Sam has a final, not-so-touching scene with his parents. Honestly, even after 4 rewatches I keep forgetting it exists because it's short, devoid of anything of interest, and bookended by the chase scene on one side and what may be one of the film's best scenes on the other.

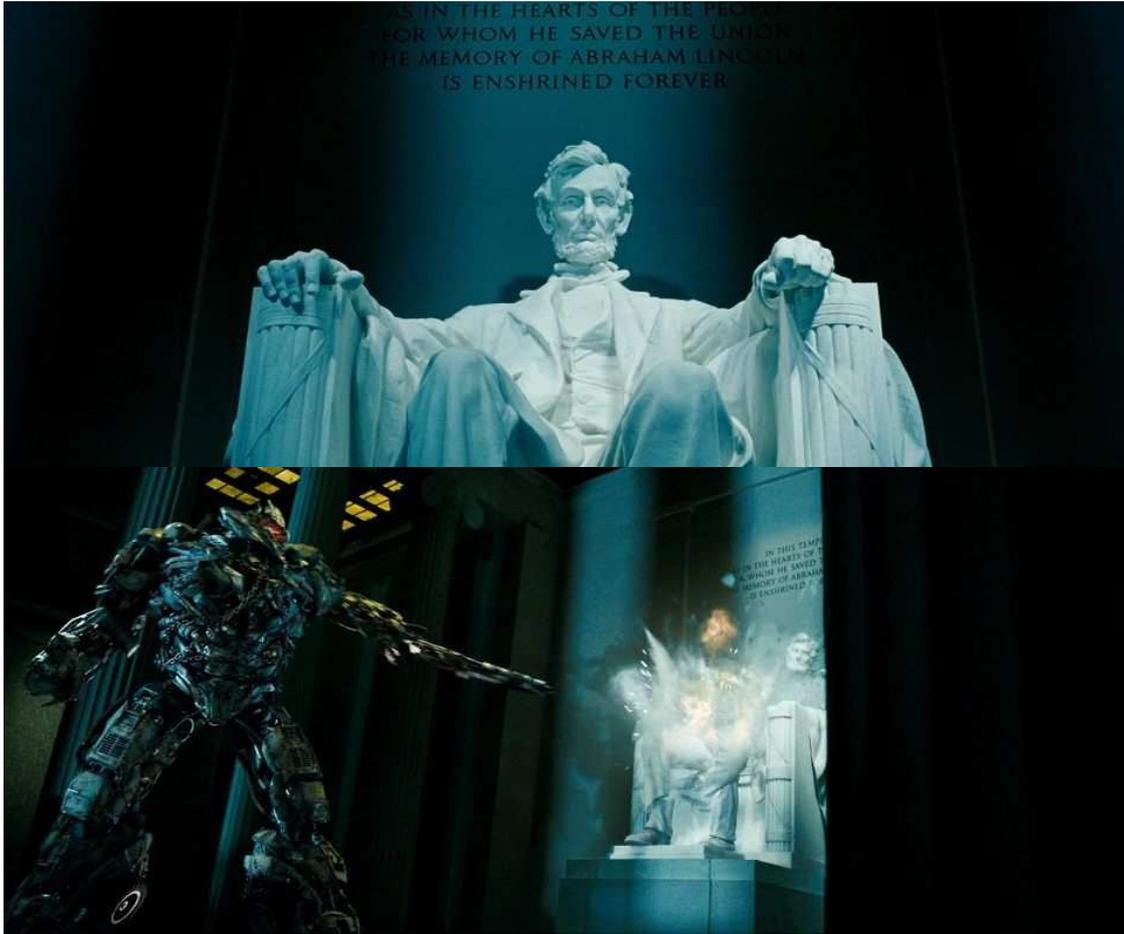


[Sentinel prepares the first phase of the space bridge plan. Yes, that's the Lincoln memorial in the background. Why there?](#)



Well, guess who finally managed to arrive. See, our friend chose this location for a very special purpose...





Transformers!

I love this scene so much. It's just so *perfectly* insane. What we see portrayed here is a uniquely American fear in which the intruding Other destroys and displaces a symbol of American values. I say "uniquely American" because while the whole "other-displacing-values" thing is a fear held by *any* society and European islamophobes still thump the "they want to bring Sharia law here!" thing ceaselessly, I have not seen them react so poisonously to the idea of, say, their flags being burned or their monuments being destroyed. It's a fascinating thing that I'm fairly sure is ultimately rooted in the 9/11 anxieties we're all so familiar with, but we'll have plenty of opportunity to talk about those later.

Obviously, on the film's fake-propaganda level, attacking a symbol of Lincoln means attacking a symbol of freedom - Lincoln ended slavery, and the Decepticons' ultimate plan is to bring it back (sort of. There's complications). But of course, there's another layer to the proceedings. As Agent Interrobang so deftly formulated, this movie highlights the idea of the signifier abandoning what it signifies, and this scene is another take on that.

See, the thing with Lincoln is, *he's old*. Back in the days when he was championing freedom and union, the world was a very different place than what it is today. In his early political career, his views were nothing short of radical. From what I understand, the word "Abolitionist" was treated with the same respect as "Abortionist" today, and even the whole civil war aside, it was incredibly difficult to bring the nation beyond the days of slavery.

Since then, more than four score and seven years have passed. The fight was fought, and the victorious Lincoln laid to his final rest, to vigil the freedom of his people from lands beyond. Only his memorial remains, sitting in the perfect stillness of white stone, to act as a reminder of what was.

But eventually... Out the old foe's corpse grew its dreadful young, and where before stood the burning whip of slavery, now the underprivileged face much more invisible terrors: Poverty, lack of education, poor working conditions, subtler forms of oppression... The youngest generation faces issues the old Lincoln probably didn't even dream of. So how can he be championed as a symbol of freedom, when this "freedom" is meant in such a dated sense? There are no more slaves, but to the poor working dregs of today - and that's the ones lucky enough to *have* work - clinging to this fact, and the symbols it is associated with, feels illusory and pointless. To inspire the people and continue the progress of society, we can't cling to gravestones and memorials. We need *new* symbols, people who shared in today's issues and can fight for the rights of the oppressed *right now*.

What this act of displacement shows is a hint of Megatron's *true* motivation - he wants to revive his species and rebuild his planet, yes, but it goes far beyond that. Compare to Carly's ambition of becoming President - in framing herself within the presidential sigil, she "threatens" to displace the previous president, but where her ambition is easily forgotten and completely nonthreatening, the audience reacts negatively to Megatron because *he's actually succeeding*. Powerful leaders are one thing. Powerful *ideological* leaders are a whole different level, because a new ideology hold the potential to completely destroy its elders. (Note: One of only two times Megs fires his gun!!)

Furthermore, the gritty, grimy, *living* form of Megatron taking place of the clean, motionless white statue is more "Desert of the Real" imagery. Megs is confronting onlookers with the complexity of reality vs. Their simplified, two-dimensional ideas and values.

Now, where were we? Right, Megatron tells Starscream how they're going to rule the world.

Apparently, leading the Autobots to Sentinel via dangling conspiracy-threads was the whole plan, since that would make Optimus revive Sentinel, who could then easily overpower the lesser Autobots and activate the space bridge. Now, this is another of those key scenes, because it confirms a number of things that allows us to piece a lot of stuff together regarding the nature of the Decepticons. To start with, let's put together a timeline.

-A long while ago: The Transformers exist as a race of spacefarers, kept in check by the Primes, who also own the life-giving artifact, the Matrix of Leadership, and the box that's supposed to hold it, the Allspark. The Fallen, in a spontaneous power trip, decides to take the Matrix to a random populated planet and blow up its sun. That planet is earth. The Primes stop him, and travel to robot heaven, taking the Matrix with them.

-Still long ago, but soon after: With the Primes no longer there to keep things orderly, the inherently violent transformers, no doubt spurred by the Fallen's shenanigans, break out in a race/class war, forming the Autobots and Decepticons. The Fallen hand-picks a particularly ambitious Decepticon called Megatron to be his pupil and their side's leader, while the other side rallies under brilliant inventor Sentinel Prime.

-30.000 BC: The Fallen takes a group of Decepticons with him to scout the Earth, which now the human race dominate, for the Matrix. Not being able to find it, he takes out his aggression on a bunch of hapless hunters, then goes off to his little cloud to sulk, not to be heard from again for a very long time. His Decepticons, meanwhile, stay on earth, accompanying humanity disguised as whatever is appropriate at the time. As the ages pass, they all eventually fall into stasis in their vehicle forms.

-Between that and modern times: Cybertron begins falling apart under the constant warring, and the Allspark is lost in space. Realizing that without the Primes' sun exploder, the Matrix, and the Allspark, they have no method of generating Energon, a deeply unsettled Sentinel decides to turn to his enemy for help. The starry-eyed Megatron is dead-set on finding the Allspark again (no one else is, as evidenced by the fact that he's the only one to go) and pegs the earth, where the Matrix (supposedly) is, as a likely location. Sentinel wants none of that, but when he realizes that the planet's human population is perfect for their needs, he decides to let Megatron go and agrees to rendezvous with him there once he works out a functional space bridge. Presumably, Megatron assures him that that won't be necessary, and that he'll return before that.

-Shortly after: Megatron crashes into the earth and is frozen in the arctic ice, to be held there for possibly thousands of years.

-Late 19th century: Megatron is dug up, then frozen again. No Transformer notices or cares.

-Mid 20th century: In spite of both Decepticon leaders' absence, the Autobots lose the war. Sentinel finishes his technology, then takes off in the Ark, but some Decepticons who have no idea of his plan shoot him down, leaving him to careen towards the moon on a crash course. The remaining Autobots are rounded up and presumably integrated into Decepticon society.

-1961/62: The Ark crashes into the moon. The Americans and soviets are all over dat shit. Either one by one or all in one batch, a number of Decepticons follow him through space: The dregs of the first movie (Starscream, Barricade, Frenzy, Bonecrusher, Brawl, Blackout), Demolisher, Soundwave and Shockwave and another couple hundreds. They raid the Ark, but realize that without Sentinel, its technology is useless, so they drag its components off into various corners of the earth (and the moon) to hide until they find an energy source with which to revive him, and lay low for the time being.

-2007: The first movie. After presumably spending half a century searching for traces of their master, Blackout says “fuck it” to the whole laying-low thing and decides to raid a military base. Finding promising results, Barricade and Frenzy kick into action, finding more information about Megatron’s whereabouts. Bumblebee, presumably sent to keep watch of the Decepticons on earth, signals the Autobots. Brawl and Bonecrusher join the fight, but Barricade gets cold feet. Understandably, since only Starscream makes it out of the final battle alive.

-2009: Now assured that Megatron is indeed on earth, Soundwave agrees to aid in his revival, sending out Ravage after one of the shards. Upon being revived (and presumably told what happened to Sentinel and such), Megatron decides that the best course of action is to go and bug the Fallen about it. His master remembers about the sun-destroying machine, and figures that once the last descendant of the Primes is out of the way, he may as well go look for the Matrix once more. Not like anything could stop him then. Then Sam materializes the Matrix and revives Optimus, who kills the Fallen stone dead.

-2011: Soundwave and Megatron finally come up with a plan to bring back Sentinel, who’s probably the only one who can sort out their Prime problem. Lead the Autobots to revive him while making them think they’re clever enough to unravel a conspiracy, then have him just murder them all. Unfortunately, he underestimates the threat his brothers pose, and only kills the one probably least deserving.

Now, looking over this run-down like that, there’s a tiny little question that pops up. That being, *where the hell where Soundwave and co during the first film?*

There are hundreds of Decepticons swarming earth, yet we only see 7 in what is the biggest confrontation between the Transformers in nearly 50 years. Apparently, most people consider this a plot hole - but then, apparently so is Optimus being a psychopath (*what!?*). It’s really not.

Do think back: How often do we see the Decepticons actually *treating the films’ events as important?* In the previous movie, Soundwave only does a bare minimum, looking for one shard and relaying a single order, and seems remarkably apathetic about it all. The only Decepticons we see that are really interested in Megatron living are the dregs and the constructicons. The Dreads freely ignore orders to stage an attack of their own. The Autobots try to paint the Decepticons as a unified army, hanging onto every word of their leader. *They’re not.* We’re talking about an entire alien race here - an entire planet’s population is pretty diverse in form, loyalty and motivation!

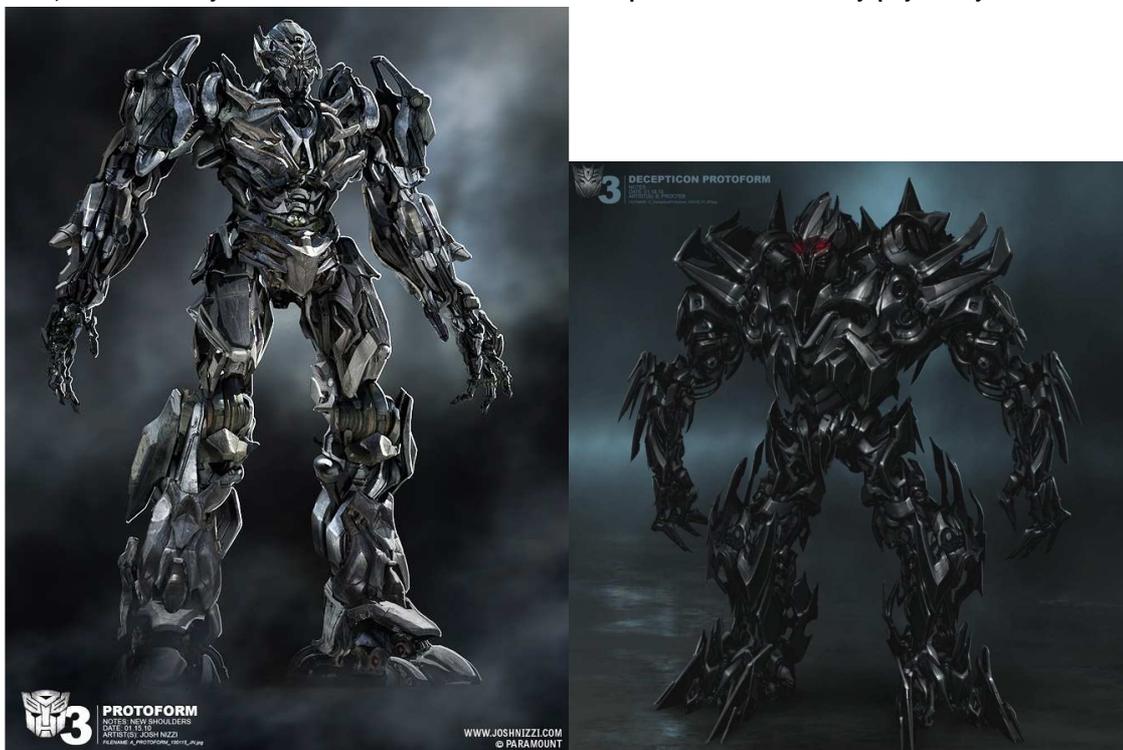
Remember, *no one followed Megatron when he left for the Allspark*, and they didn’t take serious measures to find him until *thousands of years later*. The Decepticons, at large, don’t give a damn about their “leader”. And why would they? He’s been gone for all that time, abandoned them to look for an artifact that he *thinks* is on some random backwater planet! It’s not until Frenzy sees the Allspark with his own two eyes that they’re truly sure that it is on earth. And by that point, the movie is practically over - I’m sure Decepticons all over the country mobilize at that point, but only Brawl and Bonecrusher happen to be close enough to LA. And once the Allspark is destroyed, they no longer have a reason to expose themselves.

In the second movie, it seems Starscream managed to convince Soundwave to be of at least minimal help. They revive Megatron, but again, what reason would the Decepticons have to care about anything that happens? The Fallen is chasing after a thing he *already* failed to find once and that *wouldn’t exist* were it not for Sam’s stupidity. The Decepticon leaders spend the entirety of the first two movies chasing fairy tales, so why would Shockwave et al bother? The ones we see do battle are presumably just a few loyalists who decided they still had a duty to their old masters. It’s not until this movie that there’s actually a concrete plan that all of their kind can involve themselves with.

What does this show? Well, simple. No one gives a rat about Megatron. He’s the leader in name only, while Soundwave (or,

possibly someone who's still back on Cybertron) is the *actual* authority. The only person we see consistently worry about his leader, care for his survival and follow his every word? *Starscream*. Yep, Starscream is the last truly loyal Decepticon. And this is where things get fun.

Now, we've already established how Autobots and Decepticons are inherently physically different.

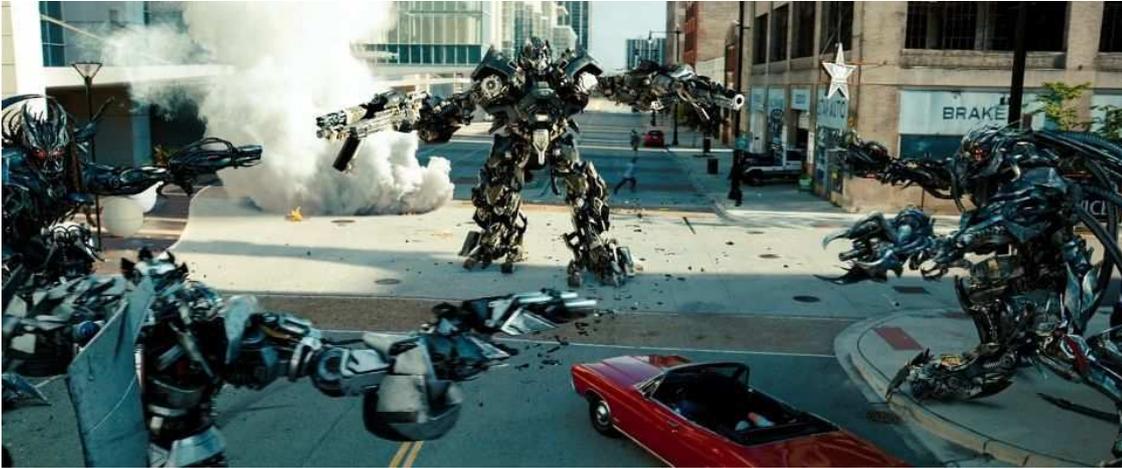


Now take a look at Soundwave. Which one does he rather more resemble...?



It's strange, isn't it? He clearly has the face and monstrous build of the latter, but also the gleaming white-blue coloration and

smooth lines and curves of the former. Surely, you could argue that the smooth curves come from his disguise, but then you contrast him against the film's other car-Decepticons...



There literally isn't a clearer shot of them in the movie, sorry.

...And you can see how they're just as dark and spiky as their Protoforms, if not moreso. They just pack away their car forms completely, with only two wheels sticking out of their calves to remind us that they even *have* an alternate form. Soundwave follows a completely different design aesthetic.

And then, as Cinnamon Bastard rightly notes, the only faction symbol we ever see on Soundwave or one of his underlings/extensions is the *Autobot one*. Add to this Wang's conflicting loyalties, and you realize that Soundwave is not at all who we're led to believe he is. The implication is that he was one of the Autobots integrated into Decepticon society. What this means is, he has no interest in Megatron or his ideas. He follows his own path, and it seems the other Decepticons follow him there. This becomes further supported when, at the very end of the movie, we see Barricade get into a serious argument with some Decepticons in a brief shot: Barricade, of course, being one of the few who actively believe in Megatron.

This is all important because it shows that the Decepticons are not a monolithic entity. By all parameters, they could easily crush the Autobots within *instants*, but first, they would need to *unite* - follow Devastator's example and become a truly coordinated force, ready to face and destroy their enemy. But the only person who *could* coordinate them all, Soundwave, is an id-driven monster who feels no loyalty. The small numbers of Decepticons who do, such as the Dreads here, are just jumping one-by-one into the meat grinder. They simply have no *unifying cause*.

And that is where we return to Megatron. That's his goal, and his greatest desire that he is expressing in his ascension on a dead man's throne: He wants to *become a symbol that his people can believe in*, to live and die for, to follow to a greater good. After all...

"A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Part 11: "The needs of the many... Outweigh the needs of the few."



Should've used this screencap last update, but I didn't think to. Oh well!



The first wave of Decepticons moves in from the moon through the space bridge and causes a huge mess in D.C. This is where we first see the fact that they have actual aircraft. That they pilot. Being Transformers. I don't even know.



This guy. This guy right here. He appears in this little scene, scans a garbage truck, and then drives off. From then on, throughout the entire rest of the movie, he will make tiny cameos in the background.

He's not named. He does not influence the plot in any way. His total screen time is maybe a minute. He's one of the most important characters in the movie.

Because I still like things having names, I'll call him Garbage Day. You may notice he looks almost identical to Long Haul in the previous movie - a Constructicon. I'll say this right now: The idea that DOTM somehow supersedes or ignores ROTF? I don't agree with it at all, and he is part of why.

Devastator's influence suffuses every part of this movie. It's subtle and in-the-background, but it's constant. Megatron has assumed a working-class form after becoming one with Scrapper. The old Long Haul's head follows Megatron around for no reason beyond further linking him to the Constructicons. And now we have this new model, coming in to become a blue-collar transport and just kind of periodically remind us of his presence. It's like the movie is trying to tell us something here! The image of Megatron becoming- symbol is directly linked to a reminder of the literal working-class-unison presented in the previous film. It's classic revolutionary imagery: The people rally, and sweep the streets in riots and violence. Pretending to take the side of the status quo, the movie of course presents this violence as wantonly senseless (as opposed to the "justified" violence of the Autobots), downplaying the fact that all these attacks are explicitly targeting fascist authoritarianism: Notice the total ubiquity of police cars in the shots above!!



Speaking of fascist authoritarians, Optimus and Sentinel get into a bit of a tuff, and chatter for a bit. “On Cybertron, we were gods!”, Sentinel exclaims. “But here, they call us ‘Machines’.” It’s interesting how Sentinel is completely dissociated from the revolutionary imagery of just now. Aside from opening the way, his only involvement in things is to argue with Optimus. That is because his character runs among slightly different lines.

Later in the movie, Sentinel will speak the words “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.”

Yes, really.

The movie belabors his connection with Spock to the point of caricature. Filming of this movie began shortly after Star Trek (2009) created the pop-cultural image of Leonard Nimoy returning as Old Spock, and this movie does nothing if not capitalize on that. Of course, most people just say that the filmmakers are bragging about having Nimoy in their movie, but of course, it goes much deeper than that.

See, a bit of a nuance is that Sentinel is not a reference to Spock in general but specifically a reference to Star Trek 2: The Wrath of Khan (1982), where the above quote is actually spoken. Sentinel is identified as a starship captain, which, of course, is Spock’s rank in that movie, and Sentinel’s red paintjob with black lining does resemble the new uniform Spock wore. So let’s talk about The Wrath of Khan.

If you don’t remember the film or are unfamiliar with its themes, SFDebris has a pretty good summary that you should probably watch (<http://sfdebris.com/videos/startrek/film2.asp>). Short version: It’s about a superhuman who once held power beyond mortal man’s imagination, being punished for rebelling against God and goodness by being cast from heaven, to live out a miserable existence in a lifeless desert as his people slowly die around him, the privileged starfarers not caring and forgetting about his suffering. He becomes driven by destructive vengeance, chasing the man who destroyed him to the bitter end, but in his final act of spite turns out to be a creative force, beginning the genesis of a new world. During this last act, the right side of his face is terribly disfigured by the heroes’ fighting back against him and waaaait a second where have I heard all that before

It’s kind of fascinating how the movie references Khan via Megatron and Spock, who opposed him, in a character who is allied to Megatron. It calls to mind the scene in the previous film of the Fallen crushing Megatron underfoot in effigy - even his allies are somehow his enemies. Later in the movie, Sentinel will tell Megatron as much: “I have dained to work with you, that our planet may survive. I will never work for you!” The key to truly understanding all this, of course, lies in the details of Wrath of Khan.

Let’s start with the idea of the unwinnable scenario. In a broad sense, Star Trek is about aging, death and the growth of a new generation from the ashes of the old. In Kirk’s age, Khan presents an entropic force of destruction coming to finish him, to let the new generation take over. The big “unwinnable scenario” is the process of aging and death itself, and Spock’s sacrifice at the end of the movie presents a victory over this scenario: In placing his life over Kirk’s, he actually revitalizes Kirk, makes him “young again”.

The fascinating thing, of course, is that Khan is victim to that same destructive force. He has aged badly, and lost his family to the forces of nature. But he actually weaponizes his misery, using the very same creatures that killed his wife to lure Kirk, and then turning Genesis itself into a weapon - Genesis, of course, aside from being a force of creation, also being a total symbol of entropy and destruction. Or, to summarize, Khan uses the forces of nature that destroyed him to destroy the enemy he blames for making him subject to these forces, but then Spock denies this cycle of life and death, presenting his ability to choose another life over his own as a victory over the cruelty of nature. (Notice, Spock is killed by radiation, yet another invisible entropic force - and something the Transformers are repeatedly likened to!!)

In Star Trek, this denial is, of course, portrayed as unconditionally heroic, and play’s into Star Trek’s general themes of man’s victory over the malices of life. But we wouldn’t be talking about Dark Side Moon here if it didn’t take a heroic act and then

Painted it as not-so-heroic. See, much like Allsam is Sam bereft of his humanity, so Sentinel is Spock without the human half that made him capable of compassion. "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few" is here presented as dispassionate utilitarianism, literally being "there's more Transformers than humans, ergo their desires are more important", totally missing the emotional component of Spock's motivation. But what this further does is outline another important rift in Decepticon ideas and morality.

If we do accept Megatron as a revolutionary figure, destroying the old world to create a better one, which this movie is clearly asking us to do, then the revolutionary imagery of his actions (and it is blatantly revolutionary - can you think of a more anarchist image than a street filled with burning police cars?) is blatantly at odds with Sentinel's ideas and motivation. Spock, in a sense, opted out of the cycle of death and rebirth, prolonging Kirk's life and youth and eventually being reborn himself, and the wishes Sentinel expresses are analogous: He refuses to let the social order of his species be lost. He wants to remain a god while children die around him in droves. Of course, the simple "I don't want my species to die" aspect is still there, but unlike with Megatron in the first 2 movies, that's only half the story.

And that really cuts into the heart of the whole philosophical divide of Autobots and Decepticons. It's important that Sentinel never identifies as a Decepticon and doesn't refer to "switching sides" or anything like that. The Decepticons are a disruptive, revolutionary force. Devastator demonstrated as much, and now Megatron's newfound motivations etc. just keep hammering the point home. The Autobots, on the other hand, have been consistently shown as being defenders of the status quo. Optimus would rather exist in a constant state of war than admit defeat, and it all ties into neoliberalism and neoconservatism being inextricably tied to one another. Optimus and Sentinel aren't having an ideological dispute or anything, in fact they totally agree. Their only difference is in the era they want to be stuck in. Optimus is defending the modern state of the Autobots reigning on earth through values and propaganda, while old Sentinel wants to return to an older time in which he was a god and the slavery was much more literal. It's another ROTF-style absurd no-win conflict, in which Megatron's genuinely progressive values are ignored in favor of framing the conflict between two imperialist asshats who both want to fuck the populace over, one just in a more subtle way than the other.

Damn, just missed the opportunity to make a U.S. Election joke.



Meanwhile, Sam is crashing Dylan's and Carly's meeting. He wants to talk to Carlie alone, but Dylan pursues them, making some rather... Unsubtle allusions about his loyalties.



Yellow, yellow, as far as the eye can see. I suddenly realize that the film completely straightforwardly uses yellow to show wealth and power. The fact that Bumblebee's signature visual aspect is here used to threateningly frame the villain cannot be coincidence, particularly considering Malkovich and his obsession with the color.

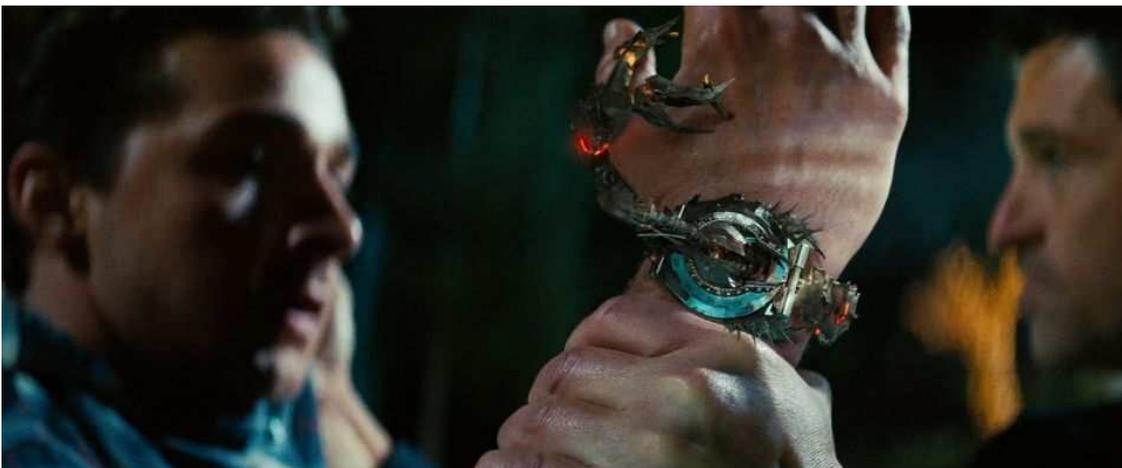


The pair tries to escape in the Mercedes, but what do you know, it's Soundwave. Plot twist! He throws out Sam, and locks in Carly to apathetically threaten her with his tentacles.

...Yeah, it's transparent sexual threat imagery. But of course, there's more. For one, there's the fascinating aspect of Carly being caged and threatened by her own wealth, since Soundwave is her car. Secondly, this scene directly calls back to the violation of the satellite in the previous movie. The fact that Soundwave threatens the two completely different entities in an identical apathetically sexual manner plays into the objectification of Carly, and shows that to Soundwave, there's no difference between women and actual literal objects. Contrast with Dylan and his sexual interest in cars specifically - this scene is built to suggest that Soundwave acts out, by proxy, the evil bad man's lust for the hero's girlfriend, but of course, the truth is much more screwed up, as Dylan himself explains.



See, the interesting thing about Dylan is the way he totally lies about his motivations. In his little speech, he makes a big deal out of “choosing the side that is going to win”, and how he’s a voluntary liaison for the Decepticons, but the actual truth is that he never had a choice. His dad was already working for the Decepticons, and he is forced to continue his father’s work. And I do mean forced - he makes it very clear that if at any point he didn’t do what Soundwave wants, the guy would fucking murder him, just like he did everyone else working for him. This is one of the things in this movie that feel a bit sloppy for me, and unfortunately, I’ll have to blame Patrick Dempsey. See, he straight-out says that he had no choice in any of this and is very much a victim, but his performance mainly consists of self-assured smuggerly, and fails to capture the subtlety of this smuggerly actually being a defense mechanism that lets him pretend he still has his life under control, which is doubly a shame when compared to how nuanced the performances of the robot characters can get. This does, however, also cast an interesting light on the idea of him being a Randian superhero - although he explains that he worked for his wealth, Soundwave, the symbol of this wealth, was passed down to him. He got everything he has on a silver platter from his dad, but that very same wealth and status has enslaved him... Exactly how when he in turn passes Soundwave on to Carly, he literally cages her. It’s like this movie is trying to say that capital is destructive, even to the people who own it!



And in even more examples of passed down symbols of wealth constraining their owner, Dylan hands Sam a surveillance pocket watch scorpion. (It actually crawls from his wrist onto Sam’s.) The idea is to listen in on him and have him ask Optimus what the Autobots’ plan is - if he refuses, Soundwave is going to murder him, Carly and Dylan. Of course, Sam being Sam, he swears to hunt the latter down later.

Part 12: "Welcome to the desert of the real."



Sentinel announces his demands to the U.S. Government: For peaceful negotiation to even be an option, he wants the Autobot rebels to be shot into space. And surprisingly, they comply. Sam tries to make a scene, but Mearing shoots him down though I do like how she's very uncertain, and makes it very clear she doesn't know if it's the right thing to do, but... Well, "And look where they brought us".

"But the Autobots have no way of leaving this planet!"



"And that's where you're wrong."

Apparently, this CGI space boat brought Sideswipe, Arcee and the twins to earth, and then NEST strapped a space shuttle to it because why not.



We also meet the Wreckers, a trio of NASCAR-themed robots whose purpose is to have inexplicable British accents. Actually, their role is to be snarling, drooling, barely-sapient beasts that jump at savage murder even faster than their Autobot brethren. With inexplicable British accents. Also, the red one has fat physics. As in, they actually animated his metal belly swaying about as he walks. It's strangely hypnotic.

Actually, alright, they do have some purpose: There's three of them, and three is of course the magic number of filmmaking. Two is just a pair and four is too many, while three is just perfect to say "there's some quantity of these guys". Essentially, they serve as the generic Autobot footsoldiers. In contrast to Optimus' military charisma, they're low-class brutes whose only defining trait is that they're styled after NASCAR, something generally associated with lower-class rednecks. The British accents serve to paint them as acultural: While NASCAR is a specifically American thing, Britain does have its own unique flavor of low-culture caricature ("chav" is a great word, by the way), and as NEST showed in the previous movie, the trilogy often uses Britain in the same breath as America, to underline their shared history of imperialism.



We also meet this fellow, Sgt. Epps (Tyrese Gibson), again. Don't remember who he is? Well, I didn't actually mention him before, because he barely was *in* the previous two movies, but this one still tries to play this scene as a fancy reunion. Remarkably, while I never paid attention to Epps before, in this movie he manages to actually be kind of a charming character.



Simmons is also back, and apparently being flung out of a speeding car by a giant robot leaves you in a wheelchair with barely a scratch. No longer being able to play the action movie protagonist, Simmons has been relayed to support, and he plays the role with every bit as much gusto. Also, are those Chevrolet Suburbans in the background? Because that's actually a pretty clever bit of filmmaking, serving as a simple visual reminder of how Simmons and Dutch got their injuries.



Simmons wastes no time and immediately begins making misogynistic comments at Mearing. It seems they had a bit of a fling a while ago, and he's not letting it go. The funny thing is that he's commenting on her shapely rumpus, but she's wearing a thick jacket that kind of covers it up completely. It's absolutely obvious that he's not complimenting the status of her butt in the slightest, he's just using her status as a woman to exert power over her. After all, it's improper for a woman in power to have a sexuality - Simmons, as a man, is at a clear advantage in spite of their difference in status, and transparently uses this to get a grip on mission control.

And after how Mearing handled Sentinel and Sam, she just lets him get away with it, practically playing into his hands by openly confirming there was something between them, too. Very strange.



It's also funny just how much this movie puts down poor Brains & Wheelie. "Property of NASA"? Ouch.



Optimus gives Sam a few final inspirational words (read: passive-aggressive digs at the human government), and Sam finally asks the question: What are their plans? How are they going to fight back?



"There is no plan."

He's lying.



"You will always be my friend, Sam." The "my friend" part of that sentence? Taken from Spock in Star Trek 2. Yep.



"Years from now, they're gonna ask us... Where were you, when they took over the planet? ...And we're gonna say, 'We just stood by, and watched.'"

This scene is kind of nasty in some subtle ways. As Simmons theatrically declares his powerlessness to the world, you can tell that he isn't just making a fatalistic prediction. He *wants* the Decepticons to attack now. In this scene, he speaks Sam's mind as well, and, well, they both profit from the Autobots' presence. They want Optimus and co. Back, and the only way that can happen is if their narrative of the capital-E-Evil invader Decepticon is *true*. There's this subtle undercurrent to this scene that Sam and Simmons would gladly sacrifice a city if it meant that their narrative proves correct. And well, this is another scene shot almost completely from Sam's POV. Of course they're going to be right.

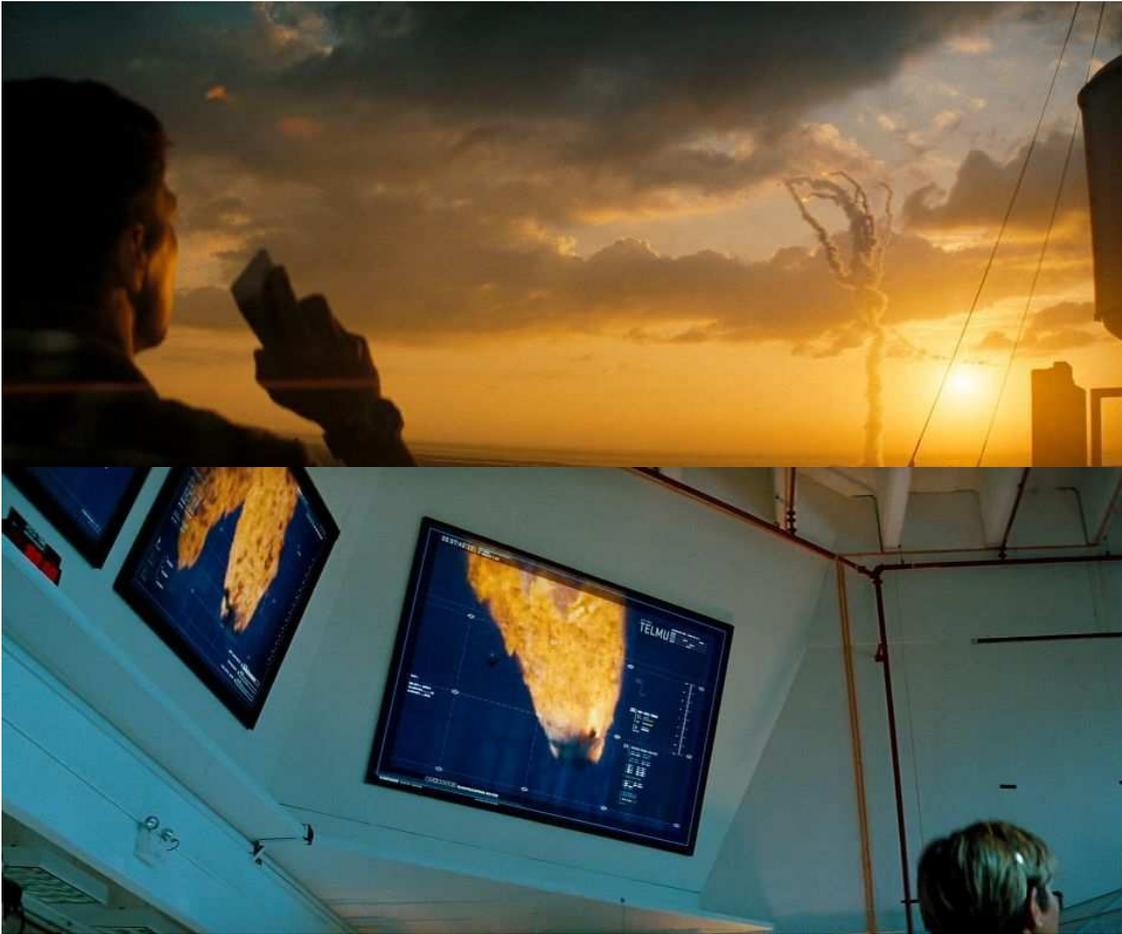


Speaking of people wanting to be right, Dylan explains that “you have to stand on the side of progress if you want to be part of history”. The movie outright states at this point that the Decepticons are progressive, and once again calls to mind history. Note Carly being framed by a glass cube - at this point, the glass imagery is going to start getting kind of out of hand. And in turn speaking of things getting out of hand,









Transformers!

If the intro to this movie contrasted historical and faux-historical-cgi, then this one just jumbles it into a total incoherent mess. It completely throws any sort of visual cohesion out of the window (notice how throughout that launch sequence, *three full days* appear to pass), and basically mostly exists to erase any and all remaining trace of suspension of disbelief. It's the crudest approximation of space shuttle-related pop-imagery possible, an impossibly perfect caricature of the image of Challenger exploding in the atmosphere in January 1986. It's just... Beautiful.

Of course, narratively speaking, what is Challenger? If at its simplest, space flight represents mortal man challenging nature and crossing boundaries he was not meant to cross, then Challenger is what happens when they fail. And that's what this scene is, as well: Mankind exiled the gods to live and fight for themselves, but the gods had other plans. Spoilers, the Autobots survive and are back on earth, where they'll soon get to wreak havoc again.



Dylan and Carly fly off to a *very* pretty city.



Here to catch the sights too, eh?



Sam wants to find out where Carly is, and how does he do it? Well, Dutch actually *hacks himself into Dylan's phone, using its camera to find its position*. With *The Dark Knight (2008)* and *Avengers (2012)* that makes *three* recent super-blockbusters to feature the protagonists hacking phones with their military-grade technology to use them as impromptu surveillance equipment. Sam and Epps take off.



Carly and Dylan caged in with this bizarre technological *thing - wonderful* shot. Carly reasons out that the earth only has one unique resource the Transformers could need: Manpower. But even with their miraculous space bridge, how are they going to ship over six billion people? “They’re not shipping people.”

“They’re shipping their planet *here*.” (<http://vimeo.com/55083797>)

Well. This is a thing.

I love how this comes completely out of nowhere. After throwing us out of the movie with Challenger and setting up this ridiculous video-game-esque element of the Control Pillar™ (Fun fact: The control pillar remains completely unmolested throughout the movie. The protagonists stop the bridge by breaking a *wholly different* pillar, namely the one Dylan and Carly are trapped with in the shot above!), suddenly night slams down like an anvil and *everyone dies*. Sanitized action movie violence? PFFFFFT. It’s insane how after all its ridiculous artifice (particularly the highway chase scene, which was sanitized as hell!), the movie suddenly just throws this genuine expression of human death and suffering at us. It’s an emotional punch. *It’s the Desert of the Real*.

It’s absurd, isn’t it? You have backflipping robots and floating CGI-apparitions appear in the same breath as charred images of total catastrophe. How can one claim this theatre to in any way approximate any sort of reality? Well, the logic of this scene returns right to the beginning of the movie: The juxtaposition serves to make the scenes of genuine suffering to appear *more real* in comparison. Think back to the finale of the first movie: We never got to see any civilian reactions or causalities. The movies have been continuously playing coy about it, leaving other people just outside the audience’s mind, keeping its robot pirouettes *distinct* from the lives lived by the various people of the fiction.

It’s no coincidence that the lead-up to this scene is the most artificial part of this movie. The clear, yet perverted pop-cultural imagery of Challenger is followed immediately by a scene that is unimaginably absurd and alien: A war of the worlds scenario in which the only thing the onlooker can relate to are other people... Who are all dead or dying. In a sense, this scene shows a breakdown of the wall between the mad torture of the robots from the movie before and the scenes of human life that made up the majority of this one.

SMG already posted this thing before, but this is where it truly becomes relevant. I really recommend reading the entire thing, because there's no part of it that doesn't somehow come up in the last act of the movie (<http://www.lacan.com/desertsymf.htm>). For the lazy, I'll try to quote the most important bits. (really though, just read the whole thing.)

And was the bombing of the WTC with regard to the Hollywood catastrophe movies not like the snuff pornography versus ordinary sado-maso porno movies? This is the element of truth in Karl-Heinz Stockhausen's provocative statement that the planes hitting the WTC towers was the ultimate work of art: one can effectively perceive the collapse of the WTC towers as the climactic conclusion of the XXth century art's "passion of the real" – the "terrorists" themselves did not primarily do it to provoke real material damage, but FOR THE SPECTACULAR EFFECT OF IT.

...

The underlying experience of Time Out of Joint and of The Truman Show is that the late capitalist consumerist Californian paradise is, in its very hyper-reality, in a way IRREAL, substanceless, deprived of the material inertia. And the same "derealization" of the horror went on after the WTC bombings: while the number of 6000 victims is repeated all the time, it is surprising how little of the actual carnage we see – no dismembered bodies, no blood, no desperate faces of the dying people... in clear contrast to the reporting from the Third World catastrophies where the whole point was to produce a scoop of some gruesome detail: Somalis dying of hunger, raped Bosnian women, men with throats cut. These shots were always accompanied with the advance-warning that "some of the images you will see are extremely graphic and may hurt children" – a warning which we NEVER heard in the reports on the WTC collapse. Is this not yet another proof of how, even in these tragic moments, the distance which separates Us from Them, from their reality, is maintained: the real horror happens THERE, not HERE?"

For the Decepticons, what strategic value is there in destroying Chicago? There is none. The purpose of the act is to display their power, to scare the people into ceasing to resist... In other words, it's *a terrorist act*. The parallels to the WTC bombings become obvious from there: Note how our first real establishing shot of the attack are the strange mecha-blimps floating around next to Chicago's skyscrapers.

So it is not only that Hollywood stages a semblance of real life deprived of the weight and inertia of materiality – in the late capitalist consumerist society, "real social life" itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbors behaving in "real" life as stage actors and extras... Again, the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian de-spiritualized universe is the de-materialization of the "real life" itself, its reversal into a spectral show. Among others, Christopher Isherwood gave expression to this unreality of the American daily life, exemplified in the motel room: "American motels are unreal! /.../ they are deliberately designed to be unreal. /.../ The Europeans hate us because we've retired to live inside our advertisements, like hermits going into caves to contemplate." Peter Sloterdijk's notion of the "sphere" is here literally realized, as the gigantic metal sphere that envelopes and isolates the entire city. Years ago, a series of science-fiction films like Zardoz or Logan's Run forecasted today's postmodern predicament by extending this fantasy to the community itself: the isolated group living an aseptic life in a secluded area longs for the experience of the real world of material decay. Is the endlessly repeated shot of the plane approaching and hitting the second WTC tower not the real-life version of the famous scene from Hitchcock's Birds, superbly analyzed by Raymond Bellour, in which Melanie approaches the Bodega Bay pier after crossing the bay on the small boat? When, while approaching the wharf, she waves to her (future) lover, a single bird (first perceived as an undistinguished dark blot) unexpectedly enters the frame from above right and hits her head. Was the plane which hit the WTC tower not literally the ultimate Hitchcockian blot, the anamorphic stain which denaturalized the idyllic well-known New York landscape?

Before leaving, Optimus “passes down” the conflict to the human race. “From here, the fight will be your own.” Up to this point, Sam has always been portrayed as a spectator. Most of the major combat, happening in Qatar or Shanghai or Egypt or the fictional non-place of Mission City (literally named to mean “a city a mission takes place in” within the context of the movie) always had a safe *distance* from *us* as the audience. The mastery of this entire sequence, starting with Challenger, is the way it uses narratives from the real world to essentially *close that distance*, inserting itself into that same space as the re-occurring news programmer imagery of the twin towers being hit, only *now* choosing to actually reach out to the audience and show us something we can emotionally connect with.

The Wachowski brothers' hit *The Matrix* (1999) brought this logic to its climax: the material reality we all experience and see around us is a virtual one, generated and coordinated by a gigantic mega-computer to which we are all attached; when the hero (played by Keanu Reeves) awakens into the "real reality," he sees a desolate landscape littered with burned ruins – what remained of Chicago after a global war. The resistance leader Morpheus utters the ironic greeting: "Welcome to the desert of the real." Was it not something of the similar order that took place in New York on September 11? Its citizens were introduced to the "desert of the real" – to us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots we saw of the collapsing towers could not but remind us of the most breathtaking scenes in the catastrophe big productions.

When we hear how the bombings were a totally unexpected shock, how the unimaginable impossible happened, one should recall the other defining catastrophe from the beginning of the XXth century, that of Titanic: it was also a shock, but the space for it was already prepared in ideological fantasizing, since Titanic was the symbol of the might of the XIXth century industrial civilization. Does the same not hold also for these bombings? Not only were the media bombarding us all the time with the talk about the terrorist threat; this threat was also obviously libidinally invested – just recall the series of movies from *Escape From New York* to *Independence Day*. Therein resides the rationale of the often-mentioned association of the attacks with the Hollywood disaster movies: the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America *got what it fantasized about*, and this was the greatest surprise.

One should therefore turn around the standard reading according to which, the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory Sphere: quite on the contrary, it is prior to the WTC collapse than we lived in our reality, perceiving the Third World horrors as something which is not effectively part of our social reality, as something which exists (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen – and what happened on September 11 is that this screen fantasmatic apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality (i.e., the symbolic coordinates which determine what we experience as reality). The fact that, after September 11, the opening of many "of the blockbuster" movies with scenes which bear a resemblance to the WTC collapse (large buildings on fire or under attack, terrorist actions...) were postponed (or the films were even shelved), is thus to be read as the "repression" of the fantasmatic background responsible for the impact of the WTC collapse. Of course, the point is not to play a pseudo-postmodern game of reducing the WTC collapse to just another media spectacle, reading it as a catastrophe version of the snuff porno movies; the question we should have asked ourselves when we stared at the TV screens on September 11 is simply: WHERE DID WE ALREADY SEE THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN?

Thanks, Zizek, you saved me from having to write a whole bunch of words!

The point of this scene? Well, Optimus pretty much put it best: “The fight will be your own.” In tandem with intruding upon the audience’s emotional space, the movie places a certain degree of *responsibility* on them. The joke being, of course, that the line “This is our fight” was already said during the *previous* movie, and people have been involved and dying since the very

beginning: This is just the first sensational, large-scale break of the status quo of American life. See, this scene mostly exists to color the rest of the movie, which is a nearly full-hour long action sequence. Yes, really. This is where the movie goes into full throttle and barely stops to take a single breath. I wish I could just let you watch the whole thing in video because there's no way to even *attempt* conveying it in screenshots, but oh well.

Also, if they had just given Megatron the Allspark, none of this would have happened. So, whoopsies! Also, 1:30 of that video marks our first Garbage Day cameo. For all its pro-revolution aesthetics, the movies leave no doubt that said revolution is a hideous and painful thing!

Part 13...



The entire top brass of the military has come together to try to figure out what's happening in Detroit. The Decepticons disabled all communications in the city and are shooting down all surveillance equipment sent over, so Mearing and co. Are effectively blind. The way they are portrayed throughout this last act is pretty interesting, but I'll get to that a bit later.



Meanwhile, Epps and his men are having doubts about actually going in. But Sam is determined.



Sam is not a very clever man.



But suddenly... The attacking aircraft is shot down! (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Autobots Return
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJZBjQ6cgg4>)





"We will kill them all."

That is Optimus' first words upon coming back. Set to that music.



"Wreckers, kill him!"



"This is going to hurt!"



Then they proceed to *tear him apart, limb by limb.*



"Your leaders will now understand: Decepticons will never leave your planet alone! And we needed them to believe we had

gone. For today, in the name of *freedom*, we take the battle to *them!*

I love this fucking scene so much. For one, I enjoy just how *organic* the lone Decepticon appears. As he's flying around, shooting at Epps and Sam, he does his ridiculous pirouettes and silly transformaneuvering, and then out of nowhere he's hit with just one shot, which is enough to harshly ground him. When he then tries to tear himself from the wreckage, the filmmakers did a fantastic job of making him appear as human as a robot can be: While distinctly made of metal, the sheer amount of moving bits and the subtle coloration, and the contrast to the harsh, blocky metal plates of his vehicle immediately make him "read" as a person... Which makes his grisly murder by the wreckers all the more terrifying. Then there's the soundtrack. The monstrous, heavy drums start right as Optimus steps into the picture, combine with a shot that completely unambiguously paints him as threatening and villainous, and carry through the Wreckers' murder. Were you to show this first part of the scene to someone who hasn't heard of the movies, there's not a chance they wouldn't think the Autobots are supposed to be the bad guys in it. And it's from this background that Optimus suddenly launches into this distillation of oorah right-wing FREEDOM bullshit, while the music takes a total 180 into romantic fanfare *but still carries a hint of that threatening percussion*, and it's *dissonant as fuck*.



In fact, just to heighten the effect, the Autobot's heroic arrival is punctuated by more terrified civilians running away, just for the fun of it. This is pretty much the point where I have to call bullshit on any attempt to read this movie as unironic, because this is just such blatant contradictory messaging.





The wreckers explain that their leaving the planet was a ruse from the very beginning: They actually hid in one of the booster rockets, dropping back to earth safely before the rocket ever exploded. In other words, they lied to everyone, made mockery of Optimus' promise in the last movie that humanity's wishes are paramount, and let an entire city be reduced to ash before making their presence known again in order to use that terrifying loss of human life as an excuse for all this and to remain back on earth, *when it was their presence that provoked this terrorist act in the first place*. It's absurd, all of it! Complete and total nonsense! And yet people are buying it, hook, line and sinker.

Bumblebee states that he can fly the downed Decepticon vessel, and takes the humans for a joy ride Dylan's.





Women are literally dogs, you heard it here first. I haven't seen a match cut this unsubtle since 2001.



Glass, glasses, binoculars, crystal balls, now a telescope. And what is Carly's True Sight spotting over yonder?

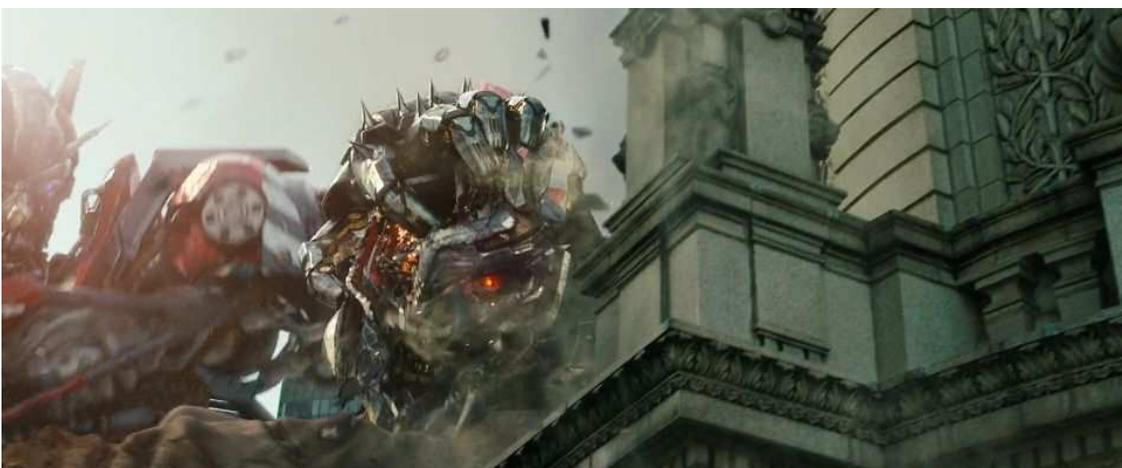


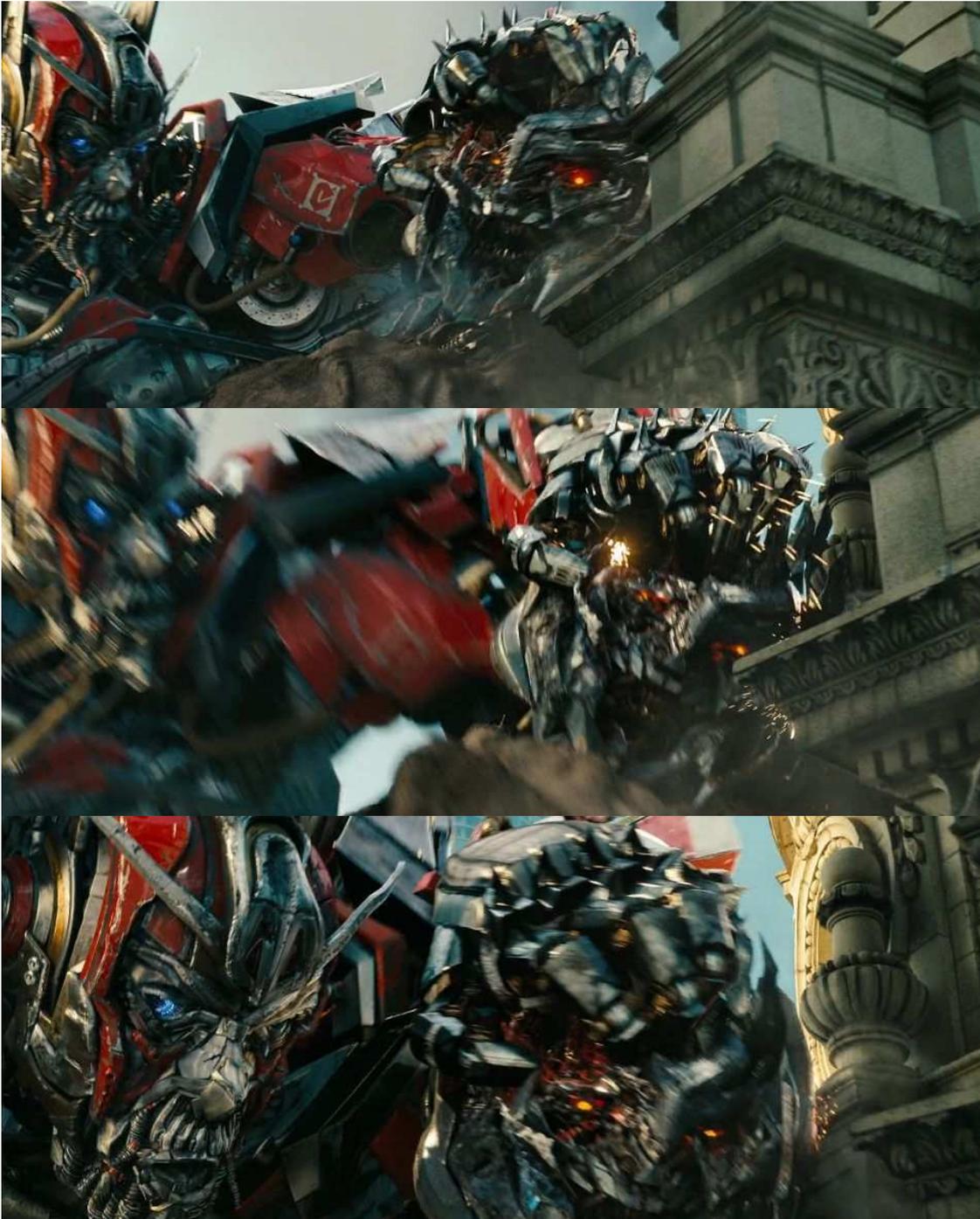


The exposition made a big deal out of the Control Pillar, but cinematographically the movie keeps returning to this particular one. I shouldn't need to tell you which one ends up actually being important.



Just look how happy he is! This is the scene where Sentinel tells Megatron that he has no intention of working for him. And he's... not very nice about it.





Freeze-framing this just for Megatron's facial animation. Just going from surprised anger to sheer pain to this depressed, downcast, almost accepting look all within a single second - an amazing effort by the animators for something no one in the audience could possibly have noticed.



The importance of this scene, and this whole focus on Carly's clarity is that, well, *this is the first time a human being actually paid attention to Megatron*. That's the beautiful simplicity of this scene: Although taken here by force, Carly uses the moment to just *see* the enemy, and immediately gets an ever-so-slight idea of his complexity and his personal conflicts... Standing at complete odds with all the other characters being blinded(!!!) by propaganda and hate.



Sam and friends have arrived to free Carly.



I love this shot. Sam is clearly in the servant's field of vision, but she gives no shit. Probably because he's holding the gun like a total wimp. Seriously, the way Sam moves in this scene has to be seen to be believed. Fantastic acting on LaBeouf's part. (Solid trigger discipline though, didn't expect that)



Sam pretending to be a sneaky action hero becomes even more absurd when we see his mortal enemy doing something as impossibly profane as looking in the fridge while venting his frustrations about being unable to do anything.



That face! Also, the servant lady just sloowly raises her hand to her mouth in what may be the most sarcastic display of shock ever expressed by an extra.





This scene cleanly mirrors Wang's death: We have the lone simple guy pretending to be an action hero and trying to tango with the big boys, then being unceremoniously thrown through a pane of glass and off a building by a monitor-turned-evil-murder-chicken. Of course, Sam does have one advantage Wang did not.



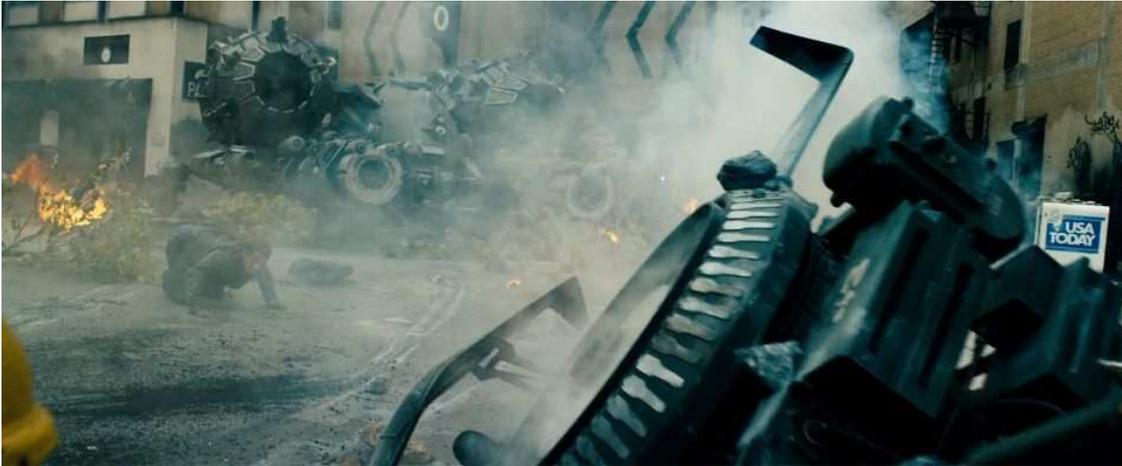
Friends.



Notice how Dylan's shirt has mysteriously turned a much darker shade since the last part. Now, here's another funny thing about this whole scene: Why did Dylan kidnap Carly in the first place? On a meta-narrative level, of course it is because Sam wanted to have a motivation for attacking the guy he hated: The dragon kidnapping the princess is the most basic heroic narrative, after all. But if you're perceptive, Dylan has stated his own reasons as well: In the video at the end of the last part, he says that he's *safe*. He cannot guarantee the survival and safety of any other human on the planet earth... Except his own. Did you notice how he immediately grabs and covers Carly when stray shots start hitting the building they're in? Yes

indeed, *he wanted to shield her with his proximity*. Sam believes there's sexual interest, but nothing I've seen has so far supported his interpretation. The way I see it, he simply wanted his long-time friend and supporter to be safe from harm... Even if it means being hated by her.

And now Sam has pulled her back out into the danger zone, the middle of combat.



Laserbeak does a *remarkably* poor job of murdering Sam until Bumblebee shoots him down, but in the process crashes the Decepticon ship. On top of a bunch of civilians. Yup!



Everyone regroups, and Sam spots one of the shot-down UAVs.



Epps tries to use it to contact ops, and finally gets through.



There's something fascinating about the way this scene is set up. With the protagonist staring down into the little housing of the camera, the image of which appears on a huge screen overlooking the usual ant-hive-commotion of military ops, you get this really bizarre effect of Mearns and co actually being *inside* of that camera, like a tiny house filled with legless fairies. Or

perhaps a portal into another dimension.

Carly repeats everything we know, and now ops is officially part of the game.



It's fascinating. Ops cannot interact directly with the proceedings, so instead they build a virtual-reality Chicago, then start off a large web of orders and things indirectly affecting other things. There's this real sense of *disconnect* between ops and the world, almost as if they're, well, in another dimension! And then there's another fascinating thing about all this, which is how our four named characters in ops are used. There's Lennox, Simmons, Dutch and Mearing, two characters who have been with us since the beginning (and one of which received some massive development), a dog and the future version of one of the characters who is out in the field, and they're all just... There.

It's like every bit of personality has been drained from them, and they've been subsumed completely into this *Gestalt-intelligence* of Ops, a sort of giant brain in which the neural pathways are formed by human beings shouting orders. Just the way everything in this monotone room of simulations playing simulations for simulated people is impossibly impersonal, and in its disconnect to "our" world calls to mind the Lovecraftian idea of the blind idiot god Azathoth, who sits at the centre of the universe, wielding power far beyond any mortal's understanding. The human beings before us, through the power of networking, have turned into something *fundamentally inhuman*.

The best part about all of this, for me, is Mearing. Like, we just established that her past version has an unusually clear sight of the world, being able to perceive the truth with her own eyes, and yet she's here, having to stare at an indirect replica created from past data and spotty information. What happened...?



One of the funny and sad things about Carly is the fact that throughout all this, her clothes remain totally spotless and her hair absolutely fabulous. Oh Hollywood, can't have a woman getting dirty, can we. I realize this is in part to keep her angelic image, but I'd still have preferred it if the movie went full hog on only paying lip service to objectification. The heroes figure that since they're here, they may as well try to lob a rocket at the control pillar, even though they only thought to bring a single one. They figure they'll need a good vantage point to do it, one such as...



That glass building up there. Why, that looks perfectly safe! Ugh, that fuckin' building. Let's just say this movie isn't done with 9/11 yet.



The movie follows with a genuinely rousing scene of the human assault force preparing. (Transformers: Dark of the Moon (The Complete Score) – Planning Attack <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiQ-2dBjTOQ>)



It's kind of strange, really. All throughout the trilogy, they've been playing their "military worship" in a fairly ridiculous way, and I figured that it was just part of the pretense they were building. But here, in the deciding hour of the movie, where they mostly come clean and finally play everything they've been coyly implying up to this point for real, suddenly we get this scene that has nothing but genuine appreciation and support for these soldiers and their mission. What happened?



And then it struck me. A simple nuance that had been there since the beginning, but I had not seen until this point. The "military worship" the filmmakers are so often accused of: It *is* real. What makes it fascinating are the specifics of it. All these elements of appreciation... The rousing music, the sweeping angles, the dramatic zooms: When are they used, specifically? Certainly not in combat, since actual combat is always portrayed as chaotic, destructive and inglorious. No, the worship happens *back at base*, when they're *preparing* to take off. Where's the difference? I think the best way to explain this is via Mearing.

See, being the supreme figure of military authority in this movie, you could say that the military is itself one of her tools. A tool of aggression, a firearm. Remember the big deal I made out of Mearing's gun, and the way guns are used in this movie in general?

Mearing lays the gun on the table to establish her authority. Megatron just draws his. Sam, Wang and Dutch all point guns around to try and leverage themselves into a position of power. The gun is repeatedly used as *a communicative measure*. And that's the trick with how they're portrayed during preparation vs. How they're portrayed in actual use. The existence of military power is righteous and justified... As long as it exists *in potentia*.

The movie explains itself neatly in the scene where Simmons and Sam meet the Russians. The scene begins with a charged, dangerous situation: To Dutch and co, the Russians are a threatening Other, and vice versa. Due to a failing of language, those Others see the protagonists as having aggressive intentions, and draw their weapons, an open display of aggression meant to intimidate. A moment of destructive chaos ensues, which sees Dutch draw his own weapon, making the clear statement that he is willing to *return* this aggression if necessary. At this point, having the bigger gun, the Other is at an advantage, and therefore still in control, but actually hesitant to *execute* said control. And that's when another moment of chaos happens, and suddenly *Dutch* is the one holding the bigger gun - and it is only in that circumstance that the authority keeping him in check can make his actual *voice* heard, resolving the situation amicably.

And is that not exactly what is happening right now, just on a much larger scale? The attack on Chicago was a form of aggressive communication - the loss of life being used to tell the human populace that they are in total control. And this activation of the military is the response: Mearing is drawing her gun, again, attempting primarily to *get a diplomatic advantage*.

This also fits Wang's death and Sam's unfinished re-enactment of said scene. Wang draws his guns to state his intention of counter-aggression, but is *unable to follow up the threat*. Sam, by contrast, has a powerful war machine looking over his shoulder - and although he goes through the same steps, the fact of his military support is what turns the tides and allows him to live. In this context, the violence - and the returned violence it provokes - becomes an actual, perhaps even necessary *component* of communication.

The joke in that reading of the scene with the Russians, of course, is that Simmons and Dutch are the ones who *actually* initiate that exchange of arms in the first place, *they* are the threatening Other intruding upon the Russians' lives. Which itself aligns beautifully with the humans setting the entire trilogy in motion all the way back with their capture of Megatron and the Allspark, interfering with the lives of the Cybertronians. So here we have a movie that condemns the US' history of imperialism, but surprisingly, avoids the logical counternarrative of all US military aggression being unjust... Which brings us right back to Zizek!

We don't yet know what consequences in economy, ideology, politics, war, this event will have, but one thing is sure: the US, which, till now, perceived itself as an island exempted from this kind of violence, witnessing this kind of things only from the safe distance of the TV screen, is now directly involved. So the alternative is: will Americans decide to fortify further their "sphere," or to risk stepping out of it? Either America will persist in, strengthen even, the deeply immoral attitude of "Why should this happen to us? Things like this don't happen HERE!", leading to more aggressivity towards the threatening Outside, in short: to a paranoid acting out. Or America will finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen separating it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival into the Real world, making the long-overdue move from "A thing like this should not happen HERE!" to "A thing like this should not happen ANYWHERE!". Therein resides the true lesson of the bombings: the only way to ensure that it will not happen HERE again is to prevent it going on ANYWHERE ELSE. In short, America should learn to humbly accept its own vulnerability as part of this world, enacting the punishment of those responsible as a sad duty, not as an exhilarating retaliation.

The WTC bombings again confront us with the necessity to resist the temptation of a double blackmail. If one simply, only and unconditionally condemns it, one cannot but appear to endorse the blatantly ideological position of the American innocence under attack by the Third World Evil; if one draws attention to the deeper socio-political causes of Arab extremism, one cannot but appear to blame the victim which ultimately got what it deserved... The only consequent solution is here to reject this very opposition and to adopt both positions simultaneously, which can only be done if one resorts to the dialectical category of totality: there is no choice between these two positions, each one is one-sided and false. Far from offering a case apropos of which one can adopt a clear ethical stance, we encounter here the limit of moral reasoning: from the moral standpoint, the victims are innocent, the act was an abominable crime; however, this very innocence is not innocent - to adopt such an "innocent" position in today's global capitalist universe is in itself a false...

abstraction. The same goes for the more ideological clash of interpretations: one can claim that the attack on the WTC was an attack on what is worth fighting for in democratic freedoms – the decadent Western way of life condemned by Muslim and other fundamentalists is the universe of women's rights and multiculturalist tolerance; however, one can also claim that it was an attack on the very center and symbol of global financial capitalism. This, of course, in no way entails the compromised notion of shared guilt (terrorists are to blame, but, partially, Americans are also to blame...) – the point is, rather, that the two sides are not really opposed, that they belong to the same field. The fact that global capitalism is a totality means that it is the dialectical unity of itself and of its other, of the forces which resist it on "fundamentalist" ideological grounds.

Consequently, of the two main stories which emerged after September 11, both are worse, as Stalin would have put it. The American patriotic narrative – the innocence under siege, the surge of patriotic pride – is, of course, vain; however, is the Leftist narrative (with its Schadenfreude: the US got what they deserved, what they were for decades doing to others) really any better? The predominant reaction of European, but also American, Leftists was nothing less than scandalous: all imaginable stupidities were said and written, up to the "feminist" point that the WTC towers were two phallic symbols, waiting to be destroyed ("castrated"). Was there not something petty and miserable in the mathematics reminding one of the Holocaust revisionism (what are the 6000 dead against millions in Ruanda, Kongo, etc.)? And what about the fact that the CIA (co)created the Taliban and Bin Laden, financing and helping them to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan? Why was this fact quoted as an argument AGAINST attacking them? Would it not be much more logical to claim that it is precisely their duty to get rid of the monster they created? The moment one thinks in the terms of "yes, the WTC collapse was a tragedy, but one should not fully feel solidarity with the victims, since this would mean supporting US imperialism," the ethical catastrophe is already here: the only appropriate stance is the unconditional solidarity with ALL victims. The ethical stance proper is here replaced with the moralizing mathematics of guilt and horror which misses the key point: the terrifying death of each individual is absolute and incomparable. In short, let us make a simple mental experiment: if you detect in yourself any restraint to fully empathize with the victims of the WTC collapse, if you feel the urge to qualify your empathy with "yes, but what about the millions who suffer in Africa...", you are not demonstrating your Third World sympathies, but merely the mauvaise foi which bears witness to your implicit patronizing racist attitude towards the Third World victims. (More precisely, the problem with such comparative statements is that they are necessary and inadmissible: one HAS to make them, one HAS to make the point that much worse horrors are taking place around the world on a daily basis – but one has to do it without getting involved in the obscene mathematics of guilt).

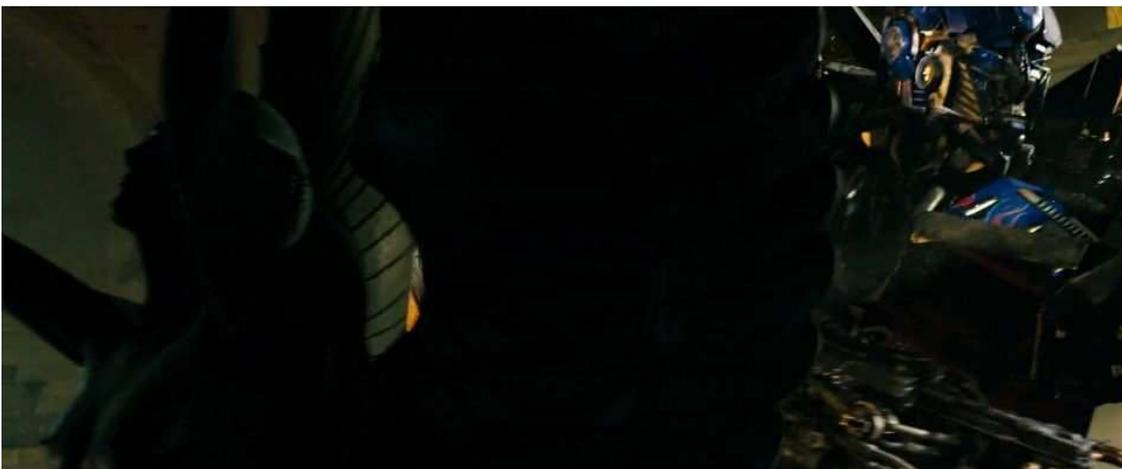
The movie puts humanity at fault for the entire situation, yet frames their self-defense as justified and necessary. And on the other side, it openly supports Garbage Day's revolution against authoritarianism, yet shows him vaporize innocent civilians. It's an almost self-contradictory position, that, if you take it in isolation, almost seems to imply that the movie is pro-war and violence in its purest form... In a sense, as an action movie, it has to be, of course, Truffaut and all. But the important thing is once again pointed out to us at the end of the scene with the Russians: The existence of an amicable, diplomatic *end* to this exchange of violence that results in a greater understanding between the two sides. My favorite thing about this movie in particular compared to the previous two is that then, everyone was just wrong and an idiot. But here, both sides have gained a certain amount of righteousness, and, with that, complexity... With the only faction that is plain-out evil being the Autobots who try to frame this conflict as a black-and-white battle of heroes and villains, deliberately sabotaging the possibility of a peaceful end in mutual understanding.

The idea of violence-as-communication is also explored in more depth in *Battleship (2012)*, a movie that seems to be a sort of response to this one thematically.

Part 14: “Every frame is so dense, it has SO MUCH going on!”



Heroically storming the city (and, in Optimus Prime’s case, losing his trailer along the way), the Autobots re-join with our human protagonists in a church with some rather... Peculiar decorations. Churches are the oldest example of a sanctuary or “safe space”, designating this scene as a last little breather before shit hits the fan (again).



While Optimus complains about his missing trailer (“*I need that flight tech!*”), he makes kind of an interesting dance around this rather *Shin Megami Tensei*-esque angel. The shot begins with him to her left, in her field of view, but his back turned to her. He turns around smoothly, but just as the statue moves into *his* field of view, his turning suddenly speeds up, scanning the other side of the room past her. He then moves to the right, and again turns his head quickly so his view shoots right past the statue, resulting in the shot above, where he’s actually divided from her by the strong line of her wings, looking into the opposite direction. Finally, he threateningly/dramatically cocks his gun for no reason, and the camera follows him to the right, the statue exiting its view left, never to be seen again.

I find it interesting because even though the statue itself is such a striking setpiece set up to immediately draw the viewer’s attention with its visual weight, Optimus himself *actively denies* its presence, as though he couldn’t bear to look at it. Aside from the obvious dissociating effect of him complaining about his toys while the viewer is busy wondering why the hell there’s a huge bronze statue of a naked angel with a whip smack-dab in the middle of a church in Chicago*, keep in mind also that

this is a naked female angel cast in dark metal sitting amongst a scene of destruction and defiled sanctity in a position of great lament, a series of images previously associated with the character of Megatron.

•Unless there actually is a church in Chicago with a naked BDSM angel statue sitting right in its centre, in which case, welp



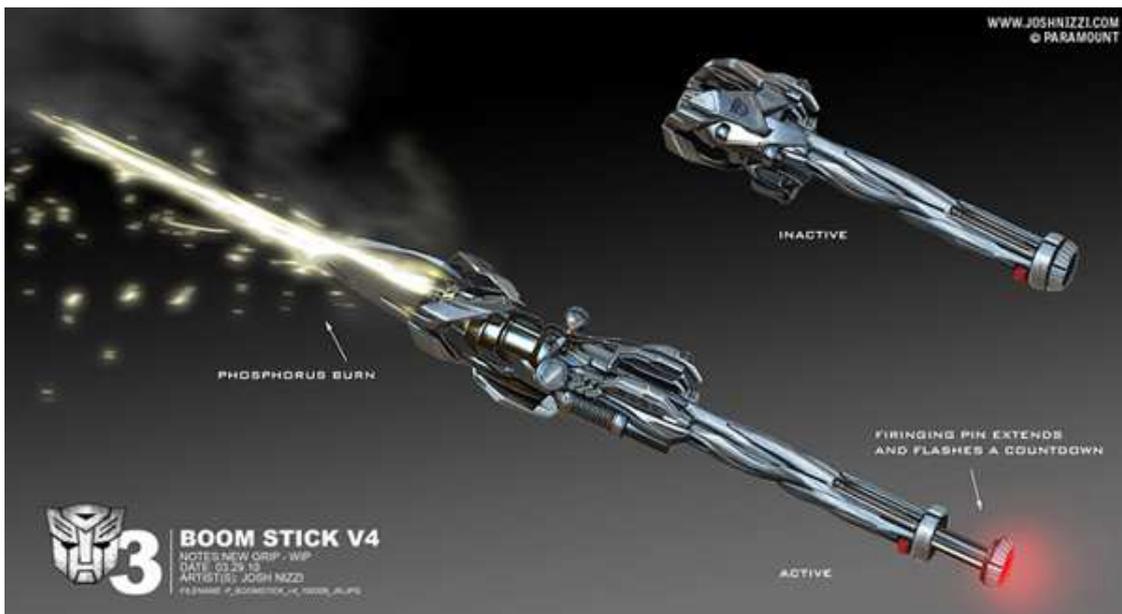
I should also note that Optimus has a history of not looking at angels, as seen here in Revenge.



While Optimus sends out the Wreckers to be murdered by Shockwave, Epps reminds the viewer of the humans' target, the broken glass building here framed by more broken glass. Someone on the production team either really fucking loves or really fucking hates glass.



But before they go, Que reminds us that he's supposed to be an inventor, and drops some techy gadgets on the floor. Convenient arm-mounted superhero grappling hooks and... Grenades. Wait a second. Take a look at that grenade in the centre. A cylindrical container connected to a long stick by which it is held. The German arms manufacturer just handed them some *Stielhandgranaten*. Welp, I guess it took them long enough to invoke the Nazis!

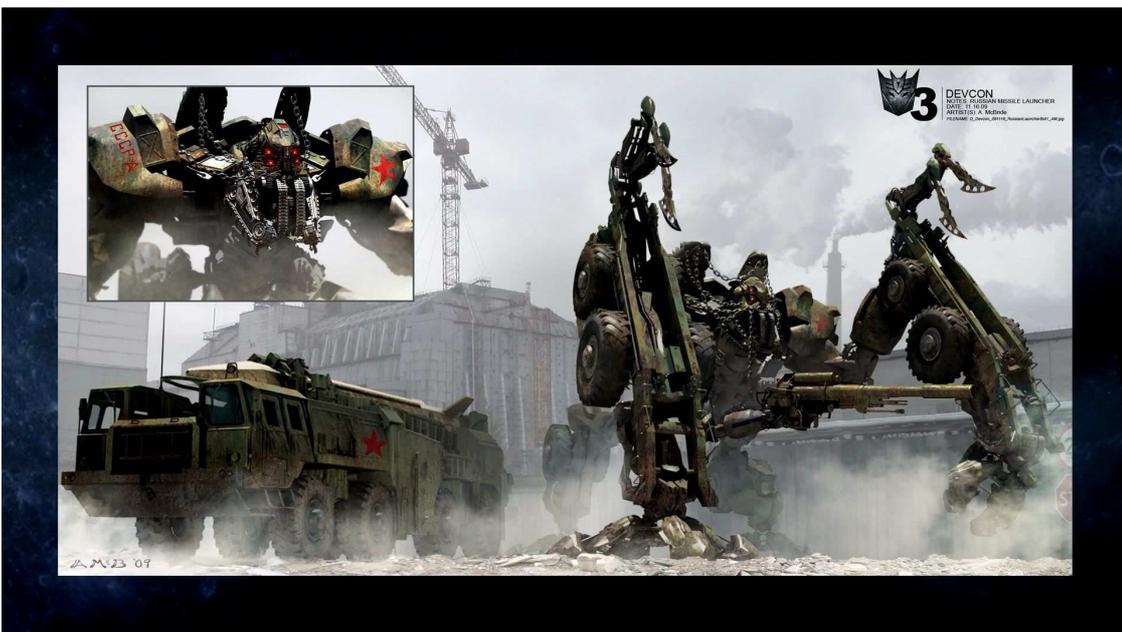


It's even less subtle in some of the concept art. Also it's a lightsaber I guess??



Garbage Day cameo in the background! Fun fact: I had no idea SA had an admin called that until just a couple weeks ago

Actually, in the interim, I found out I was wrong about him. While he resembles the garbage truck man from the riot scene before, thanks to how little he's kept in focus, he's actually an entirely different character. Whoops! Except.



Yes, rather than being a blue-collar vehicle, GD is *a literal communist rocket truck*. That only makes it *less* subtle!!



There's a bit of a cute moment where the Wreckers all fire at Shockwave with like 12 machine guns and he immediately takes a car to use as a shield, until he realizes that the tiny bullets can't even *scratch* him and just throws it away.



Civilians! Much like the statue from before, they just kind of scroll off the left side of the screen as the camera focuses on the running protagonists.



The military approaches the city in Ospreys, which don't seem to stand much of a chance against the Decepticon ships. Humanity is pretty hopelessly outclassed when it comes to technology.

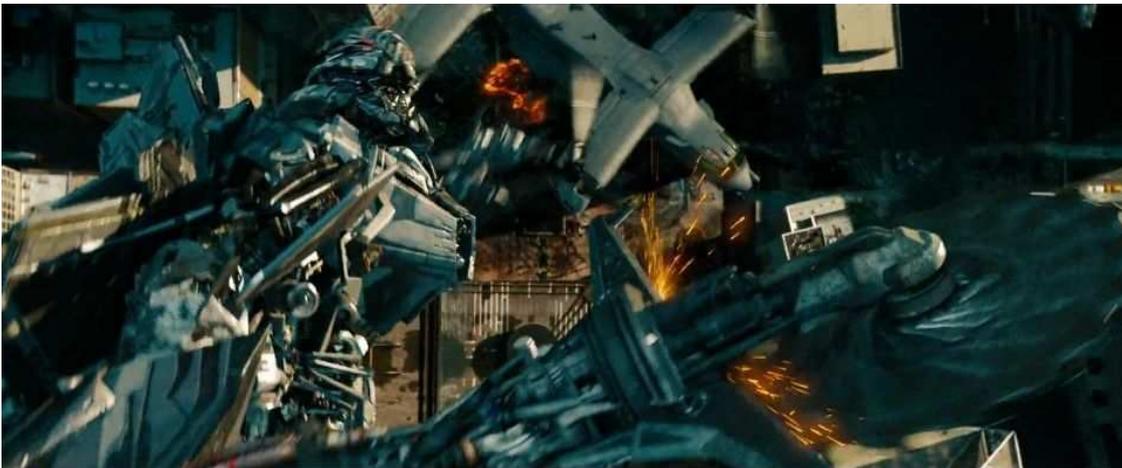


The military scenes keep returning to this guy. He's not named (beyond "kid") and pretty incidental in every way, but the few words we get out of him give an actual solid breadth of emotion that really humanizes this entire operation. Contrast with TF2007 and ROTF, where the human zerglings were pretty much faceless automatons, and you can really see the upturn in compassion that happens in this film. There's two such characters, him and another dude we'll see in a bit, who display an unusual degree of human concerns and emotions. It feels strange that they use what are effectively background extras for this, instead of, you know, *their main characters*.

What also surprised me was that both of these characters are black. See, Hollywood has this problem where they tend to sort of disregard America's demographics, ending up with cities and armies conspicuously dominated by white dudes, to say nothing of main characters. This film's main characters certainly reflect this, as even the robots are explicitly coded to read as white. Add to that the weird commentary the movies tried to make on race in media, which sort of tried to go somewhere in the first and then *spectacularly* backfired in the second, and it just ends up feeling really unlike them to cast two black dudes for the express purpose of having someone the audience can actually relate to for this last bit. It almost feels like an apology - one that rings completely hollow of course, particularly since they *repeated the same shit they did before*, just with Asians.



Love this shot of the Deceptiplanes sticking to the side of a building like moths. It's cute.

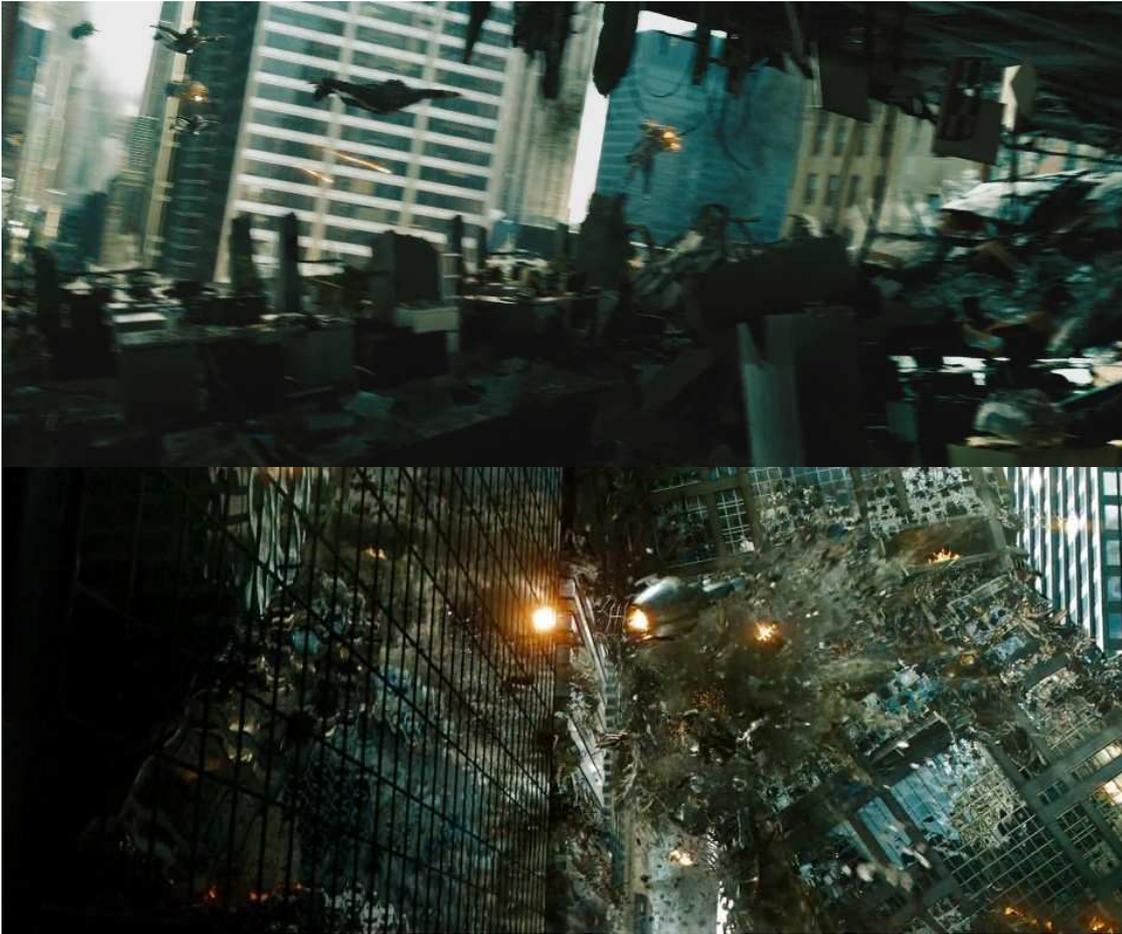


Also cute: The way Starscream shouts "locusts!" 🐛 I'm starting to notice a bit of an insect theme here.

So, now that they're in the city, how does the military hope to accomplish anything against Starscream and the technologically *and* numerically superior force of the Decepticons? Simple.



Tactical flying squirrel suits.



It makes perfect sense, really. With the past movies, we had humanity trying to challenge the aliens on equal grounds, by building big toys to fight their big toys. The problem is, this form of combat is ultimately unwinnable. I'd like to bring up the big railgun from the previous movie, the absence of which here is often considered a plot hole - like, yeah, it shot down a really big dude and could probably do a lot of damage, but consider: It needs an entire battleship to operate, and if a targeted strike on that ship was led, that's it for the big gun. You might even be able to build more of them, but equally speaking, the Transformers can just bring *more bigger toys*: Sentinel states that there are more Transformers in total than there are humans(!), so we've barely begun to *scratch* their total military capacity in these three movies.

So instead of attempting to challenge their enemy where they're strong, humanity has decided to capitalize on their *weakness*: Their inability to deal with *small, mobile* targets. The wingsuits improve their aerial mobility, allowing them to swarm their opponents from the air as well as from the ground. The "locusts!" exclamation is only too appropriate.

By the way, the suits are an actual thing (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wingsuit_flying), though I don't think they're used by the military. Thanks, Top Gear!

Alright, so after that bit, we get to another scene that really needs a video. Click here to see a scene I like a lot!
(<http://vimeo.com/55713412>)

The thing I would like to call attention to most is the *texture* of the sequence. So far, most scenes took place at ground level, lousy with dirt and debris and burning wreckage, tinted in this unpleasant dark grey smoke-like filter, but in the earliest part

of that sequence, when they reach that office, everything totally shifts. It's not immediately apparent, but as you look at it, you slowly start realizing how *unnatural* it looks.



The movie barely gives us any time to take in the surroundings as the characters carelessly rush past, but look closely. Every surface is clean and shiny. Every single chair is straight and beautifully aligned with the tables. Books are neatly stacked and refreshments untouched. There's no sign of a panic, people being interrupted in their work and running for the exits, or even any work having taken place *at all*, no stray half-finished coffee cups, loose documents flying about, anything like that. In a building currently standing at a 30 degree angle. There's an apocalypse outside and it's like no human has ever actually been here. And yet the building is lit. After all the grit and blood and broken glass from before, the undisturbed office feels inhumanly *smooth*.

The fascinating thing is that it's this very texture that becomes an antagonist in this sequence. The Decepticons don't bother fighting directly past the first bit, they just angle the structure and let physics do the work. And so we see the order of the building continuously break down and texture and chaos returning, but not before the protagonists get to slide around a bunch. On the uppermost floor, there's a black carpet laid which offers a solid standing ground for the characters, but as they transition to the shining glass, it cannot support them, and their frantic grasps meet nothing. Not satisfied with merely having symbolic breaking glass, the characters then *turn their weapons on the surface itself* as though it were an enemy, reintroducing chaos into the system and allowing them to return into the building... Except this time, there's no carpet. The floor here is just as white and gleaming as the tables above and the glass outside, and again our protagonists cannot find hold until they grab onto the dark cables freed by the damage to the building. And here we see the fluttering papers, cups being thrown around, and so on - it's not just the building that progressively decays, but the entire picture. From here, the color balance progressively shifts from the gleaming white back to the drab and gritty textures of the buildings below, and the rusty old fire ladder becomes a symbol of (temporary) safety. And then Shockwave shows up.

Alright, so this is where things kinda go *completely* off the rails, so bear with me please.

Let's look at the tower itself. What real-life concept could be seen as resembling?



Yeah GEE I DUNNO HELP ME OUT HERE GUYS

Okay, this is... Not subtle. But really, that just makes it more fascinating. Let's start with the abstract: Remembering Zizek, who referred to the WTC as a "capitalist smooth space", we see a number of references to that in the scene itself. Starting with the general inhuman smoothness I described above, we also have the fluorescent yellow/orange lights on the ceiling which don't belong anywhere *near* an actual office space, thanks to workplace psychology, the utterly inexplicable alcohol standing there, and every single plant in the whole room being the same color. We've already discussed the connection between yellow/gold and material wealth, and really this entire room is a subtle visual throwback to the early scene with Sam and Malkovich. Really, I wish the establishing shots of the room would have lasted more than a fraction of a second, though I'm not sure what that would have done to the pacing and stuff. It all ends up being too subdued compared to the crass imagery we get during the actual tower collapse, and it would have been neat to have a bit more focus on the virtuality of the thing and its entire nature as a space for machines to convince other machines that money is being generated. The funny part of this is the physical impossibility of the building itself and the monumental effort required on part of the Decepticons to let gravity actually do its work. Remember that this movie takes place in conspiracy-space, where the twin

towers could never have fallen straight downwards like they did without a controlled demolition. Clearly, if they were attacked from the side, they would have toppled sideways. Clearly. Just look at this compelling video evidence.

On the other side then, we have Shockwave, the polar opposite of everything we just talked about : We have this shapeless, incoherent *thing* that is itself actually an anthropomorphized cloud of dust and debris, mindlessly destructive and all-consuming, which creates this two-fold image: Firstly, the physical and inevitable (here represented by CGI) tearing away at this virtual object/idea that is seen as being *beyond* decay (here also represented by CGI), and secondly, the standard 9/11 story of the anti-American Other destroying this image of American might/innocence. We therefore conclude that the thesis presented by *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* is that 9/11 was caused by an undead Soviet nuclear hate-phallus. And that's not even the incoherent part.

(Notice how, when Shockwave burrows into the building, suddenly lots of civilians show up where before they were conspicuously absent. It almost feels more like he *brought* them there rather than attacking a place they were previously present in.)

Even just taken on its own, this scene is potentially very powerful. We have this group of humans powerlessly attempting to resist an aggressive, destructive war machine/force of nature on one side and the cold apathy of their own creation on the other, attempting to navigate the figurative path between Scylla and Charybdis just to survive after their failed mission... That's great stuff, you could make an entire movie based that concept. *Dark Moon* often drags, but everything we've seen to this point gives this scene a lot of extra weight. We have all these associations with the characters, the settings, and so on... Carly's angelic nature, the Chernobyl scene, the ideas of wealth and work portrayed earlier, every open plot thread, really the entirety of the last six hours of the trilogy and all the bits of modern culture they touch on, all of these things are there, on the back of your mind, contextualizing this scene. *Transformers 2007* was often hard to follow because of the camera angles, lightning and so on obscuring the action, but this movie can be hard to follow because there's just *so much going on*, visually, auditory, textually, that the brain simply struggles to keep up. Simple setups like Shockwave staring at Carly on the old fire ladder under the glass ceiling of the perfectly horizontal tower become loaded with meaning, and the movie throws out one of these after another. And after the meticulous setup of everything we just have seen, probably only this movie could brazenly pull off what happens next.

Hooooooo dear.

Someone sets the cartoon dial on full tilt, and flying in comes the freedom man on a red, white (well, silver) and blue goddamn jetpack with two giant guns, shouts "I WILL SAVE YOU ALL" and takes apart the existential threat in two seconds flat. All it's missing is confetti raining from the sky while the words "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED" flash on the screen. We conclude a fantastical vision of the WTC attacks *by having a truck man punching the explosion to death*. Ta-da, everybody lives! It's such an impossibly crass and tasteless moment that the entire movie seems to do a doubletake: The overwrought construction immediately gets caught up in its surroundings and immobilized. It is too absurd to exist in physical space. (Note how he gets trapped in a bunch of cables, much like the cables the human characters grabbed onto for safety.)

After such a meaningful sequence, this is just so... It reminds me of that cartoon version of *Titanic* in which the titular ship doesn't sink. It would be offensive were it not so *baffling*. But in a sense, it's only too appropriate, isn't it?

It's in the best interest of state and media to boil down complicated reality into simple narratives. When you have a complete clusterfuck like, say, Europe's current financial situation, it's impossible for a common person to wrap their head around the what and why of the whole thing, and as a result, the thing becomes "somebody else's problem", no matter how much it affects them. Of course, for maximum possible emotional investment, the topic tends to be reduced to the simplest narrative possible: The good guy, the bad guy, and the princess who needs to be saved, or, more succinctly, "Those Fuckers, Our

Shit". Tell the German people it's those lazy Greeks who took their money, and you have an instead widespread outrage, a potent political tool.

Of course, when it comes to terrorist attacks, the story is already handed to you on a silver platter. You have a villain and a victim, so all people will want is justice. To a degree, then, national response to the 9/11 attacks is entirely natural, and the celebration of the orchestrator's death a solid decade later is just the closure of a chapter in history. Or at least, should be. See, this is where things get funny. I don't need to tell any reader how deeply that event *actually* affected society, and you see yourself how farcical the above paragraph reads as a result. I cannot tell you why, because I'm really not nearly qualified to make any statements about this whole affair (it's too complicated for me, of course), but the impression that I get from media and discourse and the constant repetition of those images and phrases that have become burned into our memory is that America - and, consequently, the whole western world - never really moved past that date. And I don't mean that in a rote "Never Forget" kind of way; I mean that 9/11 is, on some level, *still happening, right now, as we speak*.



The politoons thread in D&D is a hoot when it isn't utterly depressing.

When something rests so heavily on an audience's emotions, naturally they will want to deal with that trauma somehow. Returning to the idea of media narrative, it is once again the revenge play that usually does its job here. But in this case, 9/11 has become so synonymous with the idea of terror that the death of the man (seen as being) behind it accomplishes very little. If he's dead and terror still happens, clearly the *actual* villain is still about; But in this case, the "actual villain" is the *idea* of terrorism. You can't fight or kill a spectre like that. As a result, the story can never actually be concluded - we're in the middle of the third act, but have no idea where to actually go from here.

So the only way entertainment can actually work with this anxiety - since they'll want to capitalize on the viewers' emotional investment - is to create villains from whole cloth. It might be Koreans, or vague Arab people, or aliens, or aliens that are also robots. A foreign force non-specific enough to stand in as a scapegoat, that Iron Man can punch in the face for a cathartic finish.

(To see what I mean, take a look back at the last two years and reflect on which big action blockbusters had and hadn't some kind of 9/11 reference in them. Note that I'm not playing that loose with the idea of a 9/11 reference here - *Transformers 2007* had an enemy plane crashing through a building, but it's not really referential. The movies I'm thinking about explicitly replicate scenes or shots associated with the event in a calculated effort to evoke a particular emotion. It's something that seems to have ballooned very recently, for some reason.)

The problem with this approach is that ultimately, it doesn't work very well. It's a poor reflection of reality, so it doesn't *actually* help on an emotional level, but it invokes just enough of the real images to put them back into our subconscious... Thus again creating the need to cope. Like a PTSD-sufferer constantly returning to the place of their trauma, it becomes a viral image that necessitates itself.

As usual, all *Transformers* really does is cut the false subtlety and take the concept to its natural conclusion: SEAL Team 6 flying in on jetpacks to save Lady Liberty from Kim Commusama's evil claws in the streets of Chicago.

Part 15: *incomprehensible Cybertronian chittering*



Sentinel gives the command to launch operation Break Spacetime, and there's a montage of cultural caricatures as Decepticons all over the world launch their doodads into space.



Wheels & Brains, finally having snapped from being the constant comic relief, find a mostly-intact fighter, and decide to, rather ominously, "lay down the law".



Sam & Carly get separated from the others (somehow),



And run straight into Starscream! “What a treat! You and me... Alone!”

What an odd thing to say. It seems like he’s been looking forward to getting his hands on Sam, but, thinking about it, *why?*

What did Sam do to Starscream specifically? His entire contribution to the conflict is killing Megatron once and setting up his second defeat afterwards. If we go by the usual “canon” character for Screamer, we know that, if anything, he should be *thankful* for Sam getting rid of Megatron! After all, thanks to Sam, he got to be Decepticon Leader for *two whole years!* G1 Starscream would short himself over that idea!

In fact, if we assume that is Starscream’s leading motivation, the trilogy could not have gone better for him (well, safe for that one time he lost his arm and Megatron beat him up a bunch). Look at the current situation: Megatron is alive, yes, but he’s a complete wreck who does no actual leading in this film, and Soundwave never gave a shit to begin with, making the only obstacle between Starscream and de facto leadership Sentinel - who is risking his own hide in the middle of a warzone. Why, then, would Starscream go after Sam, who made all this possible in the first place, instead of sitting over Sentinel’s shoulder like a hawk and waiting for a good opportunity for an “accident” to occur? He would have no reason to do this. It doesn’t add up. In fact, *none* of Starscream’s actions work with this characterization.

Let’s think even further back, *before* the movies. Cybertron spent a whole bunch of time without Megatron to rule over it.

In *Revenge*, Starscream explicitly states that without Megatron, he ends up being the highest ranked guy around. Shit, forget what I just said about two years, Screamer could have run around in a silly crown and garish purple cape on Cybertron for *a hundred*. Yet when five or so scrappy Deceptigoons make off to earth with the explicit goal of freeing Megatron, he's among them. He doesn't try to stop them, or sabotage the operation, or show any sign of personal initiative. The instant Megs leaves his icy prison, Starscream swoops in to stand by his side, apologizing for being an idiot. Megatron's reply is standard villain stuff, but as with all of his lines, it's the *tone* that's important. In spite of being a glowing ball of rage, he shows no aggression or anything towards his lackey - he just seems vaguely disappointed, like "man, you haven't changed at all over the years, have you?" Then he rips some other guy in half.

Contrast with the second film. Again, Megatron barely has time to step in the door, and already Starscream comes running in to toady before his master. This scene is pretty surreal for practically being the setup for a bad sitcom - Screamer looks after the kids while Megatron is gone, and when he returns, he quite literally says "Starscream, I'm home!" It portrays the two as an actual (if kinda dysfunctional and bizarre) *family*, with Starscream as the wife. Who is them immediately physically abused. I'll admit, I did not expect to write that sentence in a context other than bad fanfiction.

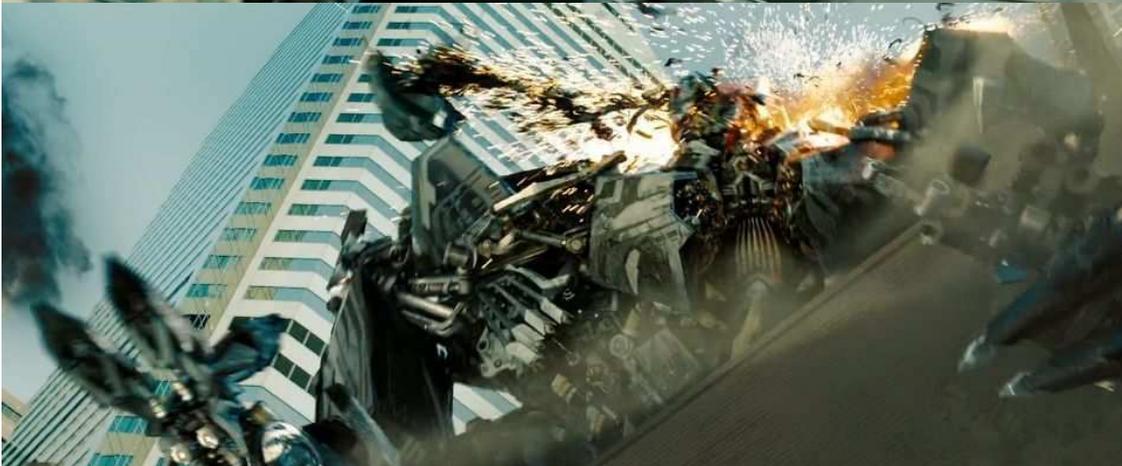
Starscream seems genuinely shocked at his Master's violent outburst, which is no mean feat considering how bad he is at expressing any kind of emotion. He has no such reaction to the second time Megatron abuses him - he goes from blind panic to feebly attempting to reason with his Master. And, most importantly, at the end of the movie, it is *he* who suggests that Megatron should flee for the time being. He doesn't egg him on to run back into Optimus' claws, nor does he abandon his master. He shows genuine concern for his survival.

It's important to note that the two scenes of abuse are the only times in the trilogy Megatron and Starscream stand opposite each other and face each other directly. At all other times, throughout all three movies, Starscream will always be *beside* Megatron, his body facing the same way, and them tilting their heads to look at each other. They face the same direction. Cinematic language!

For a perfect three out of three, it takes barely a minute after Megatron is first seen on screen for Starscream to fly in and pity him this time around too. And at this point, I find it hard to see his words of pity as sarcastic.

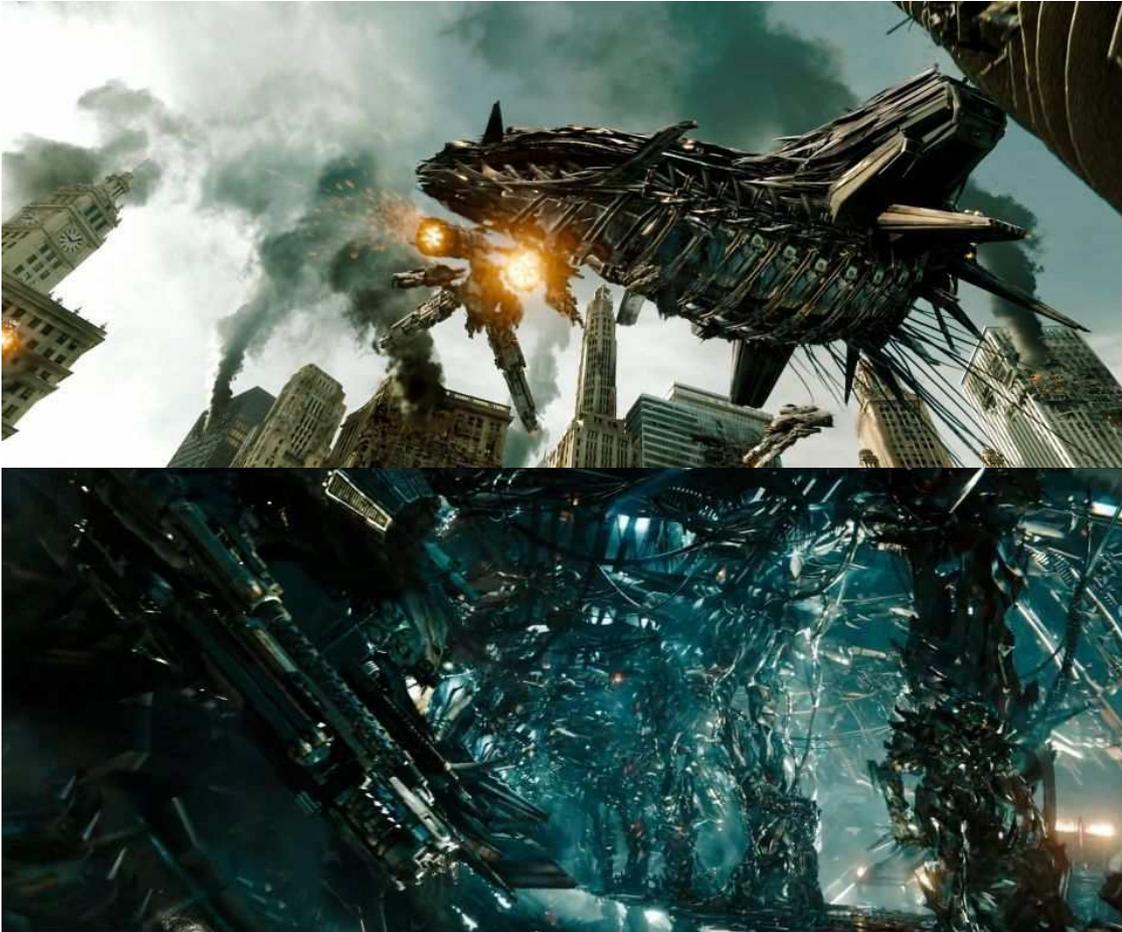
It's strange to think of Transformers as having any sort of non-murderous relationship, because we barely see them having *any benign interactions at all*. The movies tell us that the Autobots have some kind of vague camaraderie going, but they only ever talk to each other *once*. otherwise, it's always *Sam* they're talking to. There seems to be exactly one attempt at communication per movie that does not immediately lead into or involve some kind of violence - the observatory scene in the first movie, Megatron and the Fallen in the second, the Africa scene in the third. But throughout the entire trilogy, no matter what happens, Starscream never leaves his master's side, always trying his best (worst) to be helpful. I think that speaks for something!

And in that light, his hunt for this meaningless little insect makes perfect sense. *Of course* he would want to take revenge on the man who killed the one that was effectively family to him, drove him raving mad, and was instrumental in permanently physically and mentally scarring him. Starscream is completely useless, but his heart is in the right place. So how does this little attempt at payback go?



He gets a grappling hook jammed into one eye, a bomb in the other, and then his head explodes. It's... Honestly painful to watch. Like, he's the clear aggressor this time around, but watching him squirm and flail around like a terrified child while screaming in pain, while hearing that bleeping noise that spells certain doom, all you can think is "Jesus, no one deserves that fate." And what does Sam have to say about it? "Well, he's dead." He certainly is, buddy. Just when I was starting to like him, too.

(The facial violence is even more grotesque than usual, but I don't even feel the need to point it out at this point. It's just kind of a given.)



Brains and Wheels are taken into one of the big transporters by their new toy's autopilot. Inconvenient!



HQ, meanwhile, decides to appropriate traffic cameras to get a better visual of Chicago. They use their newfound vision to launch a bunch of missiles.



More surveillance imagery.



Sentinel does his “the needs of the many” shtick, and it is time to turn on the pillars!

Yeah, the movie starts constantly shifting perspective here - I’m cutting most of it out, too. Still, it’s never disorientating, and there is a certain degree of logic to how one event affects the next. Mostly.



Because you see, suddenly the Autobots have been taken prisoner. *What?* When did that happen? Bumblebee was up and about just two minutes ago!

Of note, Mearing's reaction: "Oh my god, we're helpless." The person who stood up to the Transformers the most suddenly sees herself as being totally dependent on them.

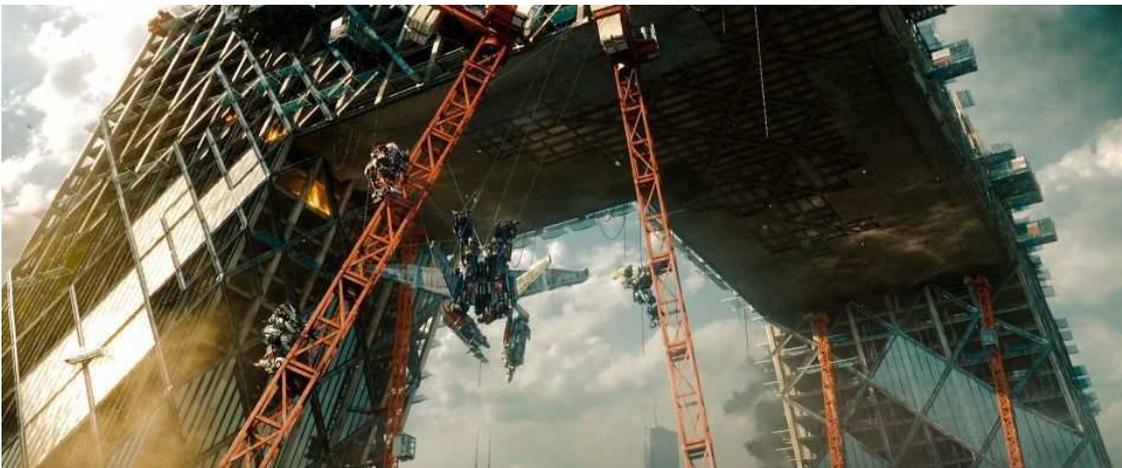




Well, there's those pillars in action. Cybertron seems to sort of *grow* into space, like a computer program generating a fractal image. And yes, Cybertron is a giant beehive. I don't think I need to elaborate what this says about the Decepticons and Megatron.

One thing I didn't really talk about is the sound design of the movies. I really like it! The sound effects for the robots and their planes and so on is carefully synthesized so they don't quite sound like anything that occurs in reality, but still have a physical quality to it that makes it seem like they really *could* sound like that if Transformers existed in real life, if that makes any sense.

The sound the pillars make, by contrast, are completely unnatural and incongruous with what occurs on screen. It's like bubbles in water, and a rhythmic, electronic sound that sounds like a quiet klaxon or maybe a really slow clock. It's the perfect way to convey "space and time is being horribly violated here".



HEY, HOW'S IT HANGIN'?

Haha look at that guy



Back to the prisoners! Soundwave and his goons were content to just stand over them threateningly, but Dylan suggests to cut the crap and just shoot them already.



This scene is *incredibly* melodramatic. The SADDEST MUSIC starts up, and Que starts playing pitiful, as apparently the idea that running around in a warzone could get you killed never actually occurred to him. The intellectual character, ladies and gents!



Goodbye Que, you were pretty awful and even the fans never liked you much. Your toy wasn't even released outside of Asia. You won't be missed.



World's saddest genocidal killer robot.



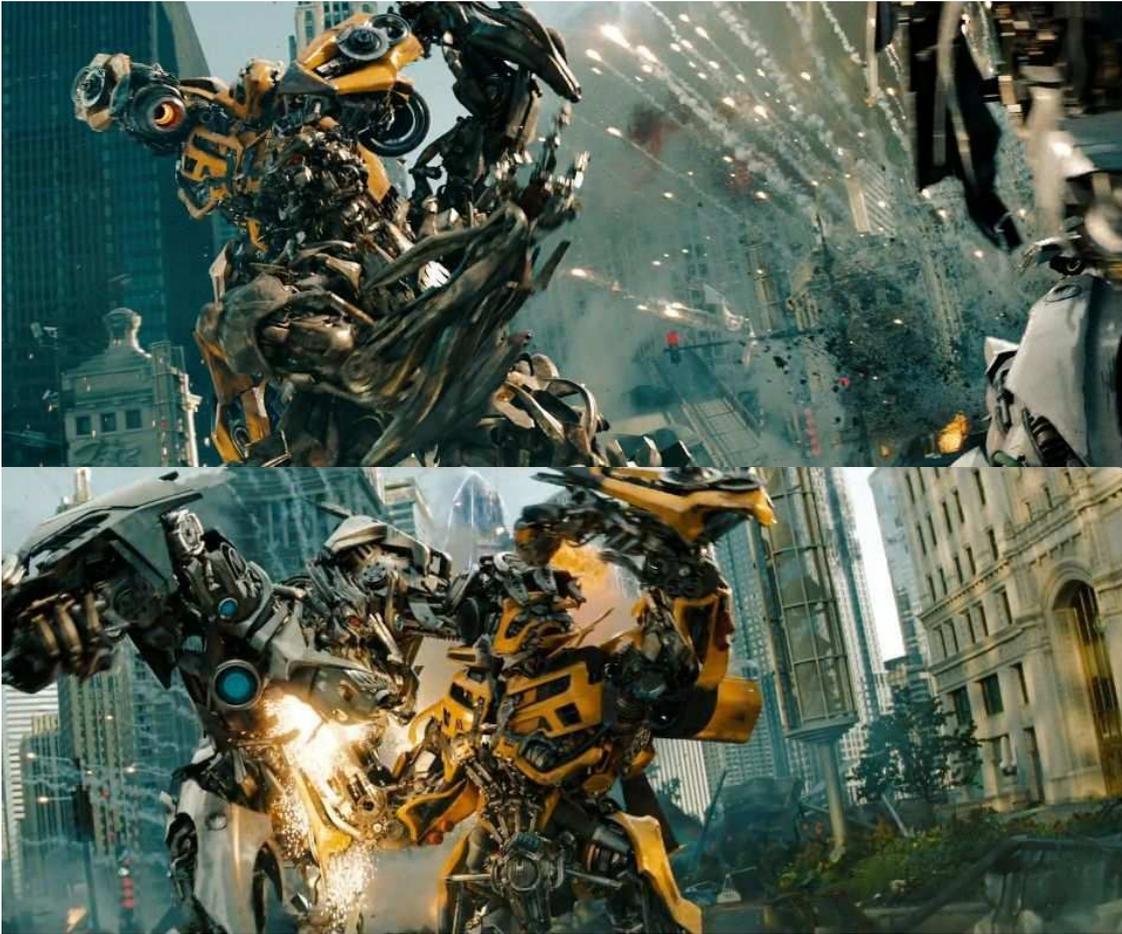
But of course, they're not actually willing to kill off their main source of merchandise, so suddenly, *It's raining spaceships!*



Apparently, the reason for the sudden change in weather is brains and wheels gnawing at the big mothership's electronics, causing it to drop its contents and rapidly approach the ground. B&W die on impact. No, really - it's hilariously unceremonious.

Brains and Wheelie, after being abused and degraded throughout the entire movie, decide to deal with their pent-up aggression by mindlessly destroying things, and then that kills them. They are immediately forgotten. It's just so... Petty.





The distraction ends predictably for the Decepticons. I said I wouldn't point out the facial violence anymore, but here Bumblebee punches Soundwave in the face, then kicks him in the face, then shoots him, multiple times, in the face, and finally graphically blows up his head. Only a single one of his attacks is targeted at any other part of his body. Come on, this is getting ridiculous!

Right. About this scene.

To be honest, I'm not sure I "get" it entirely. It feels like there's something I'm missing entirely, but again there's just so much going on it's kind of hard to keep track. So I'm just going to start rambling and see if I hit on something.

First of all, just the sudden reveal of the prisoners being taken. We first see it on a screen in HQ, virtually right after Bumblebee appears in the Starscream scene to catch the falling Sam. There's absolutely no lead-in to this, no single shot of the Autobots actually *being* captured, just them sitting in a neat half-circle with Decepticons looming over them. The Autobots are consistently portrayed as superior in direct combat to the Decepticons, as well as totally unwilling to give up. After the convenient distraction, they defeat their opponents with incredible ease, not taking a single scratch. There's *no way* for them to be captured like that. It seems like such a transparent plot contrivance.

On the other hand, there's the whole idea of the Decepticons taking prisoners in the first place. It's something that feels at odds with the whole idea of Transformer combat as portrayed before: It's always shown to be quick, brutal and, past the very

first battle in the trilogy, always necessarily lethal. Taking the opponent prisoner without a surrender in an active warzone seems like a pretty hard thing to do, and doesn't seem like it'd be worth much in the end. Yet they just... Do it, like it's the most natural thing in the world. And then, bizarrely, it's the *human* who actually suggests executing them. Soundwave, the most monstrous and morally bankrupt character we see on the Decepticon side, who actively delights in murder, doesn't even *consider the possibility* of killing his helpless enemies. He complies with gleeful enthusiasm once the idea is pointed out, it just plainly doesn't occur to him. It's so strange.

Really, that got me thinking about the "combat psychology" of the Transformers, the *way* they fight. I stated that most combat in these films is quick and brutal, but thinking about it, I am not sure that is entirely representative of their culture as a whole. See, of course the movies would focus on such combat the most - it's the most exciting, after all. But there's a degree of consistency in the driving forces behind those scenes.

In the first film, they're focused on Optimus and Megatron, who start viciously murdering the instant they get into a fight. Megatron, of course, being totally pissed off, and Optimus being... Optimus. In the second film, you have the intro scene with Demolisher, who is running for his goddamn life, and Prime (again) and the ostentatious Sideswipe doing most of the dynamic movement. The forest battle is, of course, pretty vicious: Once again, it's mostly the two leaders driving it. With Optimus gone, Bumblebee picks up the slack, after making a more cautious impression in the first movie (potentially even letting Barricade live), until his leader is back to continue his bloodbath. Largely the same story here: Bumblebee and Optimus do most of the dynamic fighting, though the Dreads do make an honest effort.

But look at all the fighting that happens in the background, particularly at the end of the first and second movie, and how the other characters behave. Largely, they seem content to stand in place and take potshots at each other. Remember how Scorponok stood perfectly in place and let a whole row of planes shoot at him instead of using his ability to move through walls? Yeah, that.

When you look at the various combatants, they often seem oddly lethargic, sticking to cover and moving very little, and then being surprised and completely overrun by the ferocity of their opponents' leader's assault. Until that happens, their fighting is very long, drawn out and largely bloodless... Which, to me, feels entirely consistent with the idea of the war lasting for millennia and slowly wearing out the fighters and their resources. The impression I get is that the Autobots' aggression is actually a fairly recent development and a product of their desperation over having lost, and the Decepticons are only now starting to really adjust to it. In a slow-burning war, it makes perfect sense to take prisoners when possible, and if it's something the Decepticons got accustomed to over many battles, it makes sense that they simply wouldn't get the idea of trying any other approach. It also fits with my little theory that Soundwave was at one point a POW himself.

Now, this is all pretty much speculation, and I'm not sure what it has to do with anything, so let's return to the scene itself. Que's and Soundwave's deaths are, in some ways, mirrors of each other. We have two Mercedes(es?) who largely acted as behind-the-lines support executed by active combatants put in a position of superiority entirely through *deus ex machina*. The interesting part is the differences in circumstance and cinematography.

Remember Barricade, from the first movie? Well, he survived 'til now to be part of this scene, for some reason - maybe to act as a counterpart to Bumblebee, as another character who's been with us for the entire trilogy, both being part of the first actual fight we see? He makes a silly cackle, and then gives Que a push. You know, the impression that I get from him is that he's a bit of a schoolyard bully. He was never terribly smart, and there's something strangely childish about his behavior. He certainly seems strangely happy about pushing Que along. But notice how *it's not him who fires the killing shot..* It's Decepticon grunt #147. The movie plays up Barricade's glee somewhat and Que's false innocence to almost sickening levels, but when it comes to the actual killing? A push, one shot, two shots and Que's head rolls on the ground. It's quick and

efficient, the grunt's face doesn't make a single movement, and the scene is framed only in the grey fog of the still city. It's very *dispassionate*, certainly.

Bumblebee's killing shot, by contrast, happens among total chaos. Metal raining from the skies, everything exploding around, part of an all-out fight that leaves multiple people dead. Unlike the happy Soundwave, cackling Barricade and "just doing my job" zero-fucks grunt guy, we have no idea about Bumblebee's emotional state. Relief? Anger? Malice? He doesn't talk, and his face is immediately obscured by a mask, so there's no real way to tell. But what we do see is the way he fights: Fucking about hitting Soundwave's face (even though that's clearly not his weak spot), taking some time aside to murder another grunt, and finally violently ramming his cannon into Soundwave's body, warping the metal and raising him up before firing through the bottom of his chest into his head from below, exploding it into a slow-motion fountain of blood and shrapnel before contemptuously throwing it aside. Barricade might cackle over having pushed a guy, the dynamic of Bee's acts among a scene of apocalyptic destruction equates to nothing less than roaring laughter, hiding behind a face-covering mask and a voiceless body.

I guess this is why the psychology of combat as portrayed here came to mind for me. It seems like we see here once again how deeply rooted the difference in the characters' way of thinking is.

Of course, this could all be nonsense, and I'm still not sure what it has to do with anything and why this scene is sandwiched between the incredibly charged tower scene and... Everything that comes after this. It's an odd bit of pacing, certainly.

Fin: "Was it all worth it?"

I deliberated a lot on how to present the last bit of the movie. At first, I wanted to do it in two parts, commenting on things as they came up, like before. But to be honest, I wouldn't even be sure what to say during most of it. These fifteen minutes are such a complete experience that trying to comment on them in such a fragmented manner would be useless. I'll try something a bit different.

Let's start by watching the conclusion in full. You have no idea how much trouble trying to make this video on my disintegrating laptop caused me, so you better watch it! (<http://vimeo.com/75690695>)

Throughout the making of this series, I spent a lot of time watching the movies. I saw each one twice before even starting to write, once blind and then knowing how the trilogy goes. Examining scenes in detail, going back and forth to find good screenshots (not easy, considering how much of the movies is covered in indistinguishable motion blur!), looking up things I'd forgotten... If you add all that up, I have probably watched the full runtime of *Dark of the Moon* eight or nine times. Quite frankly, I could do without ever seeing Shia Labeouf's face again.

I have watched these 15 minutes a lot more often than that. And every time, I would enjoy them just as much as on my first viewing.

It's just so... Joyful. There's so much detail, such elegant motion, the sound design and pacing are flawless. It starts out fairly low-key with the army setting their explosives, then tension progressively intensifies as they swarm and overwhelm the Decepticons more and more, both smoothly leading into and starkly contrasting against Optimus Prime's particular kind of dynamism as he swoops in to cut a mile-long bloody swath in just three near-seamless shots. The constantly moving camera captures this momentum and carries it forward through the seemingly more stationary/quiet shots, so the fight between Optimus and Sentinel can pick up without any perceived break in the action occurring. That wonderful shot of Carly just standing, open-mouthed, in the middle of that apocalyptic chaos she is simply unable to process forms the perfect punctuation to it, and the camera finally slows down to linger on Megatron's earthy, solid form.* Thinking back to the big "action sequence" of the first movie, whose sole emotional content was a sense of vague contempt, it's strange just how completely inadequate it is compared to this - beautiful, overwhelming, cathartic and yet somehow very tragic. It's a labor of pure love and great attention to every little detail.

I'm gushing, yes. But for me personally, these fifteen minutes, and the instant we see Megatron's head hit the ground, ended up justifying the entire trilogy.

*His shots create short "breathers" in the action by contrasting against it visually and letting the movie slow down a little. It's an identical effect to what the film normally uses churches for, making his body a sort of "sanctuary".

Before I get into the important shit, just some minor notes:

- We really see the new human strategy in motion here. Making use of their small size and mobility, they scurry about like ants, swarming the much grander machines from little nooks and hiding spots, targeting their weak spots, and effectively defeating the great Shockwave with something as incredibly profane as a large sheet of cloth. In a strange way, their far superior opponents end up being completely defenseless... It's hard not to pity them, really.

The Autobots actually accomplish less than the human soldiers do, too.

- Sentinel is totally ignorant of his ground troops being defeated. He doesn't even see it.

- Notice the random Constructicon towards the end of Optimus' rampage? That's Scrapper! No reason for him to be there, except maybe to remind us that he's also *elsewhere* in the movie, in a way...

- I made a big deal before about how the pillar they end up fighting over isn't actually the control pillar, but, well, turns out it is. 😊 Since it glows blue here rather than red and its shape doesn't match the early shots of it at all (it's just unfolded, but in a really weird way that totally changes its appearance), I figured it was a different one, but looking *reeeeaaally* close, it does moreso match the control pillar. Which does make me wonder why the movie focused so much on that other one earlier, but oh well.
- Sentinel twirling his swords about Darth Maul-style is so silly. Really though, the Optimus vs. Sentinel fight is one of the few fights in the trilogy that isn't just a one-sided beatdown. Funny, that.
- lol Sam abandoning his girlfriend in the middle of a battlefield
- not-Garbage Day makes his last appearance. I wish we'd actually seen him in a way that makes him actually visually distinguishable.
- lol that static gun shot straight out of an FPS
- The Primes' battle dialogue is very telling. "You were always the bravest of us!" Of interest: In an early episode of the 2008 TV Show *Transformers Animated*, Ratchet tells a somewhat different Optimus Prime: "Heroes are the ones who make the hard choices." Also, what kind of reaction to "Our planet *will* survive!" is "No!?"
- Notice how Optimus totally loses his composure the instant things start going poorly for him.

Right, now, about that important shit. Let's look back for a second, shall we?





[\(Music!\)](#)

Sam Witwicky was never a terribly sympathetic character. In the first movie, he was an idiot, and a bit lacking in empathy, but you know, he was a kid. It's just what teenagers are. We all were a little dumb once, so it's entirely possible to relate to him on some level. He is then thrust into a situation well over his head through nothing but dumb unluckiness, and finds himself having to fend for his life before even learning how to talk to a girl.

Over the course of three movies, we see him steadily degenerate into an abhuman, unlikeable psychopath.

The films dedicate a great amount of time to showing this development, and in a sense it could be seen as their main focus. We see a boy who, through virtually no involvement of his own, ends up being rewarded with the ideal dream of every boy his age - he gets the girl, the car, the recognition. Not just *any* girl, but basically a supermodel. Not just *any* car, but an incredibly expensive unique hypermodern concept supercar oh and also it's sentient and turns into a giant fighting robot. In a sense, he ends up at the goal without actually having fought his way there. Without having learned and grown as a person.

At the beginning of the second movie, he seems to realize this, making an active effort to distance himself from Mikaela and Bumblebee. But it's useless. Dylan accuses him of choosing the wrong side, but the sad irony of his statement is that neither of them ever *had* a choice.

Dylan himself was pretty much forced at gunpoint to work for the Decepticons. It really is as simple as that. But it's also incompatible with his entire worldview, the randian idea of the self-made man, so he ends up attempting to rationalize it - as his choice, as a business decision, all that jazz. Basically his entire dialogue throughout the movie is him trying to justify his betrayal of mankind, not to Sam, but to *himself*. "This is the only future for me!" is his last outcry of existential despair over how little control he actually has over his life. The one that is taken from him right after.

Dylan is a parallel to Sam because Sam is *effectively the same*. Back when he was just an impressionable teenager, the very instant he first encountered one of these wondrous alien beings, he was immediately offered a one-sided narrative that pulled him into Optimus' grasp. Tempted into loyalty by being given everything he wanted, he was secure in his little web of closed perspectives, seeing only those parts of the conflict that confirmed his biases. He was never offered an alternative viewpoint, and never sought one out himself - because he never even knew there *was* another viewpoint. Good guys, bad guys, life is just that simple. He never made a choice because he never knew he had another option.

Particularly in *Revenge*, Sam is very much portrayed as a victim, both a victim of coercion (being dragged back into the war against his will) and, well, an actual victim of said war. His death and rebirth leaves him a hollow, burnt-out shell bereft of all that makes him human, and his behavior in this movie reflects this. And in the end, he faces a victim just the same as him, and makes the decision to kill him.

Now, this cannot be overstated. Sam was already responsible for the deaths of Megatron and Starscream, but both of these were panicked acts of self-defense, and, as far as he was concerned, he had no other choice. But this is different. Killing Dylan made no difference. It didn't stop the pillars or the Decepticon plans, it didn't weaken them, indeed, there was no necessity for this death to happen at all, because after this, Dylan would have been *free*. Yet Sam faces him down and, in full awareness, decides that he has the right to take this man's life.

That's the climax of his character arc. After three movies, of which most screen time is devoted to him, the culmination of all his development and everything he went through is a shot of him, standing there, open-mouthed and with a totally vacant expression, over the man whose ribcage he just crushed. He fully admits he's not a hero, or someone who matters - he's nobody. That's it. That is the image we take away from him.

The main reason I highlighted *Duel* is because it presents the perfect contrast to Sam's story. David Mann is an insecure loser who, by transgressing his inner inhibitions and barriers, grows past himself and becomes a better person for it. It's a simple example of a common narrative in action movies, really. Perhaps taught by these, Sam effectively attempts to repeat the same strategy: He breaks his final inner barrier and defies the simplest and most fundamental moral commandment of humanity, and goes where most of us (thankfully) do not dare tread. But it gives him nothing. He doesn't become a better or stronger person, but merely even more hollow than he was before. Because he had no goal. He had nowhere to go *to*, because he never learned what being a strong person actually means. His life is a dead-end scenario, and no amount of beating his head against the wall is going to change that.

In presenting Sam as the audience surrogate, the films effectively state that you, yes, you, are in a situation analogous to Sam. That's a rough fucking accusation to make. There is little seriously hidden or subtextual about this; The movie steps just two words short of outright saying: "Given the right circumstances, you, too, *will* become a remorseless murderer."

Yeeeesh.

Unfortunately, the severe punch of this accusation is softened by the fact that, well, Sam's portions of the movies are the weakest part of them by far. They're just spread too thin and their focus is all over the place, and considering how simple (by

these movies' standard) his narrative turns out to be, the amount of reverse-engineering you have to do to arrive at it is rather disproportionate. A big reason for this is Dylan's character. I criticized him before, and really, he's one of the major reasons this film's treatment of Sam just doesn't work. Dempsey just plays him like a regular two-dimensional smarmy bastard, but I find it hard to blame him for it when it really seems more like a - rather uncharacteristic - directorial failure. Outside of one or two particular shots, his framing is just incredibly flat and fails to not just convey his victimhood, but really *any* aspect of personality. In the end it's less acting and staging that define his character so much as the pure *script*, which is *the exact opposite* of how literally every single other character is presented. Dylan and Sam just fail to properly tie together, and considering how vital one is to the other, the result is just a total mess.

And once an attempt to say something meaningful fails, the unfortunate implications inevitably start rolling. For example, the thing noted in the last thread where the films are so focused on destructive capitalist modes of play that benign or even positive things end up suffering from the same attacks and grotesque implications. The point made is crass and nihilistic, but not in any productive or provocative way.

Out of all the points the films' detractors make, there's two primary ones I agree with: The twins are terrible, and Sam is kind of a shit character.





(Music!) (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XX14TunXt_4)

(This track has the expected Hollywood bombast, and this might just be me making stuff up, but isn't there also something really... *sad* about it?)

In plot terms, Carly is nothing more than another damsel for the main man to obsess over, and most viewers just consider her a half-hearted replacement for Mikaela. However, in spite of having one less movie to her name and getting very little focus even in it, she has not only more character development than Mikaela, but a far stronger arc than *every single other character in the trilogy* save one.

I just spoke about how the main character of this movie has no control or agency in his life. Really, almost none of the characters in this movie do: Everyone is, willfully or not, a puppet of either Optimus or Sentinel; Every single action or decision made in the trilogy is either by immediate reflex or basically preordained/decided for someone. Here, no one makes the decision for Carly to go and confront Megatron. It's *her* who decides to risk her life on an emotional gamble, based on knowledge only she has. The designated "woman" demonstrates *agency* and self-determination.

She walks up to this immense fortress of a creature (the shots of her navigating under and around his massive mechanical legs - gorgeous) and engages with him emotionally. It works on many levels - on one hand, she's the first person to ever engage the "villain" on actual speaking terms and attempt to see things from *his* perspective. On the other hand, there's something delightfully clueless about it all. It's clear that her picture of him is entirely incomplete, and though she paid more attention to him than anyone else ever did, she totally misinterprets his situation as being about machismo and strength rather than having deeper emotional roots (compare Sam's story and how affirming his manhood did nothing to alleviate his frustration or depression). Her strategy is rather transparent: Attack him as being a lesser *man* specifically. Use gendered insults, demonstrate his inferiority, position herself in a controlling position over him as though to say, "here you are, being talked down to *by an inferior woman*". Though in the end this strategy is successful (perhaps not for the reasons she thinks) it also demonstrates how totally she has bought into gender roles. Although the very fact that she's there talking to the big bad of her own volition is a square denial of them, she feels the need to affirm that men should be out there fighting for base dominance and women like her have no choice but to stick behind the lines and lie and manipulate, implying that her talking down to him is an unnatural and undesirable state of things. It's simultaneously her brightest hour and the start of a horrible downward slope for her character.

As soon as the conflict is resolved, the status quo returned and Optimus crowned a god, she quite literally goes "Ooh, shiny things 😊", returning to her man and his car and openly embracing everything it symbolizes, accepting her "destiny" of being by his side forever. (I'm sure Sam will be a loving and caring husband and not at all abusive.) In contrast to her highly positive

depiction throughout the entire movie, in this last scene she comes across as positively vapid. It's as though, with the battle over, she gave up being a guiding hand and voice of reason and fully embraced being the objectified accessory viewers see her as. The struggle is finished. She has won the victory over herself. She loves that car.

It mirrors Sam's character resolution, both in its message and in just how anticlimactic it feels. The difference is that with her, it *works*. Not only is Carly an actually sympathetic character, you actually do get a glimpse of what a great person she could be were she not browbeaten and put in her place by everyone around her at every turn. I stated that she resembles president Obama, but of course, I was semi-joking. It would be more adequate to say that her role is that of pretty much *any* idealistic upper-class minority person. She clearly intuits that things aren't quite right as they are, but ultimately is just so irremovably caught up in her prescribed of thinking that in the end she too figures the best solution to their problems is letting a psychotic space god truck run around unchecked. After all, all those other women we've seen suffering throughout the series were *different people*, right? This is precisely what sets her on the path to becoming like the old and cynical Charlotte Mearing, strong of character but ultimately completely powerless.

I really wish Carly had received a stronger focus. There's a lot of material here, but it feels like not even the filmmakers realized just how interesting this could be. It's strange to say a character needed more breathing room in a series that wastes such massive amounts of time, but there is *so much* compressed into this last little bit of film, with Carly having to compete for attention with the "climax" of Sam's character ark, the actual climax of *Megatron's* character ark and, well, the conclusion of the whole trilogy, and it's a fight the creators clearly designed for her to lose.

Really, the films' relationship to feminism is kind of unclear and iffy in general. The female characters are consistently portrayed as stronger, more proactive and more sympathetic than their male counterparts, yet said male compatriots (and even other women!) constantly condescend to and belittle them in sometimes subtle, sometimes unsubtle ways. This is first grader social commentary stuff. But this film also gets a lot more complex than that, showing how women can be totally complicit in their own oppression; Crucially, without actually *blaming* them for it. But then you look back and see just how much less space and attention they gave to her case, and you start to wonder: Even beyond the dumb butt shot used to introduce her, are the characters really the only ones being condescending here? One gets the unfortunate impression that the creators consider her less worthy of our time than the male lead.

Still, Carly makes for a great secondary protagonist. Not to Sam, of course. But to the guy the trilogy is *really* about.





(More music! You may want to listen to this.) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKfC4p9SNCY>)

Megatron's last few scenes are probably the best written ones in the entire trilogy, once you see them in context of how he behaved - and was portrayed - throughout the rest of the trilogy.

We see Carly brazenly walk up to and insult him to his face. The same Megatron who would previously swat people aside like flies just to express his frustration. Even earlier in this movie, he has a bunch of people murdered, just because. When, at the moment of his victory, some little thing spitefully degrades him, a being with such a total lack of respect or interest in human life would simply continue his swing and crush her like one of his weird head-parasites. But he doesn't.

Megatron lost all his status and power and, yes, his masculinity, becoming a weak and meaningless figure in the eyes of Autobots and Decepticons alike. If being manly was as important to him as Carly thinks, well, there's a convenient big battle raging on just next door! After all, what's more masculine than going out to war and killing your enemies? Even in this state he's still very powerful, so he ought to just go and murder some Autobots, you know, just to show he's still the alpha dog! But he doesn't.

Sentinel Prime has become his enemy again. Actually, he really always was. Megatron surprises, immobilizes and cripples

him. That's really not his style, is it? I mean, Megatron would always destroy his enemies in a single strike, quickly and surgically. Here, Sentinel is at his mercy. He could just rip his head clean off, have his revenge and not have to worry about him getting back to health and returning ever again. But he doesn't.

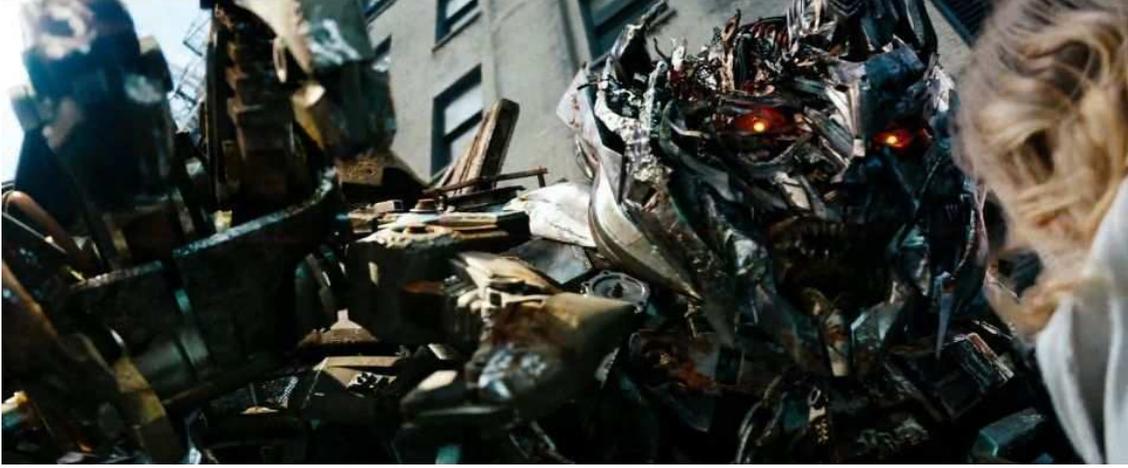
At the end of it all, he stands face to face with his nemesis, the man who had him killed and crippled and reduced him to nothing. He still has the element of surprise, and his opponent is missing a whole arm. It's a small chance for him, but it's a chance at a final victory. Maybe, just maybe, he could finally finish the Autobots, claim the matrix for himself, end the war *and* save the planet, by felling the one final true threat against him... But he doesn't.

Megatron has been raised by war and hate and murder. He studied the Fallen's infinite contempt and learned from the crimes and atrocities committed in his name. All his life ever was is fighting and killing... And in the end, losing. For the last several thousand years, *every single other living being he met* attacked him or degraded him or caused him to suffer. He was taken apart and killed and crippled, physically, mentally and emotionally, spat on and insulted a thousand times. After everything he's known and experienced and *done*, at absolute rock bottom, victory sliding from his hands once again, what is left for him to do? It's so simple, he's the villain, his actions are practically pre-written for him: Go out in a blaze of glory! Attack all your enemies, coat the city in their blood, spit out your last breath and die a justified death at their hands so they can keep claiming they are just protecting the innocents. *But he doesn't.*

He gives up. He *lets it go*. He chooses *peace*.

Whenever this movie is discussed, this scene inevitably comes up, mainly because of how *dissonant* it is. Why the hell would the filmmakers make this happen? Even though Carly's words are totally detached from his situation and really make her look more ridiculous than him, they still trigger an epiphany in him. Excuse the image dump, but seriously, look at the animation of Megatron's face:



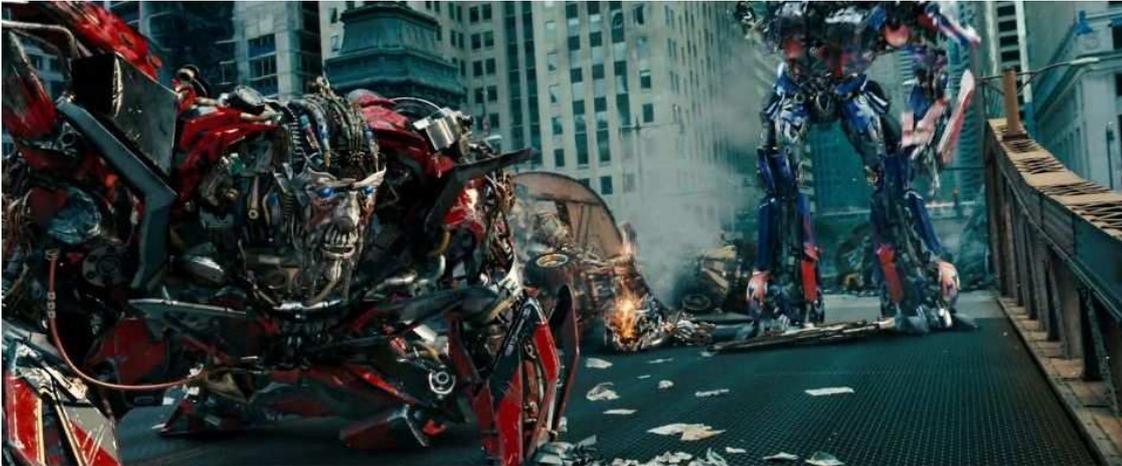




I think there's a lot more going on here than him not feeling manly enough. Megatron is just *so emotive*. Throughout the series, facial close-ups of the Transformers are remarkably rare: Even Optimus and Bumblebee get maybe two or three per movie, as the camera usually stays at a bit of a distance, looking up at them. But when movie 3 Megatron is on screen, the camera hangs out on his face *constantly*. He is *cinematographically constructed* to be the most human and sympathetic robot (hell, the second-most sympathetic character *period*) in the film. Pay particular attention to the movement of the eyes: Transformer eyes tend to barely move at all, or too slowly and theatrically. Megatron's eyes actually move the way human

ones would, and the way he repeatedly tenses up and relaxes makes it look like he's actually breathing.

He cripples Sentinel Prime, and, as I mentioned, it's pretty different from how he tore Jazz in half and ran Optimus through with his cannon. In fact, in a curious contrast to the trademark Autobot facial violence, he makes a point to knock off his helmet.



It's not a big thing, but without even being seriously harmed or disfigured, Sentinel totally loses his entire authoritative feel, looks *weak* and *old* and *exposed*. Optimus physically imposed a mark of weakness on Megatron by grotesquely scarring him, but what Megs does is reveal an *existing* weakness, just by taking the guy's hat off, a bit of a man-behind-the-curtain moment... And of course, it's the exposed bit Optimus targets when executing him, using Megatron's own gun.

When Megatron asks for a truce, he explicitly offers it in terms advantageous to his enemy, with no posing or tricks. "All I want is to be in charge" - effectively "Yo, I need some time to get the Decepticons back in order because our shit is totes wack, I'll leave you and my, er, alright, your planet alone in the meantime", and, more importantly, "where would you be without me, Prime?": Indeed, where would he be without a powerful enemy to demonize and use as propaganda to subjugate the human race? The human people aren't exactly fond of giant alien robots doing whatever they want and basically taking control of the military, but all he needs to pacify them is a bad guy they can unite against, because that's an imperative component of any good fascist regime. Optimus' reaction?



Look at this face. Look at it. This is *sheer fucking contempt* dot jpeg. Just a look of total bald disgust at this ludicrous goddamn idea and the miserable creature that *dared* to speak it in his presence. He doesn't even give Megatron's words a slightest bit of consideration, just covers up his face (!!) and goes into full-on murder mode in three seconds flat. Optimus is always aloof and emotionally distant, but now it's like Megatron's unexpected proposal has struck a crack in his demeanor, far more than any weapon could. And that tiny crack is all it takes for us to see the supposed hero of the films tear out the spine of a man who's unarmed, surrendering and just *saved his life*.



Even in death, he still gets close-up shots.

Let's talk about Megatron in more general terms, such as the way he could be seen as a promethean archetype. We have a Titan who (in this case unwittingly) brought science and technology to mankind, ticked off the Olympians (Optizeus Prime) and was punished by being chained (his character design features literal chains, plus loss of flight etc) to a rock (various Cybertronians refer to the earth itself as a rock, or dirt, or something like that) and being repeatedly killed by an eagle (itself a symbol of freedom, America and so on). Of course, this is very much *heroic* archetype. I mean, he's the underdog. He's the guy who, even in the circumstances given, is still capable of showing sympathy and mercy. He's the one who wants to save his species even though most of said species either disrespects or hates him. He just took the first step towards ending a million-year war. He should be the *hero* of this picture.

Why isn't he? Well, let me put it this way. How would Prometheus react if the very people he brought the fire to locked up and tortured him? Because that's kinda what happened here. Remember that after this, after seeing them unquestionably serve his nemesis and after being *murdered* by a human, he's still capable of treating Carly with some degree courtesy and respect. That, of course, begs the question: What would his relationship with humans be if they *didn't* do all that to him?

We never get to see his full capacity for compassion because, well, the cards are perpetually stacked against him. Starting with the Fallen's tutelage: The Fallen, of course, is kind of a dick, and it should be noted that Megatron is at his most callous and aggressive in the film where he's actually around his master. I'll remind you of the intro to the film, where the Fallen crushes him underfoot in effigy - I don't think it's a stretch to say he's twisting and suppressing Megatron *as a person*.

(Megatron saying "This is my planet!" recalls Demolisher from the beginning of the previous movie, telling Optimus: "This is not your planet to rule." He also adds "The Fallen shall rise again" - and here I choose to believe that he's not just talking about the character remotely called The Fallen, but rather his at that time dead master, who now carries the Constructicons' legacy. The joke here is that there's two characters in *Revenge of the Fallen* who fall and then return to have their revenge - and neither of them is the supposedly titular character.)

If I had to summarize the main theme of the trilogy, I would probably do it as thus: It's a story about how culture and circumstances affect people, or, more specifically, how poor information and understanding thereof *inevitably causes you to adapt the worst traits of it*. Sam's total lack of awareness turns him into earth's biggest dick. Carly *nearly* manages to escape the web of lies, but ultimately fails and is totally depowered and delegitimized as a result. Megatron spends most of his life as a mad warlord - but at the end, perhaps due to seeing his life deconstructed piece-by-piece before him, he finally receives a sort of epiphany and realizes that it's not just this current situation, it's his *entire life* that's been going horribly wrong. Prometheus is supposed to be humanity's champion, not its victimizer. Almost every character he references (aside from Khan and G1 Megatron) is considered a defender of the underprivileged. The movies examine in great detail this rift of what he (and Optimus Prime, for that matter) *ought* to be, and what the reality of his situation has turned him into - and I think he realizes this. So he totally changes strategies aaaand... Gets himself murdered again. And that's that, right? No.

You see, the big joke of the movie is that at the end, Megatron *wins*. He fully accepts his role as a victim rather than a perpetrator, and effectively *sacrifices himself for the audience*. It provokes Optimus' crassest and most transparently evil move yet. But wait, remember the last time he did something totally crazy like that? "Give me your face"? That was at the very end of the previous movie. In both cases, right at the climax, just before an absolutely minimal denouement, in conjunction with strong emotional scenes of combat and violence. In other words, *The audience's freshest and most vivid impression of both films will always be Optimus being a huge dick*.

And it works! I mean, we all like to talk about how audiences uncritically accept these films and don't really think about the crass stuff within or w/e but the truth is, whenever you see a community outside the likes of Reddit or YT comments discuss the movies, even dedicated TF fan communities, what's the very first thing that comes up? Well, okay, that's "Michael Bay, tits and explosions". But the second thing. Well, no, that's "pissed all over my childhood". Alright, but the *third* is "man, those supposed heroes are *fucking psychopaths*." Those don't tend to be people with much affection for serious criticism. Remember, these very same fan communities still like to argue there's no racial component to Skids and Mudflap. But even regular people, *even those who love these movies* will frequently be left kind of aghast at this ending, even if they just sort of shrug it off afterwards because they aren't trained to reflect on it.

The pretty large cultural pushback against the films is no coincidence. People have clearly identified the films' "ethos" - that of the stereotypical summer action blockbuster - and are *rejecting it*.

Well, it would be overly optimistic to say they all, or even a majority, are. But it's still a disproportionately large amount. Read up on some viewer-reviews of the films and compare to, say, your average superhero movie. Even the positive reviews tend to have that oddly spiteful tone to them.

Ultimately, this is all exemplified in Optimus' final monologue:

"In any war, there are calms between storms.

There will be days when we lose faith.

Days when our allies turn against us.

But the day will never come, that we forsake this planet, and its people."

He's sneaky about it, but notice that he's effectively talking about a state of *endless war*. He recognizes that this victory is temporary, and the fighting will soon begin again - and that he will be there to perpetuate it, completely without regard to the circumstances, *forever*. But the movie shows us: This is nonsense. An ongoing war can only continue to escalate, and the longer it goes on, the more people begin to realize that something is wrong. And sometimes, it only takes one person (in this case, Carly) to look even *slightly* beyond the facade to take the first step - we don't see a miraculous end to a thousand-year-war or mankind rebelling against their new space robot overlords, but considering Megatron's new outlook and implied immortality, we may have seen the seed that *might* eventually lead to those things, provided people - both human and cybertronian - *pay attention*, are willing to challenge their preconceptions, and don't uncritically accept Optimus' narrative of

endless murder.



Mid-credits, we are treated to a short scene of Simmons sexually assaulting Mearing with some really crazy lighting. He forcibly kisses her, magically untying her hair - feminizing her, establishing himself as the Man in the picture. If Sam is the “loser” of the trilogy, Simmons is the big “winner”. With his very particular brand of total egotism, he’s one of the only characters to have left the trilogy in a better place than they entered - wheelchair aside - by finding the right niche in the

proceedings to huddle in like a rat, denigrating his lessers and hanging onto the big fish. There's a great skill in how he navigates around the wheelwork of the military-industrial machine that mercilessly crushed so many others. When Mearing orders his arrest, he repeats "take me in!" while laughing and looking at the camera... As if he was sharing a joke with the audience. The joke being?

Well, who can truly say. If you ask me: The biggest joke is that right now, on this rooftop, this man can sit and laugh and act, that, even being carted to trial, he is still the most *free* character out of anyone we met. The joke is this entire scenario, where people like Simmons can succeed and good people like Carly are bound to fail. And that, removed from the person, this line - "just take me in already" - could be seen as a plea to the audience: Do not let this man have his final victory. *Transformers* presents a ridiculous scenario of earth being taken over by space robots, but space robots don't exist. People like Simmons do. And do we truly want them to be the winners?

Why are all these robots so damn ugly?

Now, before I conclude this whole deal, I want to address one of the more interesting questions about the films: Why are all these robots so damn ugly??

I feel one of the most misunderstood aspects of the films is their design language. Most people, including people who make tie-ins or fan art or frequently even the toys, seem to believe that the aesthetic of the Transformers begins and ends at **MAXIMUM GREEBLIES**. This is a sad disservice to the creative work of the designers, and has a lot to do with how we perceive visuals.



Looking at an image like this, I can totally forgive your eyes glazing over and developing a startling desire to just look at something else for a minute. Simply put, it's a mess. The proportions are wack, no visual detail meaningfully flows into another, the color balance and individual contrasts would probably get you thrown out of art school. And of course, this being his actual CGI model, this is a pretty good representation of what he looks like in the movie, right? Well, no.

We tend to think of "character designs" as a defined appearance carrying the character visually, effectively something the character "is". This idea seems so self-evident I'm not even sure how to describe it without resorting to tautology, but it shows severe flaws in ignoring the differing role and task of our eyes in perceiving a similar construct in differing contexts.

To try and explain what I mean, I'll have to get into what necessitated this kind of design language in the first place. *Transformers (2007)* presented a demand for special effects on an unprecedented scale, which presented a number of massive challenges for the entire crew, and particularly, of course, the animators. Beyond the obvious difficulties, there was also the very specific demand of having a number of scenes in bright daylight - a problem that ILM VFX supervisor Scott Farrar touches on in this lil' video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMoChbnx-LE>), explaining that of course, the usual

preference is to keep the models out of light and out of focus so you don't get to immediately see their flaws. That not being an option, the creators had to find different ways to make the effects not look fake.

A constant undercurrent in the first film's construction is a general sense of insecurity. The team clearly wasn't sure about how their work would look in the end, and they cut a lot of corners to ensure everything would look and behave smoothly, like only implying that Megatron has wings with the cinematography because ones actually on his back could get in the way of the action. The movie still spends much more time at night than the subsequent ones, and the Transformers spend very little time in the very centre of the screen, usually hanging out around the edges. In fact, one of my favorite bits of trivia about the first film is that *it uses practical effects wherever possible*.

Beyond using a unique CGI/miniature hybrid approach for some scenes (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uNNQ9CC4A0>), they also built physical props for parts of Skorponok, Frenzy, and, indeed, a *full-scale Bumblebee* for the scenes in which he wouldn't have to move.



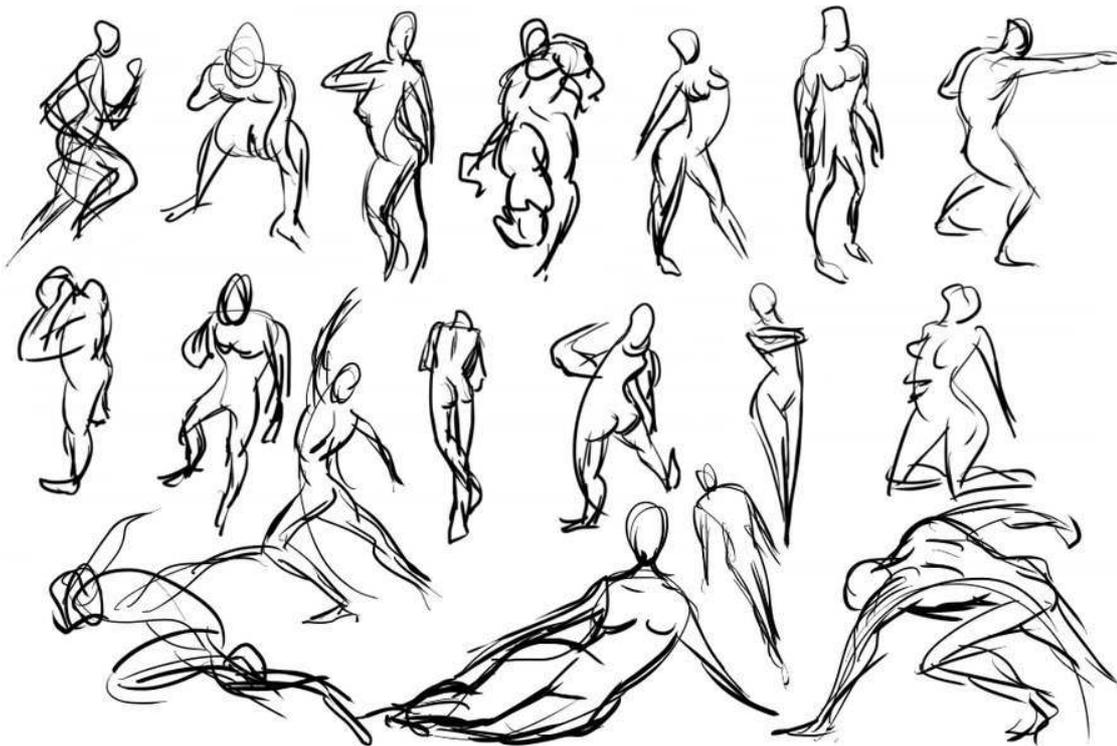
One of the big worries that must have come up in the actual design stage is that they had to avoid flat surfaces wherever possible. Making a simple, flat design like your average G1 Transformer look good as a CGI projection in a live-action context is near impossible because unless you expend obscene effort to get all the reflections and little textures *just* right, it's always going to look, well, *flat*, and artificial. The sheer amounts of visual detail on the Transformers fulfils the dual purpose of a) breaking up the surfaces to slightly ease the work of the animators, and b) in conjunction with the framing choices of the film, they actively prevent the human eye from properly focusing on the things, which *itself* both more effective at "hiding the effect" than just keeping them in shadows and only showing them for seconds at a time. It also has a different, much more important purpose that goes back to filmmaking as a craft in general.



Check out this render of Optimus as he appears in the first film. What do you see? A large amount of mechanical junk, for one. But remember, that's not what you see in the actual film. What you actually see is something more like this:



We have neither the opportunity nor a particular motivation to focus on all the details in the actual film context. What we do see in those split seconds of divided focus are, however, the imperative parts: The overall shape and lines of the design, what people in the artist's trade call "gesture" or "figure" or "form" or like a million other things. If you haven't heard of "gesture drawing", it's an exercise in which the artist attempts to capture the fundamental motion and attitude of their model in as few lines and details as possible, forgetting about the physical and visual details entirely to attain something much more fundamentally lifelike.



A random example I plucked from GIS. (<http://pencilpaperparty.wordpress.com/2013/01/18/more-gesture-drawing-examples/>)

Take a look at Optimus' bodylines. There's a consistency in the shapes created by the color zones of his armor plates. He's symmetrical, extremely vertical, all the sharp edges and extremities of his body seem to point *upwards*. There's a very deliberate use of subtle curves, particularly those along his lower legs that give him his solid stance, but primarily he's characterized by his straight lines and right angles. Look at the areas a viewer is most likely to focus on, the bright red chest and forearms. It's a traditional heroic image, a man straight and true, all parts of his body pointing to god and the heavens and everything good. It's *the perfect propaganda poster*.



Compare that to Megatron:

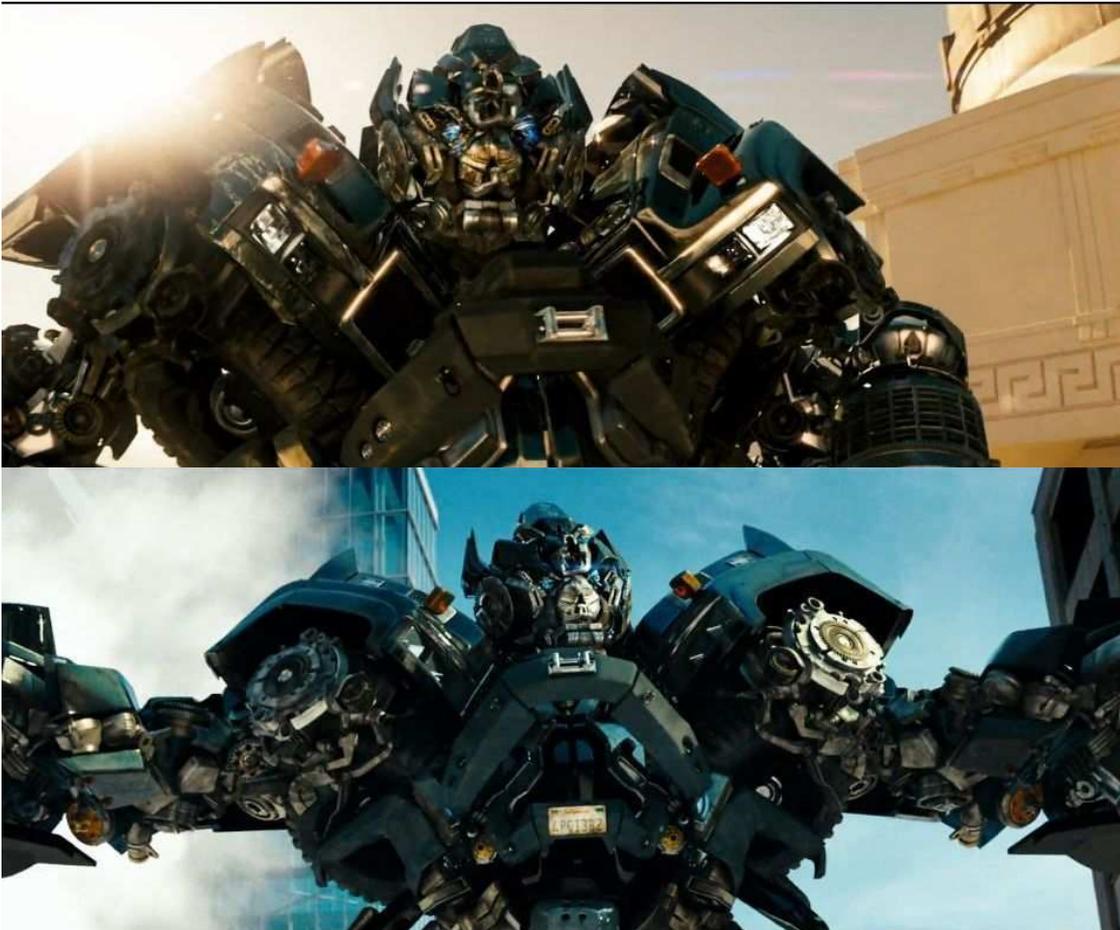


Notice how Megatron lacks any truly distinct color zones at all, but seems entirely composed of the interior metal bits of the Optimus design, thus becoming nearly impossible to immediately visualize. What's more, look at his body lines. Every bit of his body is twisted and curled, and the lines seem to explode off his body in all directions. Quite the opposite of Optimus'

hard-straight solidity, it's a very *emotional* and *uncontrolled* appearance, fitting perfectly the guy who basically spends two movies in an extended manic episode. While naked.

Another fun bit of trivia about the Optimus design: When Michael Bay was asked why they gave him the flame deco, his reply was pretty much "because it's cool". Of course, later it turned out that they couldn't use the traditional red upper body because red just doesn't photograph very well (particularly combined with EXPLOSIONS), and the flames were a good compromise to make him recognizable as Optimus Prime while still making him a primarily blue robot. I would also further argue that their inclusion leaves fewer undetailed flat planes without needing to resort to even more broken panels and mechanical detail, and that they add just a little bit of flare and temper back to what is otherwise a very cold and orderly design, which befits his character as a whole. Basically, the lesson is: Don't take what you hear in interviews for the whole story. Although they *are* pretty cool.

Of course, there's been some artistic evolution throughout the years, as well. Notably, Optimus' model has been tweaked between every movie to make it neater, more human and more visually cohesive, and of course Megatron looks vastly different in the other two movies. But what about the other guys? Let's look at Ironhide.



Ironhide is, of course, designed to evoke dirty Harry. His arms and legs are every bit as incoherent as any Decepticon, but pay particular attention to the chest area, the part which, and this is important to remember, along with the head is always going to draw the absolute most visual attention. The designers generally don't give a particular fuck about the spatial

coordination of where various vehicle bits end up, but notice they took care to make his chest actually resemble the front end of the car. The side fenders are there (if at an odd angle to each other), the headlights are there (pointed inwards), the bumper is there (twisted and inexplicably shrunk), there's bits below the fenders that resemble brakes or hubcaps, he has tires and even a license plate. All the bits are there and even in roughly correct relation to each other, but everything is just scrunched up enough to make it look, no, not like he transforms *into* a car, but rather like he's specifically *wearing the car as a leather jacket*.

Now, the reason I included two shots here, one from the first movie and one from the third, is to highlight a couple of differences in how this design is *presented*. Ostensibly, they are two very similar shots: Close-up on Ironhide as he's speaking, focused primarily on the upper chest area. The differences however, while subtle, are very significant. One major thing is the camera. In the first shot, it's panning towards him, never *quite* perfectly centering on him, then immediately panning away. The shot in general isn't really devoted to him specifically, but involves three of the Autobots all standing near each other. The huge glaring sun obscures much of his shoulders, and the lighting in general causes many of his parts to sort of meld together. In addition to all that, he's holding his arms (and guns) close to his body, obscuring the shape of his chest and confusing his silhouette, and the chest itself is cut off at the bottom, leaving out even more of its shape and obscuring the number plate.

The second shot is nearly static and focused even more specifically on the chest area, the cold-blue lighting causes the silver parts of his body to reflect and stand out much more, and he's holding his arms far away from himself, letting the more potent details of his design speak for themselves. Even totally disregarding the differences in rendering quality, *it's a so much nicer shot*. Even though it's the exact same CGI model, the second example is significantly more visually identifiable and just plain nice to look at. The third movie is basically all this all the time. It's obvious that they became much more confident in their ability to make a CGI model look good on its own, and discarded a lot of the obscuring techniques that made the first movie so hard to follow visually.* This can be seen not only in the way the existing characters are presented, but also in the new guys' designs: Autobots and ex-Autobots at least use significantly more smooth lines and flat shapes than they would before. Which brings me to the probably most important part of design period: Faces.

*Which makes criticisms of the films being visually incoherent applied to *the trilogy as a whole* feel rather hollow and really a product of projecting expectations, honestly.

It always comes back to faces, or perhaps, a *lack* thereof. No amount of incoherent visual detail on the arms and legs can make a character seem quite as alien and horrible as a deformed or unrecognizable face does. Hence, the awful "shredded insect" look sported by Ironhide and co. It's a powerful tool that makes it virtually impossible for the audience to build proper empathy towards the character. Ironhide resembles Harry Callahan, right? Well, now imagine Harry walking around asking punks if they feel lucky, only *he has a bunch of unrecognizable shapes where his face should be*. Terrifying stuff. Of course, while the second/third movies keep this approach for the Decepticons (who always remain alien and unfathomable), the new Autobots work a bit differently. Although their faces feel a bit more immediately human at first, they have this odd quality where they conform to a particular stereotype so fully that they cease to feel like people's faces at all, oddly soulless and empty. It should be noted, for example, that you can't actually see any of the Wreckers' eyes.

The two big exceptions are, of course, Optimus, who at least in the third film has an unusually humanlike face, but has a convenient mask that he can just put on when it's time to do something spectacularly awful, and, and here we go again, Megatron.



I find it pretty funny that concept artist Josh Nizzi (🇺🇸) clearly operated on the assumption of Megatron being an imposing and threatening villain, something he very definitely did not end up being.

On pictures, Megatron's face is among the most hideous and unfathomable, but with the constant attention and effort put to it in the third film, something magical ends up happening and Megatron basically turns into a prawn from *District 9*. No matter how gross he may be, something about the way he moves and emotes makes him incredibly humanlike, in a way. That reminds me, there's something I failed to mention before.



There's a weird intermediate step in Megs' transformation where, after giving off a beastlike roar, he tries to raise his entire cab off the ground, then slams it back onto the ground hard. It really does look as though the cab itself was the head of some kind of animal, right down to the tarp fluttering behind it forming an enormous mane. The reason I bring this up specifically is because we've seen a heavy, beastlike character slam his head into the ground while roaring during a transformation sequence that felt more painful and unpleasant than elegant and magical in a desert setting before:



Just yet another visual link between the two characters.



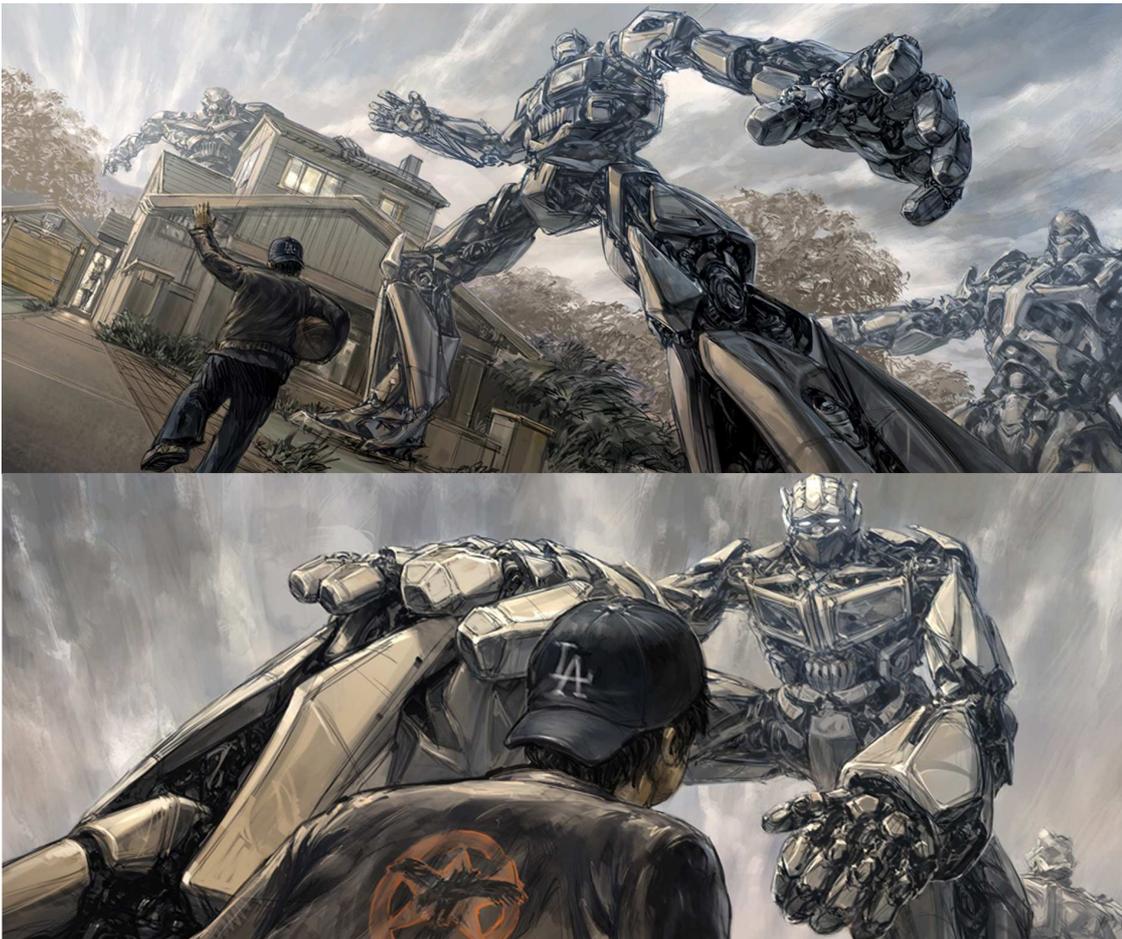
Really, there's just so many things about this design that work for me: It really is probably my second favorite character design in all of visual media (the first is Utsuho Reiuji from the Touhou series. Don't ask.) it's not *pretty*, but it's incredibly emotive and multifaceted and full of little details and references. I just admire all the work and thought that went into bringing this character to life, and my greatest regret about him is that he couldn't find his way into a movie I can actually recommend people to watch.

So then, to review, here's why I feel the general aesthetic of the films works:

- It plays with the viewer's perception, causing the CGI models to look, well, certainly not more real, but a different *kind* of fake that works better within the context of a film.
- The high amount of detail gives an additional impression of scale, making the models look massive even when there's no reference objects around them.
- It makes the characters more alien and distant, making it harder to immediately accept their viewpoints, which is, for better or for worse, clearly something the filmmakers tried to accomplish.
- It adds multiple important thematic elements, like the robots looking like they're wearing cars as clothes.

- It adds more detail and nuance to a few characters and is in part responsible for the most detailed and nuanced character in the trilogy actually becoming such.
- It's unique and immediately recognizable, and its hypermodern sensibilities allowed it to really take root in our culture, both making the Transformers series even more of a "thing" in people's minds and showing concisely the amount of influence the movies had.
- It makes for some pretty kickass toys.
- Really, once you allow yourself to get used to it, it can just be pretty nice to look at, in its own way.

While I'm at it, here's some more neat concept art.



Some very early storyboard art by Tony Kieme. I actually really like the framing and ambiance of these pieces (I particularly enjoy the tilted angle of the first one - the robots on the right side have so much visual mass that the entire planet seems to buckle under them) and I would absolutely not object to the entire film having been made with this approach.



Thought the Constructicons in the movie were weird? You should see some of the stuff that *didn't* make it in. Another concept artist called it “freeform robot design” and yeah, you can pretty much see that. It really shows that after the success of the first film, they became confident enough to really start pushing aesthetic boundaries and just generally fucking around. The return to more “reasonable”, humanoid designs for the third film is both a blessing and a bit of a shame.



One of the dropped ideas for the second film was an enormous combiner made of millions of tiny insect transformers (like the one Sam squashes at the end). Having one of the Decepticons be a literal plague of locusts is a terrifically biblical idea that I think would have worked perfectly in ROTF, but instead we got Devastator so I can't really complain.



Mirage / Dino. Remember this guy? I don't. Anyway, notice the somewhat abstract nature of the piece. He's barely recognizable as a car at all, and the mechanical detail is pretty much just an applied texture. He totally lacks *physicality*. Instead, the piece focuses entirely on showing the flow and lines of the design. It's a good showcase of what was important to the artists at this stage. (contrast with the much more technical concept art for the first film.)



THE BEST LASERBEAK CONCEPT. There's actually a bunch of neat Laserbeak concept art, but I guess in the end they just wanted him to look ugly and unpleasant above all else.



Que also went through a number of very distinct designs, ranging from “actually sympathetic looking” to “horrible Nazi doctor”. I can see why they went with his final design in the end, but I also won't lie about it being one of the least aesthetically worthwhile ones in the trilogy. It seems he was also going to be a different model of car, but I'm not car nerd enough to identify it based on the visible vehicle bits.



I, uh, have no context for this. Are we still looking at DOTM concepts because



Wait Aaron Sims what are you doing do you even remember what movie you're working on



what the hell is going on here aaaaaaaaaaaah

I haven't found any site that has all the available art collected in one place, so in case you're curious to look at some more, I compiled a list of all the individual artists' pages I could find.

Transformers 2007

[Ben Procter](#) (has some additional information, worth reading)

Revenge of the Fallen

[Wesley Burt](#)

[Ryan Church](#) (the "scenery and set pieces" guy)

[Stee Jung](#) (it seems his actual site went down, but his silly Constructicons can be found here)

[Josh Nizzi](#) (hired for being good at fanart, now pretty much the main robot designer)

[Paul Ozzimo](#) (robot concepts, more on irritating to navigate flash website (<http://www.paulozzimo.com/>))

[Ben Procter](#) (mostly curious unused concepts)

Dark of the Moon

[Wesley Burt](#) (some of those Optimus super mode ideas floating around are pretty crazy)

[Joel Chang](#) (some space stuff)

[Ryan Church](#) (some Shockwave)

[Warren Manser](#) (some vehicles)

[Josh Nizzi](#) (did I mention I love this guy?)

[Aaron Sims](#) (what is this I don't even)

Conclusions, or really just ramblings

With these threads, I mainly wanted to do three things: Point out some of the subtler going-ons that easily got lost in the obnoxious loudness of these films for most people, show that what's presented doesn't always jive cleanly with the idea of them being totally brainless, and present an overarching narrative that I feel places a more coherent light on these supposed inconsistencies. In hindsight, I feel I've focused a bit much on that third bit and not quite enough on the second.

See, the thing is, this is, of course, only one possible reading of the films, and not necessarily a very good one. However, I do feel that it's one of the only readings that takes the entirety of the movies into consideration. Although I skipped over parts (mainly in *Revenge*), that was generally because I felt they only reiterated things that had been shown before or otherwise didn't contradict my thoughts, and people in the thread were always ready to help out and explain things to me. But whenever I try to view the films through the alternate, commonly accepted lens, there's always quite a few things that trip me up.

- The first film specifically brings up the way the Cybertronians learn our language through the internet (which is something that was invented for the film, the Transformers were always just capable of communication before and since), but then conveniently ignores this plot point when Megatron wakes up and immediately starts talking in English. Coupled with that first sentence being him clarifying what his name is, this seems to exist exclusively to show that he was conscious during his captivity - something that puts both his character and the humans' in a totally different light.

- The first film also makes a point to have Optimus show remorse over the murder of Megatron and destruction of the Allspark - putting his actions in the latter movies into a rather odd light. Compare "You left me no choice, brother" to "*time to find out.*"

- What is with the absurd focus on Autobots smashing faces? It's only more visceral than other bodily damage when it's done in select cases, but by the third movie it reaches levels of self-parody - and only the heroes do it. By contrast, many if not most of the Autobots wear battle masks or otherwise cover their faces a lot. In the context of them being heroic, what is that supposed to mean?

- What is it with glass items? Particularly in the third film, you have a *lot* of people looking at or through binoculars/telescopes, glass panes, crystal balls, recording devices...

- The third film has frequent shots of security cameras, surveillance equipment, armed guards and so on. The subtle and silent establishment of a surveillance state is not something you just kind of throw into your action movie willy-nilly, is it?

- why are women dogs

- The absolute disregard of continuity and "realism" in movies 2 and 3. Consider scenes like Megatron's Africa scene, where he appears to be in a totally different desert in every single shot, or Sentinel already having an alt mode and speaking English from the get-go, or every single crass break from science and reason taken in aggregate. It's just bizarre.

- This shot:



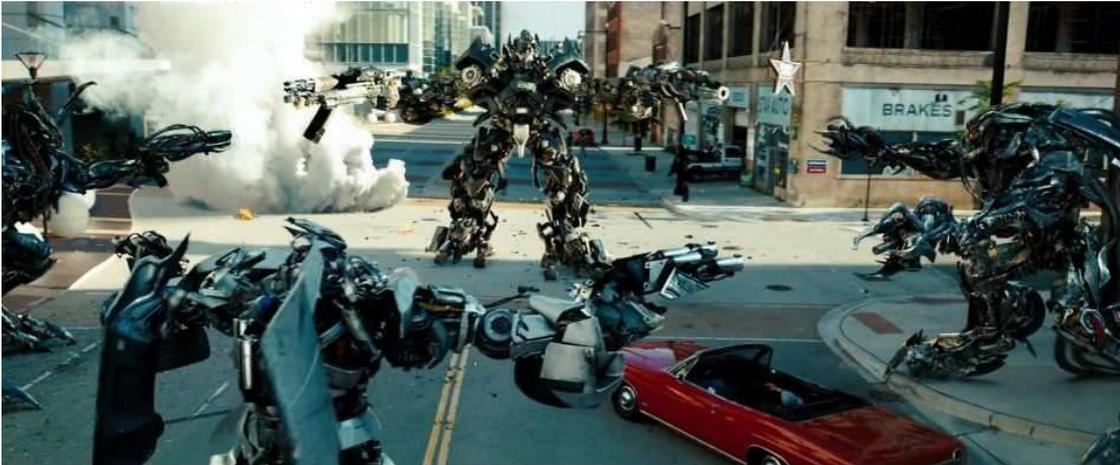
A fun thing to try would be showing this shot to someone who has never heard of the films completely out of context and ask them what they think the situation depicted is. I would bet they would identify the people in front as the protagonists and the figure in the back as attacking/threatening them, because *that's how the shot is set up*. Optimus is a massive, indistinct presence slowly approaching the foreground where the humans are, framed by a scene of total destruction. His entire upper body - and with that, his *face* - is off-screen, so even with the upturned camera he has no defined height, making him appear endlessly tall. You can't quite make out what he's holding, but he seems to wield it like a gun: It feels like he could point it at the screen any second. The humans are facing away from him, as if attempting to crawl to safety, clearly distraught. Every single thing about this frame *bleeds* an unknowable malevolence. Of course, *in* context, it all seems explained and benign, but here's the thing: The movies are *full* of shots like these. Optimus in particular is constantly framed in ways that make him appear malicious, and although the narrative tries its best to sweep the cinematography under the rug, *some part of you can't help but notice*. Remember, Optimus is the active narrator of the films, as well.

- Similarly, Megatron in movie 3: Everything about his framing suggests pity and sympathy. He is literally seen caring for newborns. The camera practically can't get enough of his face. The movie constantly encourages sympathy for the guy, and in the end he does something that's totally uncalled for as a movie villain. If they just wanted to have another bad guy, why bother with all this? Why not just make him *attack* Optimus in the end, and make the audience feel a *deserved* victory?

- Why link Megatron to the Constructicons specifically? If you look at the G1 cartoon, there's a very clear divide where the Autobots are working class or otherwise common vehicles, and the Decepticons are military equipment or otherwise offensive weapons. Devastator was basically nothing more than a themed lackey. The first film carries this with Starscream, Brawl and Bonecrusher, but then suddenly humanity gains a total monopoly over military vehicles and all the Decepticons are now road- or construction vehicles. Megatron himself has never had any working-class theme in the history of the franchise (though the IDW comics and *Transformers Prime* have recently picked up on this). Because blue-collar workers are the everyman, and therefore the hero.

- Here's something interesting the films *don't* do: Turn Optimus into a Christ figure. This is an idea that's as old as G1, and a trope popular in action movies in general, but even though Optimus dies and is then revived in the most biblical movie this franchise has ever seen (casting Megatron as Lucifer, no less), they made a wide swerve around any images that could link him to that archetypal story.

- Another shot:



I didn't actually notice until someone in the thread pointed it out, but look at the red car. Notice how there are two extras cowering in there. That's the car Ironhide crushes under a baddie for no reason, evidently *killing two people in the process*. That car could have been empty. Those two extras were not just there to play a prank on the team - they had to be actively hired and directed to sit in the car and hide from some empty air that a robot would be CGled into later. *Why*. The filmmakers expended an active effort just to make the heroes' actions just that little bit more insane, in a situation barely anyone in the audience actually noticed!

And these are just the more obvious ones. The problem I have with the suggestion that these movies have little vision or intention behind them is because inherently, you are stating that stuff like this is totally unintentional, or just kinda worked out that way, or whatever. I frequently see filmmakers accused of this sort of carelessness and not thinking things through, but I feel it's a rather myopic thing for viewers to do. See, it's fine for them, because they invest two hours into a movie, half-heartedly pay attention to the things exploding, then walk out of the theatre, shallowly play back a cliff-notes version of the thing back in their heads and think "yeah, there sure wasn't much to this." They can do that.

Paramount Pictures has been working on and off on *Transformers* for *five years*.

It's difficult to imagine, as a simple person in the audience, how much thought and effort has to go into every single thing committed to film. What we see on screen is just the end result of many, many hours of consideration and debate and design, an incredible series of compromises between artistic vision, resources and the demands of the audience. Take a look at this concept art:



You might remember these things from the first movie. Actually, I'm pretty sure you don't, because they only appear in a single scene, in no shot that lasts longer than five seconds, in total darkness. (It's the Autobots' atmospheric entry mode.) It's far from their only piece of concept art

(http://www.benprocter.com/storage/oldersites/sitev2/html/PROJPAGE_Trans_12.html). Notice how even beyond the crazy amount of surface detail (that had to be properly represented on the CGI model, as well!), they carefully and deliberately planned out the angle of their collision with the ground, the depth, the scale, and so on. All this engineering of how this thing would look and work, for like *one minute* of footage in a 2 and ½ hour film. And that's from the first film, which itself shows much less care and love than the third or the better parts of the second.

For five years, now four movies, the team lived and breathed and almost literally ate Transformers, as it provided the financial foundation for their lives. For every shot and re-shot and re-re-shot set-up had to be done, work organized, actors and extras directed, results evaluated... Need I remind you that the director named his dog after the film, was practically so offended at the franchise continuing on without him that he returned to it even after he announced being done with it, twice(!) and felt personally insulted when Hugo Weaving admitted his heart wasn't really in it? Take a close look at these movies and, even without any clever subversive storytelling or whatever, and you begin to notice how deliberately and attentively crafted they are and how much respect was paid to set- and sound design and how hard they tried to get the special effects to look

just right. This does not square with my idea of a cynical, low-effort cash grab. I simply have to believe that all this theatric complexity has meaning, because suggesting that the team made the antagonist more emotive and filmed him in a more sympathetic camera than the hero because they can't even get sub-filmmaking 101 framing shit right feels both facile and ludicrous to me. Everything is there because the filmmakers *wanted* it to be - yes, even in *Revenge of the Fallen*.

Of course, speaking of *Revenge*, let's not forget that no matter the amount of earnest work put into something, sometimes it just turns out shit. There's a strange perception I noticed in critical response where people seem to find it difficult to consider something both earnest or satirical and, well, not very well made. *Sucker Punch* can't be an honest indictment of cinematic objectification *and* a somewhat poorly conceived, almost hypocritical attempt at being more clever than you should. *Transformers* can't be an inversion of the traditional hero/villain narrative showcasing the effects of authoritarian propaganda *and* a meandering, under-focused, often poorly communicated, destructive mess. Maybe it's a strange entertainment-version of the Just World Fallacy where lacking results must necessarily result from lacking effort, or maybe it's modern audiences' strange worship of subversiveness, where a work critical of old tropes must by default be better than the works it's commenting on throwing to the dustbin of history, but either way, people are extremely resistant to the idea that films they found emotionally dissatisfying could express depth and meaning and tend to dismiss them as another 'genre film'.

Beyond the inherent serious issues of dismissing genre- or even cliché films, this causes some serious tension in this case due to *Transformers'* unique presentation. Although it doubtlessly presents itself as a large-scale action movie, its idea of what action movies are *like* doesn't exactly seem sincere. But it's a very strange new standard of insincerity that doesn't gel with what we usually consider "subversive". Where Marvel's *Avengers* is like a bad anime stereotype going "b-but it's not like I *like* anti-intellectualism or anything!" *blushes furiously*, *Transformers* is more like a strange hall of mirrors where everything *seems* to be a reflection of something real but is unpleasantly stretched and warped and then you take a closer look and what you thought was a reflection is actually your face painted on the wall in pig blood and unspeakable human liquids. The other day I watched *Fast Five (2011)* - seemingly a movie with similar sensibilities, being all fast cars and burly guys and pretty girls and cartoonish large-scale destruction, but I find it an absurd idea to even compare the two stories, much less find actual common ground. Calling TF an action film suggests that it actually holds itself to the conventions of the genre, but it's so totally differently constructed, from the ground up, than any other action film I've seen, that trying to use its genre as its summation ends up making rather strange claims about the film *and* the genre. It's a colorful assembly of cinematographic elements collected from a wide variety of sources, none of which is new *per se*, but collected and distilled in a way that creates a totally distinctive "feel" that almost seems to supersede the sources in people's minds, and ended up having a massive influence on releases since - making *Transformers*, of course, the *Citizen Kane* of dumb action blockblusghuhghhhlllllgrrrrrrrrg

In this case, it is only natural that people approach the films as what they claim to be, but that's where everything breaks down. We meet them with the critical framings and language we use to reflect them against our expectations of what makes an action movie good: Do we want to see the characters succeed? Can we put ourselves in their place, and do their emotions, as portrayed, resonate with what we feel? Can we immerse ourselves in the emotional charge of the moment? Inherently the cards are stacked against the film, because we expect something out of it, it was simply not designed to offer. When people cite one of the most frequent criticisms of the films as films, that the action sequences themselves are "boring", they are not making a statement about the sequences themselves, because past the first film they, by themselves, are still some of the most excellently staged, framed and executed action sequences in modern cinema. The thing that's lacking is the *emotional investment*. Action films go great lengths to make us empathize with their characters, to make us feel what they feel, because only then can we really place ourselves with them emotionally. The result is that even scenes that are clunky or loose and amateurish can still feel satisfying and impressive just because they reflect the characters' - and our - emotional state, see the entire original *Star Wars* trilogy. *Transformers* is not just a film that doesn't bother involving us with its primary combatants, but designs them to *actively reject* sympathy, portraying them as faceless and alien and vaguely malicious. The greatest

director in the world couldn't make a conventionally satisfying action scene with these ingredients.

Of course, I hardly think they are without merit. They're still consistently the best parts of the films, after all - they're not engaging in the way seeing Luke finally confront Darth Vader is engaging, but they are more beautiful in the sense of an abstract painting or a choreographed dance, a visual spectacle that sort of justifies itself. It's not a better or worse approach to moviemaking, but it requires a different approach - and I would argue, more good will - on the audience's part as well.

And I guess that's one of the problems with the trilogy. It builds a very clear tone and expectation, then delivers something totally different with zero attempts to actually involve the audience or make them understand what's happening. Well, not zero - the odd thing is that we do have such strategies employed for the *robot* characters (with the visual design tricks I outlined, the facial focus (or lack thereof) and so on), but plays much more sloppily with the *human* ones, who still do take up the vast majority of screen time. The result feels sloppy and dissonant, and although there's some attempts to shock the audience into reconsidering what they just saw at the very end of movies 2 and 3, totally discarding 2 hours worth of emotional response and investment and reflecting on everything you've just seen is a lot to bloody ask for in a person who's never been particularly trained to reflect movies critically, for a movie that itself hardly ever suggests it even *deserves* that level of reflection.

And in spite of every single thing I said, there's simply no denying the very real cultural damage the movies did. The fact that not just the filmmaking team, but the entire set of investors and the ratings boards all thought these films are in any way appropriate for children to watch is insane, and the gleeful enthusiasm with which they exaggerate - and necessarily perpetuate - awful ideas and portrayals of minorities is frankly embarrassing to witness. The big problem is that all three films' insane financial successes sent some pretty unfortunate messages about what a filmmaker can get away with, and a lot of things portrayed here as crass and violent have sort of become the newer normal. I'll admit that the ending of the aforementioned *Fast Five*, where the protagonists destroy an entire city using a bank vault (the money, of course, being an indiscriminate agent of pure destruction, much like a Transformer), but then get an extended sequence of them getting drunk on its contents in a poisonous display of hedonistic success sent me reeling somewhat. (But then I'll admit I didn't understand a lot of that film's subtleties, and it still has the clear advantage of not seeming to consider black people *hilarious*.) In the end, this escalation also reflects back on the trilogy. When something crass becomes normal, it's difficult to look back at it as anything *but* normal. Although the films escalate to an absurd degree, it seems pop culture is always just a step behind.

I guess what it comes down to is that I really don't blame anyone for broadly rejecting the films. I would be rather more troubled if more people *didn't*, really. I simply cannot in good conscience recommend anyone to watch them... And to me, that's *sad*. Partially because I see all this incredible work done by the artists and effects team dissipate in a story that cannot properly present it, but mostly because I can say without a hint of irony that I have gained more enjoyment out of *Transformers 3* than any single other movie I watched, and it sucked not being able to share that enjoyment with anyone. To me, this isn't about "proving Bay's secret genius" or whatever. It's about how we, as an audience, approach a film. If you come to it with a set of expectations that render the images presented by the film as confusing, awful and dissonant, *don't be surprised at the film being confusing, awful and dissonant*. The reason I see the films the way I do is because I feel that creates a level of consistency and ultimately makes the films much more fun and interesting, and the more I read about and reflect on them, the more fun and interesting they become. You probably don't even have to see them as dishonest and subversive to fulfill this requirement: I'm positive that a proper and complete reading of the movies as mostly honest can be done, and every niggle I have addressed - I just haven't seen it done yet. And even beyond any perceived cleverness, *Dark Side Moon* is still gorgeous, dynamic, culturally relevant, nuanced, unique and oddly compelling. Over the past year I've grown from having a curious appreciation for its existence to outright loving it, horrid warts and all, because it has entertained me far beyond just its 2 ½ hour runtime. And while I can't ask anyone to share these feelings, I do have one wish: That people look at *all* movies with an open mind, and try to take them on their own terms, no matter how definitive the stereotypes

that have arisen around them seem. You might walk away justifiably thinking of them as garbage, but there's always a chance that you'll be positively surprised, far beyond what you could have possibly expected.

And really, when your tagline and entire driving concept is "more than meets the eye", is it really so crazy to try looking beyond the obvious?