

Rescue Bots: Roll To The Rescue

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Rescue Bots: Roll to the Rescue is the first DVD release for the newest Transformers cartoon and contains the first six episodes of the series. As with other current releases, this is by Shout! Factory—specifically, their Shout! Kids imprint. The premise of Rescue Bots is pretty interesting. A quartet of Autobots built for rescue operations lands on Earth. Optimus Prime assigns them to the technologically-advanced island of Griffin Rock, where they are paired with professionals from the Burns family, who apparently account for all emergency service personnel on the island. The Rescue Bots are tasked with learning about and protecting humanity while masquerading as emergency vehicles that turn into robots. Hiding in plain sight… it's probably the most creative and literal use of "robots in disguise" that the franchise has ever seen! The ruse is quickly discovered by Cody, the youngest member of the Burns family, who befriends the 'Bots and becomes their liaison to Earth.

Stylistically it's a Flash-style show, which isn't the drawback and limitation that it used to be. It's filled with bright colors and the robots are chunky and friendly-looking. The action is frequent and fills a good portion of the episode without being overwhelming. It's definitely the sort of visual that kids would be enraptured by. The characters have individual quirks and personalities rather than being all plastic friendliness and sunshine as in some shows for this age bracket. The voice acting is top-notch, with a clear eye (ear?) toward making every voice sound unique; when the main cast alone is nine characters strong and there's a lot of supporting and secondary characters in every episode, that's much appreciated. The plotting and dialogue doesn't dumb down to kids. There are no Decepticons in the show and no real villain in these episodes, but there is a lot of super-science with all the crazy developments that implies—I sure never expected to see Transformers dealing with the threat of floating lobsters! The danger in each episode is generally presented as real and serious, and in children's show fashion some lesson or moral is learned at the end of the episode.

There is also an eye toward older fans and parents who might watch the show, with frequent references to pop culture and such that wouldn't register with the target audience but adults would get. The episode "The Alien Invasion of Griffin Rock" in particular is full of sly nods to popular science fiction movies. This DVD didn't really give me a chance to see any real continuity at work, but frequent references to the pasts of the characters and Griffin Rock made it clear that a story bible exists and the showrunners are using it. DVD Specs: The DVD case is a simple white clamshell. The name and all the main characters are prominently featured on the front. Optimus Prime is front and center, even though he appears in about five minutes total of the six episodes. There are no inserts or even advertisements inside the case. The premiere episode "Family of Heroes" is listed as one of the special features, which is confusing. It's listed on the menu right along with the other five episodes, and when I hit "play all" it started out the runtime. Putting that episode among the special features seems to be little more than a way to artificially inflate the value of the DVD. The only other special feature is five printable coloring pages of Optimus and the main quartet. They're the usual stock poses found frequently in the show (and on the DVD case). Unfortunately they're also in grayscale, which I would think makes them difficult to color… it certainly would have bothered me as a kid to see my orange turn into gray mud halfway up a robot's arm. There's really nothing noteworthy to say about the picture or menus. The picture is a standard widescreen and the menus are minimal but do the job they're supposed to. However, sound on this DVD seems to be rather loud. My television was practically muted and it was still blaring—it only got louder when the theme and certain musical cues were playing. Overall: The DVD is a very simple promotion and little more. Whether one likes or dislikes the DVD is wholly dependent on their opinion of the show it contains… so what did I think of that? I wasn't very sure what to expect from this show, and I found myself genuinely enjoying it. There was plenty of conflict and suspense and I barely noticed the lack of Decepticons or other villainy. The people behind Rescue Bots have used a well-known brand to create a show with a strong appeal across several age groups, starting with the very youngest and working outward. If I had one complaint, it's that the show is not very educational. With Hasbro starting the Hub venture with Discovery and the high-science setting of Griffin Rock, I expected more Bill Nye moments and less Nutty Professor. I feel like an opportunity is being completely overlooked here, but also that a balance can easily be struck. Even without that, there's a lot to like about this show. In the final analysis I would only recommend this DVD to parents of children who can't get enough Rescue Bots and would watch it over and over because I feel that's the point of it. However, the show is a real gem and I'm sure a season set chock-full of special features to enjoy would not go unappreciated by the older fandom.