

## Q&A With Bob Orci, Alex Kurtzman From ROTF Round Table

Contributed by NightViper  
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Last week, our very own lonegamer8 had the opportunity to attend a Round-Table event about the upcoming DVD/Blu-Ray release of *astf*. So now we present Part 1 of her write-up of the event, the Q&A with Robert Orci and Alex Kurtzman!

Screenwriters Roberto "Bob" Orci and Alex Kurtzman were present for a round table during a press event held by Paramount at the Viceroy Hotel in Santa Monica, CA, on promoting "Star Trek" and the DVD/Blu-Ray release of *astf*. During the first half of their round table, the questions focused on their working on "Star Trek", such as bringing in Leonard Nimoy to reprise his role as Spock and the story conception. The latter half switched gears to the work behind "Transformers" and "Revenge of the Fallen".

[Click here](#) to read the full summary for this portion of the event!

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Paramount Press Event, October 8, 2009  
Viceroy Hotel, Santa Monica, CA

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Question: Can you talk about some of the differences between your approach to the special features on the "Star Trek" movie and on "Transformers"?

Roberto "Bob" Orci: We tend to sit down and talk very loosely about the experience of making the movie, and I think the differences are in the way that the movies were made, but not necessarily in the approach to the DVD extras. But what's really cool about the DVD extras is that in both cases they documented kind of everything [what] we were all doing together from the minute [the production] started to the minute the movie was released. So it's pretty intensive.

Alex Kurtzman: We try to be very open as possible [on the commentaries] and not just "I remember that day", and more of interpreting what we did.

Orci: We grew up having nothing like this at all. For example, there was one screenwriting book when we [were growing up]. Only one. Now there's DVDs, you can go online, you can see everything. There is so much there, so I think we feel like "how cool is it for people to be able to actually have the thing that we didn't have?" So we try to give as much to the DVD extras as we can.

Question: Without the resources we have available now, how did you learn your craft?

Kurtzman: A lot of writing badly for a long time. \*laughter\*

Orci: We met in high school senior year and we just wrote together every year through college. For example, every time we watched a movie, we would sit down and write out every scene. We'd make an outline and see what the structure looked like on paper. Then we reverse engineered from that.

Question: When writing a sequel, is it more interesting to you to come up with a brand new adventure for the characters, or to reinterpret and revisit a previous episode or a previous situation? What would be more rewarding for you?

Kurtzman: Every franchise has a different need, so you have to look at them differently, based on whatever the mandate is there. But in the case of "Transformers" it was very important for us to have a sequel idea that stood on its own. You need to be able to not have seen the first movie to appreciate the second one. But, I think that for us, it's always about going back to the sequels that we loved as kids and asking ourselves why we loved them. So, "Empire Strikes Back", "Superman 2", "Aliens", "Terminator 2", "Star Trek 2". What do all those movies have in common? Well, they're amazing stories all on their own. You didn't have to see the first movie, and there was some incredible, emotional test of character in all of those movies. Superman has to give up his powers for love. The Spock and Kirk relationship, being tested by Khan. Ripley finding a daughter. All of those things are such big ideas in and of themselves, and you really can't tell those stories in movie one, because movie one is very much about establishing a world.

Orci: How would you classify the first movie? As an original or as a riff on an old story&hellip; or both? We&rsquo;d want some kind of similar balance with the second one. The fact that you&rsquo;re debating that whether or not the original is a riff is great, that&rsquo;s exactly the point.

Question: When you write the scripts for [&ldquo;Transformers&rdquo; and &ldquo;Revenge of the Fallen&rdquo;], do you take into account how fast Shia Lebouf is going to be saying his lines?

Kurtzman: Yes. Sure, we&rsquo;ve made three movies with Shia so we have his rhythms in our heads for sure.

Orci: And he knows that movies tend to run long, so God bless him he goes right through it.

Question: Did you guys ever expect the &ldquo;Transformers&rdquo; sequel to be so divisive? People seemed to love it or hate it.

Orci: Yeah&hellip; I expect it to be divisive. Sequels are easy targets. Number one, it was undertaken under the pressure of the writer&rsquo;s strike, which makes us targets. It was longer, which at the end of the day&hellip; And it was bigger, louder and longer than the first one. For me, it&rsquo;s just length, but for the fans it&rsquo;s like &ldquo;I can&rsquo;t get enough! I wish it was longer!&rdquo;

Kurtzman: It&rsquo;s very hard to gauge what is going to work with people and what&rsquo;s not going to work. Because what one person says is way too long, my 12-year old cousin was like &ldquo;I just wish it was longer!&rdquo; And that just totally confuses me, so I think that at the end of the day, Michael (Bay &ndash; Director) has his rhythm and his pace and he can determine in the editing how long he wants to make the movie.

Question: Is music a critical part of your writing process and at what stage?

Kurtzman: It&rsquo;s always the first thing, actually. I don&rsquo;t have anything in my car or my iPod that isn&rsquo;t a soundtrack. It&rsquo;s sad but it&rsquo;s sorta true. It&rsquo;s like how the ideas get dreamt up and all of Michael [Giacchino&rsquo;s (composer for &ldquo;Star Trek&rdquo;)] stuff is on there too, along with a million other composers. So all day long, I drive and day dream.

Question: You&rsquo;ve written a comic tie-in for &ldquo;Star Trek&rdquo;, what are the chances of writing a comic story for &ldquo;Transformers&rdquo;?

Orci: Hmm. I guess the chances aren&rsquo;t zero, it&rsquo;s something above zero. But I don&rsquo;t know. It sort of depends though, we&rsquo;re sort of &hellip;

Kurtzman: Yeah, if we had a cool story to tell but we couldn&rsquo;t tell it in a movie for some reason, yes, we would absolutely think about it.

Question: Do you find it easier to write dialog for sequels considering you have returning actors such as Shia and Megan Fox, and you already have experience writing for them?

Kurtzman: Knowing them and knowing their voices? It&rsquo;s a huge help, it&rsquo;s a great thing to have. As we said, we made three movies with Shia and he is an incredibly fun actor to work with&hellip; He can do dialog at any pace and not every actor can do that. He really can run through things. Shia has a really good, I&rsquo;ll call it a cheese alarm. \*laughter\* If he thinks something is cheesy or, which I think means really inauthentic, he won&rsquo;t want to do it. So when we&rsquo;re writing we&rsquo;re often thinking of kind of knowing where his instincts tend to go in terms of scene work and what he likes to do. I think for him he can not act a scene unless he feels the truth of it somehow. It has to be truthful. Even if it&rsquo;s a scene about giant robots, there has to be some truth to it. And if there isn&rsquo;t, then he can&rsquo;t do it &ndash; so that&rsquo;s very helpful in terms of knowing what to look for in any given scene.

I think Megan was really interesting in the first movie because she was very surprising. There&rsquo;s a sweetness to her, and that was I think what made their relationship dynamic work really well. And I think for us knowing that [the sequel] was going to be about her character going to deal with whether or not the boyfriend that was going off to school and leaving her behind, and whether or not, that relationship was going to survive. Thinking about how that relationship was going to play out over the course of the movie, I think gave us what we needed. We talked to Megan a lot in preproduction. We had a couple meetings where we would all sit in a room and we would all talk about the script, go over scenes and we&rsquo;d rip stuff out. That&rsquo;s where the actor&rsquo;s voices become really great because, you&rsquo;ve been living in your head for so long, and then you bring it to them and you can start rewriting once they get their hands on it.

Orci: For Shia and the parents, those kinds of scenes really benefit from the actor&rsquo; input. &ldquo;See dad, that&rsquo;s how you&rsquo;re supposed to treat a child leaving for college.&rdquo;

Question: Has the economy changed your confidence or the types of projects you take? Does it affect the content of your writing?

Orci: It affects the content in a global way, which is in the movies that are being selected to be made have to be, right now, very escapist, fun forget-your-life sort of stuff. We aren't seeing a lot adult drama. So the minute you're writing "Transformers" you have to accept that genre. But the studios also want to be more conscientious budget wise, so yes they do want more robots but for a price, you have to make sure you do it at the right level.

Kurtzman: So what that means is hopefully your characters' story is strong enough to sustain the affordability factor, which is that you might not get to have a robot in every shot.

Question: Did the success of the first movie emboldened you or intimidated you when approaching the second film?

Orci: We had a different kind of pressure on the first one. Now it was like "great, I'm glad we had a nice victory but now we got to do it again", but with the same amount of trepidation and reverence to the source.

Kurtzman: But the excitement of knowing that we have everything in place. Going into the first movie we had no idea what the actors were even going to look like. So now knowing what the feeling was and who's playing the part definitely was helpful.

Question: You guys are on the front lines of a genre that is now being called "reimagining". How do you approach that?

Kurtzman: I think in the case of "Transformers", we didn't feel it was reimagining because there was no movie before it. It was just a cartoon, so that was actually just imagining. What is this going to look like, you know? The standards of story telling were so different when the cartoon was first invented. And it was a cartoon, you know. They literally didn't have the ability to make a live action movie back then. So figuring out what the balance of human and robot time was going to be, what the access point for the audience was going to be, who would the character they were going to follow into that world, why, what's that story? Finding the story of "a boy and his car" was, like, again we didn't take that off of anything. But we tried to think what are the movies that we want this to feel like. So we kind of want it to feel like the movies we grew up on in the Amblin (Steven Spielberg's company) vein, and that led us to "a boy and his car".

Orci: Whereas "Star Trek" there was ten movies, you've seen it live-action, you've seen lots of things that could be done, so it's kind of a bigger impression in people's mind already.

Question: When writing these iconic characters, who are yet very malleable, did you find you had to approach characters differently depending on what form they ended up taking? Say Sideswipe going from a red Lamborghini to a silver Corvette — does that change how you write him? Or Bumblebee going from a Volkswagen beetle to a Camaro?

Orci: In the case of Bumblebee making him not a bug and a muscle car led us to making him more of an action character than what he was in the original series, where he was sort of the child and the youngest one. He's the closest to Shia but he's also one of them, one of the soldiers. And you find out he lost his voice as a result of war. It does change that a little bit but so many things go into figuring out these characters. You can write them one way and then you get to see what the car looks like, then you try different voice actors, different voice actors will bring different things to it. So there's a lot of stuff together.

Question: What was the hardest scene for you guys to cut from the script?

Orci: Actually, with "Transformers", since they animate the robots after the fact, you can continue playing with their dialog up until the last minute. Scenes can be created after the fact, scenes that weren't in the original script at all.

Question: How do the two of you work together? Do you have specific roles?

Kurtzman: Our writing is a dialog — it's a process of debate back and forth.

Orci: We sit across the table from each other with our computers and we decide what's the right line. And I think that process ended up in the "Star Trek" script moreso than any other project we've done. I think Alex is Kirk, I'm Spock. For "Transformers", Alex is both Sam and Bumblebee.

Kurtzman: We write everything together.

Orci: We might tinker with our own stuff on the side, but we go over every line together, in a room like an office.

Kurtzman: We started writing together, pre-internet, so we'd be on the phone like this \*mimes cradling a phone and awkwardly typing\* and that's how we've developed our voice. And that voice became the way we still write.

Question: What's the difference between writing for Michael Bay and writing for JJ Abrams?

Kurtzman: Michael actually is also emotionally-based too. He looks at different things directorially, but he knows to go there for story, too. The action scene ultimately has to come out of some story front. They do look for different things but I think they have the same endgame goal.

Orci: "Mission Impossible"; [with Abrams] we kind of wrote together, "Star Trek"; we wrote on our own. "Transformers 1";, we wrote but then on the second one, Michael was there from the beginning so it all kind of depends on the project.

Question: Do you find that ideas bleed between projects?

Orci: We try not to. When we pitched "Star Trek" as a Time Travel thing, Damon Lindoff (producer of "Lost") said "Oh, I don't want to hear about it." But that was inadvertent. We tend to have the same themes in our work, technology, advancement, it can be good or it can be bad depending on humanity. But we're pretty good at separating it out. If you find what the good emotional content is — like the minute you know that "Star Trek" is a "brother story"; it's going to lead you different places than if it were a different story.

Question: Why aren't you working on "Transformers 3"?

Kurtzman: We have been working on Transformers longer than I was in college.

Orci: I think we have a degree in Transformers now. And I think we've given it a lot, but...

Kurtzman: The franchise is so wonderful it deserves to be fresh all the time, and I think we just felt like we've given it a lot.

Orci: We don't come back unless we have an idea. We always think the best idea should win, and that means opening up to everybody.

Question: How do you approach writing a movie that is essentially a Toy-commercial, for example the upcoming "View-Master" film?

Kurtzman: We've read a lot of the wildly cynical response to that. Here's what I'll say: some toys should be movies and some toys should not be movies, and I'd like to believe that we know the difference between those things. The movies that work, work when there's a story there that you could take the toy out of, but then, when you put the toy in, it becomes an even more amazing experience, for whatever reason.

Orci: Spielberg actually told us once that his first draft story of "E.T." didn't have an alien in it. It was a family drama about a kid missing his father, and E.T. was born from that. And, that's always stuck in our minds. You've got to be able to take out the thing.

After Orci and Kurtzman left, a quick presentation of the DVD/BD features for "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen" was shown, touring animated menus, character profiles as well as tracing the Transformers' origins from the comics, toys, and cartoon. The Blu-Ray featured "the All Spark Experiment", where viewers could create their own Transformers from a variety of colors, car designs, etc. Certain combinations allowed for unlocking new robots, videos, as well as a special message from Michael Bay (SPOILER: While no specific details were outright mentioned, the concept of Unicron being in TF3 is considered at the time of the discs' release).