

## In Which We Try To Explain The Rise of This Cobra

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Alex in AMERICA, alex carnevale, channing tatum, dennis quaid, gi joe, god, john scalzi, joseph gorden-levitt, sienne miller, stephen sommers



### Joe's Lemma

by ALEX CARNEVALE

Following in the distinguished footsteps of Hollis Frampton and [Stan Brakhage](#), Stephen Sommers — the director of *G.I. Joe: Rise of the Cobra* — has constructed the most unlikely film ever to occur.



It is enough to simply describe what happens in this marvelous ode to the nonsensical. One of my

favorite moments is when the mixed-race protagonists (Channing Tatum and Marlon Wayans) accidentally fall-in with the Joes' tactical unit. Standing in an underwater base that is more biosphere than military installation, commander Dennis Quaid, fresh off a montage training sequence that features Brendan Fraser as an officer (amazing) looks over his two new recruits. "You've scored in the 99th percentile," he informs them.



After your brain stops exploding, you realize Sommers' canny joke. No military outfit like G.I. Joe would ever exist, could ever exist. With those restrictions loosed, he creates an informed commentary on the American military that is destined to become the biggest grossing experimental film since *Sherman's March*.



Channing Tatum plays the hero of this revue of randomness. It's fortune that he fell into the same fighting unit that's trying to stop his fiancée from stealing nuclear warheads. (He keeps this a secret until the appropriate time, just like in the actual military.) This premise is occluded still further by the fact that the ostensible villains also owns the manufacturing process that develops these warheads. Why they needed to steal them, we never find out.



This is closer to the actuality of war than *Black Hawk Down* or *Bridge Over the River Kwai*. From its finite details, war and military expedience makes sense. But with a broader view it makes as much sense as this movie. I have to pour one out for Max Allan Collins, who had to *novelize* this epic journey into the insane. I am simply amazed that he found the courage not to write the line, "Channing Tatum took his dick out."

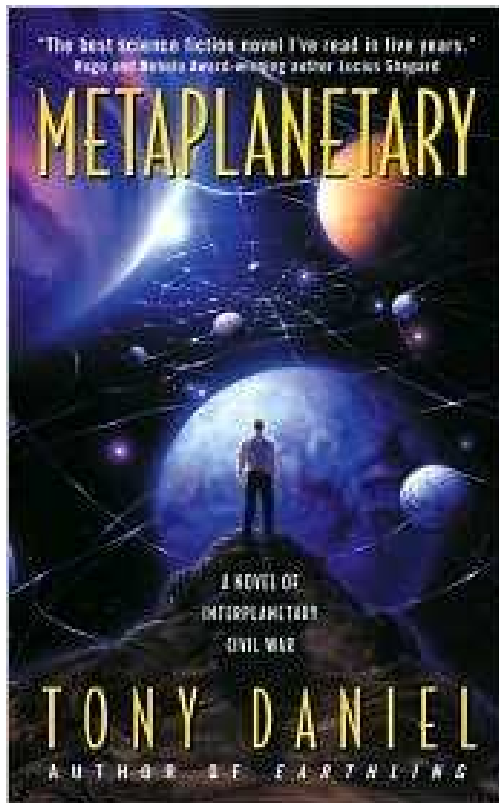


only max allan collins could handle this giant

After they join up with the team, the Joes are told by a black man with a british accent and the Latino guy from *Lost* that it's their combat fighting suits that make G.I. Joe real special. "If you think it, they do it," the makers say. Another revelation comes to us, swifter and more ironic than the path that brought *Zorn's Lemma* to its singular hole.



zorn's lemma There is no technology that turns thought into action, and I can assure you that despite the vaunted persuasions of fabulists like John Scalzi (with his BrainPal, that great weapon) and Tony Daniel, we will never bring our thoughts into action through a mechanism. We might develop an AI that was that sophisticated, but physics prevents us from ordering metal around with our mind like Ian McKellen.



The tech provided to the Joes (who writing the checks for this endeavour is *verboten*) is on the whole worth far more than any warhead.



Even if someone wanted to say, knock down the Eiffel Tower (only God knows why they'd knock over that silly toy instead of you know, a military target), they'd do it easier with that suit than a warhead.



No one dies in *G.I. Joe*. That's Sommers' next important point: we never hear of casualties, Bush blocked **our even seeing them**. We must see them, it is our greatest moral duty. But here, we don't. Sommers isn't just softening war for the kiddies. He's passing along a pillow and a bed.



This is a movie so unlikely that Jonathan Pryce plays the president! Seeing him so embarrassed in front of a meager world is even more enjoyable than watching the role Christopher Eccleston **dumped** *Doctor Who* for. It's like Sommers' subplot mission is to prove that actors you might have though had talent never had it really.



Sienna Miller, plays the Baroness, a furious war widow. She lost her dead brother with Channing Tatum in some military altercation, and somehow, fulfilling our wildest fantasies for such casting, they got Joseph Gordon-Levitt to play him. The only thing that could improve *G.I. Joe: Rise of the Cobra* is if Katherine Heigl suddenly came'd as a ten ton nuclear weapon that could *think*.



If you didn't know *G.I. Joe* was tongue-in-cheek by now, Sommers is shoving it in your face.



The Joes' team is composed of representatives from a bunch of countries. For example, Rachel Nichols comes to the team from the casting office that brought you Megan Fox. She's attractive if you don't think about the fact that she's a soldier and she wears full makeup in every scene. There doesn't seem to be much need for a global peacekeeping force, seeing as they spend most of their time flirting on treadmills.





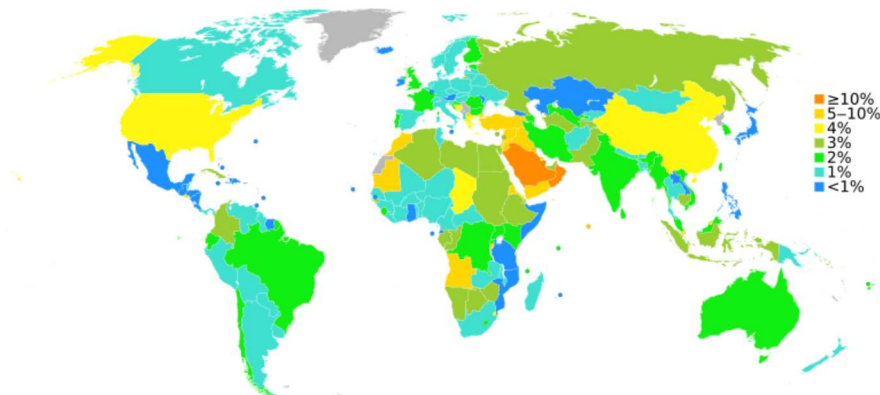
For a military unit, the Joes are lacking in every possible way. They don't even have line of command. They don't answer to anyone, or even have mission briefings. Not even vague preteens can believe after the realism of video games like *Call of Duty* and *Gears of War* than any battle could actually be fought in this fashion.



In other words, if it weren't for combat simulators, we wouldn't know what actual war was like. We would have forgotten it, and the men and women who serve this country overseas.



This is the more pertinent fact, one that goes beyond all need for 'our protection.' Less lives than ever are being wasted on such enterprises, but still too many for thinking people. Let there be doubt that some military force is required. Yet despite any enemy who could be our equal in a fight existing in the world, we continue to rearm at unprecedented rates.



Military expenditure as percent

of GDP, data taken from the CIA factbook We cripple a once wealthy society by feeding the beast. We can kill anything, but nothing wants to kill us, or couldn't if they tried. Our military spending has become the feeble habit of elected officials who feed a patriotic need to repel an imagined enemy. Sommers' movie says as much. As Ben Friedman [put it recently](#):

*There are no enemies to justify such spending. Invasion and civil war are unthinkable here. North Korea, Syria, and Iran trouble their citizens and neighbors, but with small economies, shoddy militaries, and a desire to survive, they pose little threat to us. Their combined military spending is one-sixtieth of ours.*



*Russia and China are incapable of territorial expansion that should pose any worry, unless we put our troops on their borders. China's defense spending is less than one-fifth of ours. We spend more researching and developing new weapons than Russia spends on its military. And with an economy larger than ours, the European Union can protect itself. Our biggest security problem, terrorism, is chiefly an intelligence problem arising from a Muslim civil war. Our military has little to do with it.*

*We should embrace this geopolitical fortune, not look for trouble. If we decided to avoid Iraq-style occupations and fight only to defend ourselves or important allies, we could cut our ground forces in half.*



*If we admitted that we are not going to fight a war with China anytime soon, we could retire chunks of the Air Force and Navy that are justified by that mission. Even with a far smaller defense budget, ours will remain the world's most powerful military by a large margin. The recently enacted GI Bill, which gives veterans a subsidized or free college education, offers a vehicle for transitioning military personnel into the civilian economy.*

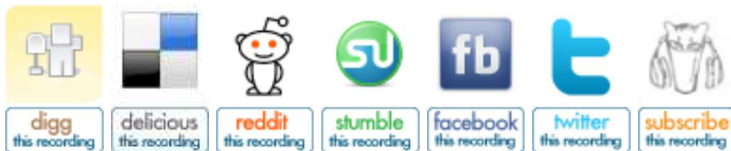
*Of course, powerful interests benefit from heavy defense spending, and cutting the military budget*

*would be a tough sell. Both political parties believe that American primacy is the route to safety. But they're wrong.*



We must commend Mr. Sommers for making his films this execrable that we must divine such horrible, prolific meanings from them.

*Alex Carnevale is the editor of This Recording. He tumbles [here](#).*





"Silver Moon" — Blitzen Trapper ([mp3](#))

"Black River Killer" — Blitzen Trapper ([mp3](#))

"Preacher's Sister Boy" — Blitzen Trapper ([mp3](#))



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