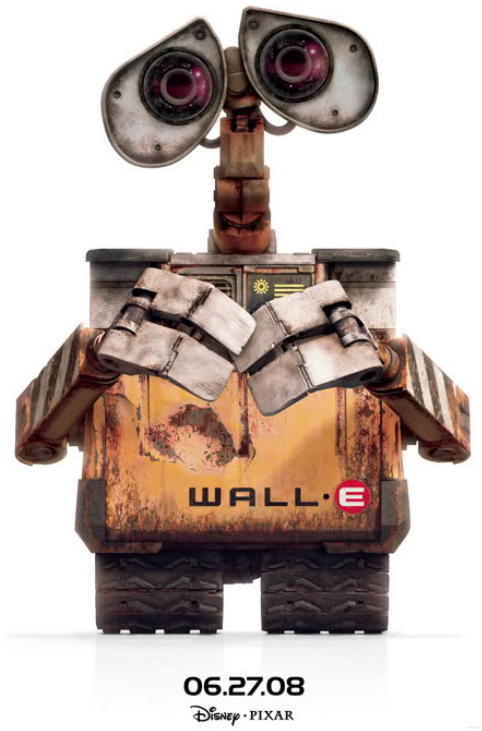
"WALL-E" hit the theaters last Friday amid hype no animated movie had seen in several years. And according to Mitch, this film delivered on those expectations in a big, big way. After years of reading Mitch's reviews, we all know ... it takes a lot to make Mitch gush. But he calls this one a masterpiece. And says it's a film for everyone, not just those with kids. And by far, the best movie so far in 2008.



Every now and then, a film comes around that is simply magic.

I'm not talking about brilliant films that make you think, like "Juno", or incredible films that astound you with their power, like "The Departed". No, I am referring to one that makes you smile throughout the entire film, caught up in the unfolding of something that entertains and thrills you from the opening sequence through the finale. Something that makes you fall in love with the medium all over again for blessing you with such an incredible experience.

"WALL-E" is such a film.

It is the pinnacle of animation as an art form, this exquisite tale about a lonely little robot's search for love and a sense of belonging. The beauty of its imagery will

linger hours after you leave the theater, but beyond its stunning visuals is a story for the ages as well, one that operates on so many different levels. "WALL-E" may be primarily about robots, but it is a movie with a huge heart, a magnificent soul, and a sharp mind.

It is almost two films. The first takes place on an abandoned Earth, over 800 plus years into the future. All humans have left the planet for the stars, and there is no life left, with the exception of an occasional cockroach. One of which happens to be the "pet" of WALL-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter - Earth Class), the last of his kind, programmed 700 hundred years ago to be a mobile trash compactor to all of the rubbish that was making Earth uninhabitable.

In the passing centuries, WALL-E has developed a consciousness and a persona. He is an incurable pack-rat. As he scoops up trash to press into little cubes that he stacks as high as skyscrapers, he pauses whenever something new catches one of his binocular eyes. A spork. A Rubik's Cube. A jewelry box with a diamond ring (he tosses the ring and keeps the box). These treasures he takes back to his little abode, and he winds down his day with his favorite find; a videotape of the movie "Hello, Dolly!" (seeing WALL-E dance using a hubcap as a hat to tip is an early gem in this feature full of them).

During the first forty minutes, the only words you hear are from Michael Crawford's singing in that old chestnut of a musical. WALL-E watches it over and over, pausing each time he sees characters holding hands...so sadly aware of the isolation he has, and the desires left unfulfilled. But he motors on day after day; a little mechanical Sisyphus with his unending task of pushing objects up a big hill.

Everything changes one day when a spaceship arrives (right on top of him), dropping off a sleek, egg-shaped probe named EVE. As WALL-E is obviously male, EVE is most certainly female, but one who packs quite a punch with her laser gun. WALL-E is completely smitten, even though EVE seems too busy with her "directive" to pay him that much attention.

She does go back to his shelter to escape a storm, and while there an item in WALL-E's stash sparks an immediate interest. Soon EVE is being hailed back to her ship. WALL-E can't stand the thought of letting her go, so he rushes behind and grabs onto an exterior ladder, blasting into the sky, through the junkyard of satellites circling the Earth, and out into the Great Unknown.

Like "The Wizard of Oz", the color scheme radically changes from this point forward, from dull browns and grays to stunning Technicolor. WALL-E is astounded, as will be the viewers watching his three minute journey from beyond Earth's orbit to the giant luxury ship Axiom light years away, which has been housing the remainder of the human race for generations.

But the cautionary tale continues. The ship, along with everything else on and off the planet, is owned by B-N-L, or Buy N Large. Picture a world where Wal-Mart controls absolutely everything, and that would be B-N-L. The humans on the Axiom are now grossly overweight, pampered beings who do not move about on their own, or interact with anyone else directly, even if they are right next to someone. They spend their entire lives in floating lounge chairs, online 24/7, with all entertainment and food available to them without leaving the comfort of their (large) seats, with robots performing all of the everyday tasks in life. Neither B-N-L, nor the humans are made out to be evil or stupid; they are just an extreme exaggeration of the worst consequences of over-consumption.

Inside of this quasi-paradise, there are other forces at work, and the discovery EVE made, along with the introduction of WALL-E to the Axiom's non-changing world are about to shake up everything.

Although it is an animated film, it also plays very well as science fiction. In fact, look for some very sly references to "2001: A Space Odyssey", and I'm not just talking about the time that the good Captain finally gets out of his lounger, stepping awkwardly on nearly unused feet while the theme from "2001" plays. Like any good sci-fi, it makes us take a look at our current affairs, warning of what might come to pass if certain things do not

change.

The animators at Pixar keep upping the bar with every movie. In this case, I cannot imagine what it would take to top this. The robot WALL-E has far more emotional range than 50% of the actors currently working in Hollywood. And even though all of EVE's expressions can only be displayed through two fluorescent blue eyes on a black screen that is her "face", the animators make it so that "she" can use those eyes and her "voice" to convey emotions that would make the average sitcom actress quit the business in shame. The brilliance comes shining through in those dialog-free scenes, as WALL-E proves to be the 29th Century's version of Charlie Chaplin in "City Lights".

While the seriousness of the underlying sci-fi message is clear, it is not the point of the film. Comedy still reigns throughout, but it is the type that will leave you smiling, more than gut busting jokes, although there are still moments of pure slapstick hilarity as the awkward cross between R2D2 and ET stumbles about first Earth and then the universe with the wide-eyed (wide-binoculared?) innocence of a child.

Your heart will absolutely break several times, and then be lifted back up time and time again in joy and satisfaction at the very real emotional issues that resonate as much for adults as for children. Loneliness, a desire to be part of something, sacrifice for something or someone you love; all of these themes are the very essence of this motion picture.

Wistful and whimsical, warm and intelligent, tender and triumphant; "WALL-E" is a masterpiece. By far, the best movie so far in 2008. You don't have to have young kids to go to see this, as it is indeed a film for all ages. One I'm sure to see again at the theater, and

then purchase the first day it is available on DVD.

Do yourself a favor, and don't wait for the DVD next year...go see it at the theater as soon as you can.

My Rating - Bernie Kosar (4 footballs)