

## *What do you say about robots that are more human than the humans?*

*Written by Andrew Stanton and Pete Docter*

*Directed by Andrew Stanton*

*Sound Design: Ben Burtt*

Ben Burtt ... WALL•E / M-O (voice)  
Elissa Knight ... EVE (voice)  
Jeff Garlin ... Captain (voice)  
Fred Willard ... Shelby Forthright - BnL CEO  
MacInTalk ... AUTO (voice)  
John Ratzenberger ... John (voice)  
Kathy Najimy ... Mary (voice)  
Sigourney Weaver ... Ship's Computer (voice)

Voice in commercial:

*Too much garbage in your place?  
There's plenty of space out in space!  
BnL StarLiners leaving each day.  
We'll clean up the mess while you're away.*

WALL-E is a superbly entertaining movie on all levels with its ET appeal to youngsters, its romantic-comedy angle for lovers, its science-fictional world for the imaginative, and its unsubtle—yet loosely constructed—political statement for the socially conscious.

### ***WALL-E's World***

Bringing to mind Wally World in the classic Chevy Chase comedy, National Lampoon's Vacation. Well, just as devoid of people as Wally World, Earth as we know it—the world inhabited by the protagonist of the story, WALL-E, has become literally a toxic-ocean-to-toxic-ocean waste heap. WALL-E stands for Waste Allocation Lift Loader—Earth Class; he/it is a drone, a complex electro-mechanical robot whose job it is to compact trash into a cube inside his midsection, then stack it diligently, neatly to make stable building-sized piles.

At some point presumably in the 21st century, human society had failed to recognize that it was fouling its nest with more refuse than it knew what to do with. So the refuse started accumulating, overflowing the landfills and the recycling centers, to a point that vast stretches of land became uninhabitable. Moreover, these landfills encroached steadily on remaining areas that were inhabited. Global corporation to the rescue: an ultimate Waste Management, Incorporated firm called BnL (By and Large) hits the problem with automation. Hence, the advertisement above: and we're given to understand thousands of waste disposal 'droids were built to "clean up the mess."

As the movie opens, it appears for whatever reason only one WALL-E now remains, an individual robot left behind as the humans leave the toxic planet en masse aboard the BnL starliners. Not only does our individual WALL-E continue to perform its job, gathering and compacting and stacking trash on what appears to be a wholly dead wasteland, it (he) seems to have acquired a personality—showing hesitation, loneliness, boredom, and even friendship with the only living thing around... a cockroach.

Through the droid's unique actions and sounds we see that WALL-E is much like a Robinson Crusoe character—or Tom Hanks in Castaway—a living intelligence that longs for companionship and does the best he can to make life interesting. After work he retires to his "home" among the ruins; it appears to be a defunct container vehicle, where he's run power and set up his repair shop, spare parts, and interesting artifacts that he brings back from his daily routine. These include light bulbs, a Rubik's Cube, forks and spoons, Zippo lighters, etc. And he's decorated his rugged little crib with Christmas tree lights and a VCR—on which he sighfully watches the romantic duet in Hello Dolly! repeatedly.

So maybe what happened is the other droids were left behind to rust away in the dust and debris, but somehow our WALL-E protagonist "came alive" thus managing to survive for, possibly, hundreds of years.

It's a bit unclear the origins of our special WALL-E, but it is clear he's fond of human things and even considers himself human.

### ***EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator)***

We soon learn how old WALL-E really is as a space ship lands depositing a far more sophisticated automaton. Where WALL-E is basically a tracked vehicle, this new one is capable of flight. It, most definitely a "she," also has powerful armaments and brushes back our curious earthbound droid on several occasions. She also appears to be on a search mission, constantly scanning around for something—which we eventually learn is evidence of plant life. The sequence of scenes by which the two robots get to know each other is a special sort of "meet cute;" they are alive.

### ***The Creativity of Sound***

The movie WALL-E, more than any movie in recent memory, brings the art of sound design to center stage. If you get the DVD, be sure to watch the extras about how the director Andrew Stanton and sound designer Ben Burtt collaborated to produce the characters in this story, making them real. The fact that only a few words are spoken by the robots, such as their names WALL-E and Eve—WALL-E never does figure out the name is Eve, not Ev-aah—, means the entire relationship is conveyed with the universal language of simple sound and movement.

I recall when my parents took my brother and me to Mexico on vacation in like 1956, when I was perhaps seven and my brother five. We wound up in a small town named Veus, which had a little motel with a swimming pool next to a golf course. All the other children were Mexican, and couldn't speak English, but it didn't matter. We all played and got along, communicated with gestures and sounds, smiles, laughter, sign language, whatever. We could have been playing with our friends back home (Overland Park, Kansas). Forrest and I had the time of our lives. No English required.

Thus, the movie WALL-E has a built-in a universal appeal that transcends cultural barriers... which I suppose is shrewd marketing. But I definitely get the idea the creators are more about satisfying a widespread need for stimulation of joyful imagination, and that the moneymaking is simply a natural accompaniment to that. There's no question WALL-E is a distinct work, a total-family entertainment gem. You won't dismiss it, as I often do with child-friendly movies, as superficial comic-book material not worthwhile for adults.

As for the adult-focused part of the story, i.e. the science-fiction/social message component, I don't want to shed much light because it's the plot. Suffice it to say that the human society is now comfortably ensconced elaborate starliners that left Earth behind hundreds of years ago has become literally fat, dumb, and happy—but with a twist: automation provide their every need or desire. Virtual reality enables them to experience everything from the best golf courses to the best diddlin' imaginable... at will. Are they truly happy though? Are they in control? Is there any confidence, any adventure to their lives?

These sorts of questions flow naturally out of the substance of the film, and seemingly will inspire viewers of all ages to engage in deeper-than-customary discussion. WALL-E is a healthful movie for this reason alone—not to mention the issues of environmental awareness, corporate government, or whether the machines are destined to take over from the biological machines that spawned them. We also get to consider whether WALL-E or EVE or even the eternal everlovin' cockroach belong in the realm of sentient creatures.

One of the best family movies I've seen. My highest compliment is that I didn't experience it as one of those Disney children's pablum cartoons that stoke the perceptions and emotions, but not the conceptual mind. It genuinely stimulates thinking.

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*WALL-E* | *Postapocalyptic Film* | *Amazing Sound Design* | *Trashing the Planet*