



## REVIEWED ON:

June 7, 2008



**Director:** Andrew Stanton

**Writing Credits:**

Pete Docter (story)

Andrew Stanton (story, screenplay)

Jim Reardon (screenplay)

**Principal Cast:**

Ben Burtt (WALL-E and M-O)

Elissa Knight (EVE)

Jeff Garlin (Captain)

Fred Willard (Shelby Forthright)

John Ratzenberger (John)

Kathy Najimy (Mary)

Sigourney Weaver (Axiom's Computer)

**Topic:** Environment, robots

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## REVIEWS

### WALL-E

**RACHEL PETKEWICH, C&EN WEST COAST BUREAU**



In the future, robots will search for love and signs of photosynthesis. And their comedy and warmth will tickle funny bones and tug on heartstrings like never before. Or at least, that is partly what "WALL-E," the animated movie about endearing robots with puppy-dog eyes and small vocabularies, manages to do.



The story of “WALL-E” is set in 2700, when Earth has finally become too polluted and toxic for humans, and everyone has gone to live on a gigantic spaceship called *Axiom*. But someone forgot to shut off the last robot. So for hundreds of years, WALL-E (voiced by Burtt) did what people built him to do. The solar-powered, gritty, rolling robot—officially a Waste Allocation Load-Lifting Earth Class robot—compacted trash into cubes. Over the centuries, he methodically stacked the cubes into structures that cast eerie shadows over the skyscrapers resting against a murky sky. He collected dusty relics such as a Rubik’s Cube and holiday lights, fed Twinkies to his pet cockroach, and watched classic romance movies before powering down for the night.

One day, WALL-E meets EVE (Knight), a supersleek robot that was sent from *Axiom* to find signs of life on Earth. He’s smitten. To woo her, he shows her his greatest treasure—a small green plant. She gets very excited because finding sustainable photosynthesis is exactly what humans built her to do. People could return to Earth from their outer-space exile if EVE (that’s short for Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) succeeds in her mission. As she scans the plant, chemical structures flash across the screen, and her green-plant indicator lights up. When *Axiom* comes to collect her, WALL-E hitches a ride on the ship and starts his interstellar adventure with the humans and some misbehaving robots.

The animated robots WALL-E and EVE are much more intelligent than today’s service-oriented robots, says Wolfgang Fink, a robotics researcher at California Institute of Technology who is developing robots for extraterrestrial exploration. Although WALL-E and EVE are programmed for a specific job, they go beyond their programming to solve problems, discover new things, and react with gestures associated with feelings, such as eyes that show warmth and bodies that quiver when scared. The total autonomy, curiosity, and variety of emotion that WALL-E and EVE show are the holy grails for robotics researchers, he adds.

Living on *Axiom* may seem like permanent cruise-ship bliss, but the movie highlights some sad realities about this space life. Microgravity weakens bones, and the people have become too fat to walk. So the humans float and hover in lounge chairs while robots take care of their every whim and desire. Holographic video screens sit in front of peoples’ faces at all times, so they rarely talk face-to-face with the person next to them. Connecting with one another for something as simple as holding hands becomes rather moving. The robots rule the ship. Even the ship’s human captain (Garlin) has to fight to get control away from the “automatic pilot” (Weaver). And let’s just say it’s a big deal when the captain takes the first step from his chair.

Although “WALL-E” shows how pollution could ruin Earth or how robots could challenge humans for control, also remember that it’s a Disney-Pixar movie. The animation defines the next level of visual quality, and the production team did their homework to make the tiniest details as seemingly real as possible. Many of the best scenes artfully play out with just a few words or sounds and provide humorous and poignant moments that speak to audiences of all ages. And no worries, WALL-E, EVE, the rest of the robots, and the humans all find a happy and hopeful ending.