

H'WOOD'S ROBOTIC DNA

In the new animated film "Wall-E," a small computerized robot that uses squeaks and squeals to communicate has won audiences over with its human-like desire for love. Think Charlie Chaplin 2.0.

Hollywood has always loved robots, even when robots haven't always liked humans. Whether they're smart and friendly, like curious Data from the "Star Trek" movies, or an out-of-control mechanized monster, robots make for fascinating characters:

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951)

Our plug-in friend: Alien Klaatu lands on Earth and warns us to behave ourselves. But no one listens until Gort the robot starts zapping tanks and other weapons out of existence.

Man or machine: Gort is all machine — relentless, silent, unstoppable and remorseless. You do not want to pull a gun on this silicon sheriff.

A.I. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (2001)

Our plug-in friend: Director Steven Spielberg's film, based on a Stanley Kubrick idea, is filled with robots, from sex-machine Jude Law to perfect little boy Haley Joel Osment.

Man or machine: Law's gigolo is just

artificial enough to ease your guilt over accessing his hard drive, and Osment is almost too ideal to love. Oddly, the most human character is the robot teddy bear voiced with warmth by Jack Angel.

SHORT CIRCUIT (1986)

Our plug-in friend: No. 5 is a military weapon robot zapped into consciousness by a bolt of lightning. It doesn't take long for it to decide that hanging with Ally Sheedy is more fun than killing.

Man or machine: Duh. No. 5 is alive! And in more ways than one: An updated remake is in the works for 2010. This time, No. 5 will presumably cost more than the piddling \$11 million price tag on the original.

FORBIDDEN PLANET (1956)

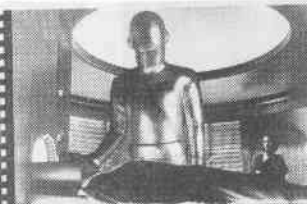
Our plug-in friend: Robby the Robot was a stiff-legged fellow with one redeeming feature: a personality. Which was sorely lacking in most previous movie robots.

Man or machine: Machine, one hopes, given its sad career. Robby became wildly popular and then slid into a long, slow decline, including cameos on everything from "Gilligan's Island" to "Mork & Mindy." It's now reduced to hawking for AT&T.

THE IRON GIANT (1999)

Our plug-in friend: The Iron Giant (voiced by Vin Diesel) is a fierce weapon sent to destroy Earth, but gets damaged on landing and is befriended by a little boy.

Man or machine: Man, eventually. Like Pinocchio and the Scarecrow, the Iron Giant discovers his humanity while the movies discover a major new talent in director Brad Bird, who goes on to helm "The Incredibles" and "Ratatouille."



"THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL"



"FORBIDDEN PLANET"



"THE IRON GIANT"



"HEARTBEEPS"

ZOOM

HEARTBEEPS (1981)

Our plug-in friend: In this notorious flop, Andy Kaufman and Bernadette Peters are service droids that escape to freedom and build a love child out of spare parts — voiced by Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead!

Man or machine: Robotic in the extreme. The movie was so God-awful that it became Kaufman's first and last leading role.

STAR WARS: EPISODE I — THE PHANTOM MENACE (1999)

Our plug-in friend: A minor saving grace of the increasingly digitized and leaden "Star Wars" prequels was the comforting presence of R2-D2 and C-3PO, the Laurel and Hardy of robots.

Man or machine: Both. R2-D2 is pure iBot — up-to-date, clever and highly adaptable; C-3PO is a mechanized bundle of fear, doubt and insecurity so human that he makes us laugh in recognition.

Michael Giltz