

9 (2009)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V- 5; L-1 ; S/N-1. Running Time: 1 hour 19 min.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

...

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves..."

Genesis 6:5 & 11:4a

The title is the name of our hero, a small automated rag doll that seems to have been stitched together by a child using old burlap, a large zipper, and a pair of eyes that seemed to have been snatched from a couple of cameras. Actually 9 (voiced by Elijah Wood) was made by a brilliant scientist in an apocalyptic era just before dying as he brings the little doll to life. At first 9 has no voice, but when he ventures forth to discover a large city in ruins, he meets up with 2 (Martin Landau), who salvages an old speaker and installs it inside 1's body so that he can now speak. Their companionship is cut short by a huge spider-like machine with red glowering eyes that attacks them and

2009 Focus Features

carries off 2. As we meet the various droids, each with a number on its back, we discover that their "names" simply refer to the order in which the scientist had made them.

9 finds refuge in the ruins of a large cathedral where he discovers others also have sought safety. The small band is ruled by 1 (Christopher Plummer), whose broken hat and dogmatic demeanor makes him look like one of the bishops of old who sent heretics to dungeon or stake. He forbids 9 to leave, even though 9 asserts that 2 is alive and could be rescued if they hurry. 1's bulky bodyguard is the not so smart 8 (Fred Tatasciore), always at hand to do his master's bidding, now including the prevention of 9 from leaving. However, 9 manages to sneak away, find 2, but instead of a rescue, the hapless droid sets off a chain of events that could turn the world over to the evil machines that seem to exist only to destroy things.

Director Shane Acker and written Pamela Pettler have crafted a film that is far too dark for pre-school age children—the film deserves its PG-13 rating (Parents strongly warned). Science fiction fans will appreciate the riff on the old Frankenstein theme of humanity over-reaching itself, mixed with the post-apocalyptic and robots with feeling genres. Children who can handle the scary images will love the intense action, and adults will appreciate the continual debate between 9 and 1 over adventurous seeking and risk taking versus certainty and security. The landscapes are beautifully drawn, showing the influences of Hieronymus Bosch and Tim Burton (who is a producer of the film), and the computer-generated figures have a hand-crafted look to them.

Not all of our questions are answered, though an old news reel and a series of news headlines and photos give us a clear enough picture of humanity's last days of inventing ever more

terrible intelligent killing machines, reaching the point at which the machines turned on their makers and, in a poison gas attack, killed all breathing beings. The film's New Age ending will turn some off, though the filmmakers do envision life as consisting of more than the physical. Truly we are living in a grand era of film animation.

For reflection/Discussion 1. These automatons are a bit different from the usual robots, aren't they? Compare them to those in other animated films. How do the materials and their stitched together (literally) fabrication show the dire straits that humanity must have been in when their creator brought them to life?

2. The film suggests that there is more to life than physical existence: what did the scientist put into the machines beyond energy and physicality?

3. What is the basic disagreement between 9 and 1. What does each stand for? How are the views of 1 like the stance once taken by the church, especially before the Age of Enlightenment? At what point in the film do we see 1 giving up his dogmatism?

4. How is the argument of safety/security versus freedom/risk-taking played out in real life?

5. Where do we see moments of grace in the film? Were you surprised at who gave up his life for the others?

6. What did you think of the ending? If put off by some of it, what about its affirmation of things spiritual?