

The Iron Giant (1999)

Rated PG. Running time: 1 hour 26 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 4; Language 0; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Galatians 5:22-23

Brad Bird, creator of the television series The Simpsons, has given us a wonderful adaptation of British poet Ted Hughes' children's book (known in the U.K, as The Iron Man). With the latter author's blessing he has given the original story an American spin, setting it in the small town of Rockwell, Maine, during the height of the Cold War. Sputnik has been launched. Rock and Roll is on the rise. The Russians have the atomic bomb. Berlin has been under siege. Spies and traitors, so it was believed, are everywhere. Children at school are led through drills to prepare them for an atomic blast. The Cold War antagonism and paranoia are reflected in the media, especially the films depicting ruthless aliens from outer space invading earth.

Single parent Annie works too son Hogarth is always looking out hard as a waitress to participate in for the aliens to come. Thus when an the paranoia, but her imaginative old sailor in the cafe reports that he encountered a huge metal man who fell into the sea, Hogarth is the only one who believes him. Hogarth's beatnik friend Dean defends the old man from the ridicule of the other diners, but it is out of kindness-he does not really believe the wild tale. Hogarth

sneaks off at night and does find something, far more than he had bargained for. The metal man turns out to be 50 foot tall, an Iron Giant. But he is a kindly giant, more like a curious child than a monster-and he is able to talk, mimicking Hogarth's words as the boy points to different objects and giving their name. Realizing the terror that such a creature would cause among the fearful citizens, and mindful that his powerful new friend might be used the wrong way, Hogarth decides to keep his discovery a secret. Eventually he enlists a startled Dean to hide the Iron Giant in the junkyard, which he runs as part of his vocation – Dean is a metal sculpture artist. The Iron Giant has a voracious appetite for metal, so what better place to conceal him? The apprehensive Dean would like to come up with several alternatives.

There are some funny scenes of Hogarth trying to keep the Iron Giant's presence a secret. Rumors start flying about a mysterious creature wandering in the woods. Soon Washington has dispatched the arrogant suspicious agent Kent Mansley to investigate. Hogarth takes an immediate dislike to Mansley, sensing that he is both devious and prone to shoot first and ask questions later. Matters escalate until the military are called out. In their pursuit of the Iron Giant they threaten to destroy the whole town, with Hogarth frantically trying to intervene and get them to listen to reason. It is only through a great sacrifice that annihilation of the town is prevented.

Some good scenes: The two of them encounter a beautiful deer in the woods. Moments later they hear a shot. The Iron Giant is as taken aback, as is Hogarth, when they come upon hunters who have shot the creature. When they see the Iron Giant the hunters yell "It's a monster!" and run away. As they look at the lifeless deer Hogarth tells his friend that guns kill. "It's bad to kill. But it's not bad to die." Hogarth talks with Iron Giant about the soul. Although his belief that the soul is indestructible is more Greek than Hebrew-Christian, it is a rare moment in cartoons, recognizing that we are

spiritual as well as material beings-and suggesting that even a machine, if it possess curiosity, good will, and a conscience, as the Iron Giant apparently does, is more than just a machine. Later, when the Iron Giant is about to use the terrible weapons built into him to wreak havoc upon their enemies, Hogarth pleads with his friend, telling him "You don't have to be a gun. You choose what you want to be." This latter is similar to the message of another fine family film, *The Mighty*

If you liked [*The Day the Earth Stood Still*](#) and [*E.T.*](#), the two films it somewhat resembles, you should enjoy this film. The Iron Giant succeeds well as wholesome family entertainment, with some of its humor and references to the 50's aimed at adults, and its message of love and acceptance directed at all ages.