

Anti-Pesto at your service, ma'am.



LUKE SMITH, DREAMWORKS ANIMATION AND ARDMAN FEATURES, 2005.

Big Screen Debut

Lovable dog and daffy master solve mystery.

WALLACE AND GROMIT: THE CURSE OF THE WERE-RABBIT: Written and directed by Nick Park, Steve Box. Written by Mark Burton and Bob Baker. Produced by Claire Jennings, Carla Shelley, Peter Lord, David Sproxton, Nick Park. Executive producers Michael Rose, Cecil Kramer. Edited by David McCormick, Gregory Perler. Cinematography, Dave Alex Riddett, Tristan Oliver. Music produced by Hans Zimmer. Music by Julian Nott. Supervising animator, Loyd Price. Starring voices by Peter Sallis, Ralph Fiennes, Helena Bonham Carter, Peter Kay, Nicholas Smith. DreamWorks Animation and Ardmann Features, 2005. G. 87 minutes.

Wallace and Gromit are among the most beloved animation characters now working in film, even though *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* is their feature-film debut. The brainstorm of creator Nick Parks, this eccentric pair of clay-animated characters starred in a trio of award-winning short films made and brought to video during the 1990s. I count myself among the delighted grandparents, parents and children who have watched *A Grand Day Out*, *The Wrong Trousers* and *A Close Shave* countless times. The films are available again, and they make the perfect gift for kids — toddlers to junior high — and movie lovers of all ages. Each film is chock-full of references to other films and directors such as Alfred Hitchcock.

For the uninitiated, Wallace, a good-natured, cheese-loving inventor, and Gromit, his silent but wise dog, solve mysteries. Detective work doesn't adequately describe what happens when they try to fix a situation gone wrong, because many times Wallace himself is at least partially to blame. Wallace's crackpot inventions may be untested and dangerous, but, like him, they are cheerful and colorful. Gromit is the fall-guy who must commandeer Wallace's schemes, while Wallace unwittingly fails victim to his own thingamabobs, as when he gets trapped wearing *The Wrong Trousers*, my all-time fave.

Here Wallace and Gromit have formed a company called Anti-Pesto, which employs a series of devices that include giant vacuum cleaner tubes guaranteed to safely capture and humanely treat garden pests, such as marauding rabbits. And for some time, Anti-Pesto preserves the lovely tomatoes, zucchini, pumpkins and other vegetables tenderly grown in the village by people anxiously awaiting the Giant Vegetable Competition. One benefit customers of Anti-Pesto's pest-

control protection receive is the company's early warning system, another series of linked contraptions, including lights and alarms. These wake Gromit, who wakes Wallace in the middle of the night whenever there's trouble in the pea patch.

Also central to later Wallace and Gromit adventures is a damsel in distress, such as the unforgettable Wendolene Ramsbottom of *A Close Shave*, a character created by Park's directorial and writing team partner, Steve Box. Here it's Lady Tottingham (Helena Bonham Carter), who has a soft spot for bunnies. Her ladyship's distress stems from the antics of boorish Victor Quartermaine (Ralph Fiennes), who would rather blast the burrowing rodents into next week with his trusty hunting rifle than help them live another day to frolic on Lady Tottingham's lawn.

Victor is a trifle taken with himself, and he falls into a snit when he realizes that humble Wallace seems to be making inroads with the lady he hopes to marry for her money. Wallace has a weakness for proper ladies, but an ingrained class barrier prevents him from expressing his affections directly.

If you are a dog lover, you will be unable to resist Gromit, who furrows his brow, rolls his eyes, and continues to pick up after Wallace. Gromit carries scene after scene with no more than the tiniest changing motion of his head, the position of his ears, the worry lines of his expressive brow and the deep pools of his intelligent eyes. Despite being unable to speak (or bark), Gromit is perfectly understood by even the youngest among us, as well as by non-English speakers. His is a universal language.

Wallace, on the other hand, talks all the time — to Gromit, to himself — and his distinctive voice is that of veteran actor Peter Sallis, who has spoken for Wallace since his inception in *A Grand Day Out* in 1989. Parks said he learned how to make Wallace's face move by how Sallis "formed his vowels and said words like 'cheese and crackers.' ... I let Peter's voice dictate to me how Wallace looked, and it evolved from there."

The Curse of the Were-Rabbit is now playing at Cinemark and Cinema World, and it's not just for the tots. Come one, come all. Celebrate!

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