

## Film Review: Frank Langella Shines in Delightful Sci-Fi Comedy 'Robot and Frank'

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on August 24, 2012 - 8:42am

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CHICAGO – Frank's world is fading before his eyes. With his wife gone and his children all grown up, Frank lives a reclusive existence, though he doesn't seem to be in particular need of company. His memory may be fading, but his instincts as a retired cat burglar are still ever-present. He can't help stuffing a few soap figurines into his pockets while casually browsing through a store.



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

This is a plum role for Frank Langella, the wonderfully understated actor capable of projecting a sly intelligence even in his most delusional state. There are echoes here of Leonard Schiller, the aging novelist Langella played in 2007's woefully overlooked treasure, "Starting Out in the Evening," in which he found enriching companionship in the unlikeliest of forms. Yet in Jake Schreier's Sundance prizewinner, "Robot & Frank," Langella is paired with a far more unusual screen partner.



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Rather than place him in a nursing home, his dedicated yet oft-exasperated son, Hunter (James Marsden), forces him to accept the gift of an unnamed robot (voiced by Peter Sarsgaard) that will function as a butler of sorts. Yet Frank soon realizes that the robot is in fact a "health care" aid designed to improve his cognitive functions, and it isn't long before the mechanical vexation starts waking him up early to plant a garden. Sarsgaard's voice is utterly unrecognizable, and emulates the deadpan timing of Douglas Rain's iconic HAL 9000 while draining it of its malevolent edge. "Robot," as it's referred to in the film, doesn't appear to have plans for world domination, primarily because they weren't programmed into it. When it's invited to engage in small talk with a fellow robot, all they can think to say to one another is, "I'm functioning normally." Even Robot's pleas for Frank to cooperate with it, for fear of being junked, are simply activated to manipulate the man's emotions, since the machine has none. Robot isn't a friend so much as it is a catalyst for Frank to reconnect with the universe, for better and worse. His begrudging affection for the artificial creature grows all the more once he realizes that it has no knowledge of what's considered lawful behavior (a major glitch that's more than a little far-fetched). Thus, Frank proposes to Robot a new way of improving his cognitive functions: pull off a heist.

*'Robot and Frank' stars Frank Langella, Peter Sarsgaard, Susan Sarandon, James Marsden, Liv Tyler and Jeremy Strong. It was written by Christopher D. Ford and directed by Jake Schreier. It opened August 24th at the Landmark Century Centre Cinema and the Landmark Renaissance Place. It is rated PG-13.*



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Frank Langella stars in Jake Schreier's Robot and Frank.

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