Earlier this summer, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas made waves throughout Hollywood when they predicted that the long-standing practice of charging the same ticket price for every movie would soon give way to a tiered pricing model that would radically divide movies between big-budget action blockbusters (for which you'd pay Broadway-level premium prices) and less costly dramas (for which you'd pay a fraction of the blockbuster price). Talking at a panel discussion at the University of Southern California, Lucas said Broadway-style pricing would allow some movies to linger in theaters for up to a year, while Spielberg specified, "You're gonna have to pay $25 for the next Iron Man, you're probably only going to have to pay $7 to see Lincoln."
Here's the thing: The Broadway-level premium ticket is already here.

Paramount tested it out this summer on *World War Z*, making the $50 "mega-ticket" available at five theaters across the country. For that price, you got to see the movie two days before it opened, in 3D, a pair of *World War Z* custom RealD 3D glasses, a limited-edition poster, a high-definition digital copy of the movie (once it becomes available), and a small popcorn.

Bells and whistles aside, then, what the mega-ticket was good for was seeing a sneak preview in 3D. Is that something people want badly enough to spend $50 on it?

Apparently, yes. According to *Variety*, four of the five theaters involved in the promotion sold out, and the fifth filled 80 percent of the house. That doesn't mean they'd get the same results nationwide, or on every movie, but the numbers are encouraging enough that we'll surely see other studios trying the same tactic on other "event movies" before the year is out.

Maybe it's hard for the average moviegoer to imagine spending 50 bucks on a ticket for a film you'll be able to watch at home for a tenth of that in three months. But the theaters are really trying to sell you on the once-common but now increasingly rare experience of being immersed in a movie showing on a larger-than-life screen in a darkened room in the company of fellow fans.

That's one reason theaters have been moving to enhance that experience, whether with 3D and IMAX, with motorized seats that jerk and pitch in accompaniment with the action on screen, or with upscale food and liquor. (The latter option has the added benefit of keeping out screaming kids, texting teens, and anyone else under 21.) A ticket at Brooklyn's Nitehawk Theater, where a classic movie might be accompanied by a thematically-related menu of gourmet food and wine, can set you back as much as $95 per person.

At those prices, moviegoing becomes an elitist experience, something qualitatively different from watching a movie that shrinks as it follows you from your living room to your tablet to the palm of your hand. Instead of an experience to which you abandon yourself, it'll be an experience you abandon and take up again at your convenience, when you have a few moments of free time. Having the time and the wherewithal to go to a specific place and surrender yourself to a movie for two hours will become a luxury.

There's some irony in the complaint about premium pricing for blockbusters coming from Spielberg and Lucas, who have done more than anyone, however inadvertently, to shape the current Hollywood model that would rather make event movies or nothing at all. Still, these are two of the most populist filmmakers in history, and it would be a shame if even they can't figure out a way back to a more democratic model of exhibition, one that preserves for everyone the kind of Saturday matinee experience that inspired both men to become filmmakers in the first place.