

Film Review: 'Surrogates' deserves a replacement

by **Zachary Drucker**

Tufts Daily
U-Wire Content

Let's try a simple exercise: Rack your brain and try to remember watching "The Matrix" (1999) and "I, Robot" (2004). Now, slowly strip away all the riveting and aesthetic scenes of these two films and voila! You have basically seen Bruce Willis' latest film, "Surrogates."

"Surrogates" attempts to creatively critique society's reliance on technology but succumbs to numerous plot gaps and abysmal acting.

Director Jonathan Mostow's latest sci-fi thriller follows agents Greer (Bruce Willis) and Peters (Radha Mitchell), two detectives on the hunt for the murderer of two people and their "surrogates," manufactured by Virtual Self, Inc. (VSI). Based on the eponymous comic book series created by Robert Venditti and Brett Weldele, "Surrogates" takes place in a near future in which civilians ditch their unappealing, actual images for perfect, durable surrogate bodies. These surrogates, highly technological robots that humans can control with their minds, allow people to sit at home and avoid the dangers of the everyday world.

Greer and Peters' search leads them to the discovery of a weapon that can kill surrogates and their operators by bypassing a failsafe system and literally "frying" human brains. Ditching his surrogate, Greer takes to the streets as a "meatbag" to infiltrate the Dreads' society: a quarantined, autonomous city where humans who denounce the use of surrogates reside. Greer's search leads him to implicate The Prophet (Ving Rhames), the leader of the Dreads. But with most people donning an alternate identity, the murderer could be anyone.

The film's plot is plagued by inexplicable holes that leave the audience members disoriented and confused. Plus, the idea of surrogates assumes that most human beings are acne-ridden hypochondriacs who would rather lie at home in pajamas than experience life firsthand.

The film also never confronts the reasons for VSI's dismissal of Dr. Lionel Canter (James Cromwell), the original creator of surrogates. (As a side note, James Crom-

well essentially reprises the stale role of the robot inventor, Dr. Alfred Lanning, that he portrayed in "I, Robot.") Finally, the film openly contradicts itself: It defines surrogates as only responding to the DNA and neurotransmitters of their specific owners, but it then allows foreign human operators to occupy others' surrogates.

With a running time of only 88 minutes, "Surrogates" does not have nearly enough action to sate the thirsts of the average moviegoer. Aside from one scene in which a one-armed, gun-toting Greer surrogate chases after a meatbag suspect, the film is virtually devoid of explosions, crashes, combat and the like. Compound that lack of action with all-around substandard acting, and audience members will question whether the film is a lackluster thriller or a depressing comedy.

In his first film since 2003's "Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines," Mostow fritters away a seemingly interesting plot and the promise of a comic book fan base by resorting to Hollywood clichés in a fatal effort to please audiences. His protagonist, Greer, mourns a dead son who was killed in the age before surrogates and has a depressed and distant wife who is overly attached to

her surrogate.

Neither Willis nor Mitchell does Mostow any favors, as Willis proves unable to earn the audience's sympathy through a passionless, robotic performance that rivals the emotionless of the surrogates themselves. Not even Willis' sandy-blonde locks and "Benjamin Button" anti-aging cream can help him salvage his deteriorating acting skills. Similarly, Mitchell provides a forgettable portrayal as Willis' partner surrogate, which becomes occupied by several different human operators throughout the film.

Perhaps the most heinous crime committed by "Surrogates" is that it squanders the opportunity to exploit a dreadlocked Ving Rhames as The Prophet. In his first collaboration with Willis since "Pulp Fiction" (1994), Rhames is only featured in several scenes and is wholly underutilized. Despite several unexpected plot twists, the movie is hackneyed and uninspiring, falling well short of most preceding comic book adaptations. "Surrogates" leaves the movie industry aching for more innovative science-fiction thrillers like the recent "District 9" (2009) and makes viewers wonder how much longer Willis can be typecast as the macho, stoic action hero.

The Clarion

Senior Staff

Editor in Chief:	Travis Wireback	Managing Editor:	John Climer
News Editor:	Open	Copy Editor:	Open
Business Editor:	Open	Layout & Design:	Travis Wireback
Opinion Editor:	Open	Photo Editor:	Marc Newton
Arts & Life Editor:	Open	Business Manager:	Emily Clark
Sports Editor:	Open	Faculty Advisor:	John B. Padgett

Other Staff

Karam Boeshaar	Nina Willis	Thomas Lide
Dabney Farmer	Anne Bolos	Christopher Shirey
Richard Bush		

Unsigned editorials represent the collective opinion of the staff of *The Clarion*. Other opinions expressed on this page are those of respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the faculty, staff or administration of Brevard College.

Letters Policy

The Clarion welcomes letters to the editor. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and content. All letters intended for publication must be signed.

All correspondence should be mailed to:

The Clarion, Brevard College, One Brevard College Drive, Brevard, NC 28712