

Movie's 'mercury' rises only so far as average action fare

■ Miko Hughes, 12, makes the most of his role as an autistic computer hacker.

Picture what it would have been like if people were out to kill Dustin Hoffman's autistic character in "Rainman." Now, make that character 9 years old, and it's "Mercury Rising." Bruce Willis ("Die Hard") stars as

Art Jeffries, a single, delusional undercover FBI agent who has been demoted for being too big for his britches. Sound familiar?

See any "Die Hard" film and see Willis portraying the exact same character. At least we know he can do it con-

WILL KIMMEY

Movie Review
"Mercury Rising"



vincingly and that he always looks so cool with a cut on his forehead and blood streaming down his brow.

Miko Hughes is Simon Lynch, the aforementioned autistic child with a predilection for puzzles. He solves a big one in deciphering the nation's top-secret security code, called Mercury, and Jeffries is the only one who can save him from National Security agent Nicholas Kudrow, played by the always cunning Alec Baldwin ("Malice").

Once Baldwin finds out that the child has broken the code, he goes to great lengths to prevent the child from getting into the wrong hands — this includes murdering his parents and attempting to murder him.

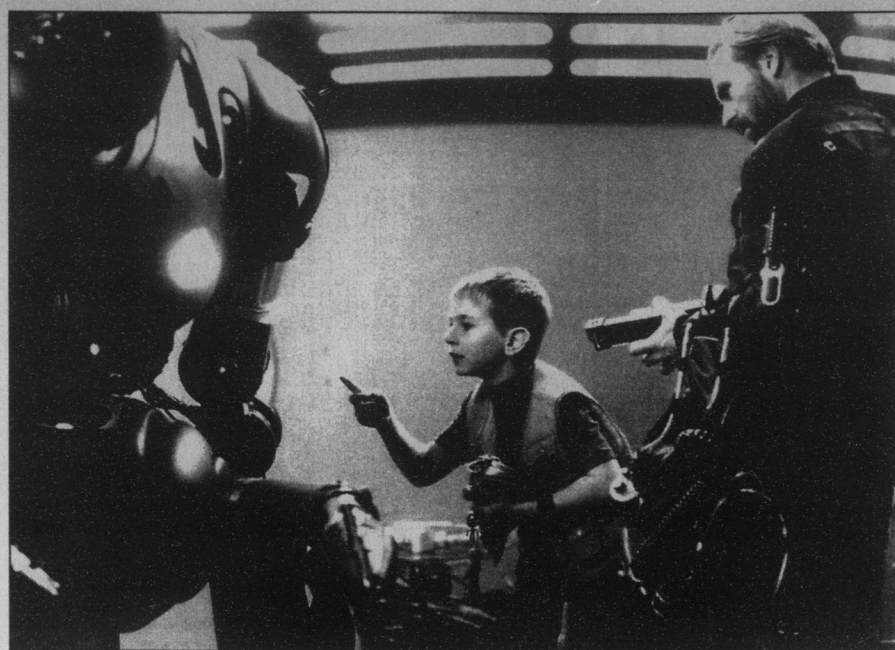
As the story unfolds, it becomes one where you basically know what is going to happen, just not how it will actually go down. Jeffries and Simon narrowly escape several attempts on their lives by government in such places as a hospital, the freeway and a train. The dialogue is rather hokie at times, and Willis and Baldwin tend to overact their parts.

Twelve-year-old Hughes, however, steals the show. He proves that he has come a long way from his "Boys have a penis, girls have a vagina" days alongside Arnold Schwarzenegger in "Kindergarten Cop."

I know the Academy rarely looks at such young actors for its awards, but the performance Hughes gives is first-rate, especially for someone so young. Of course, Anna Paquin did win for "The Piano," didn't she?

Maybe he will win, after all, the Academy has been kind to actors portraying people with mental handicaps. See Hoffman in "Rainman," Tom Hanks in "Forrest Gump" and, most recently, Jack Nicholson in "As Good As It Gets." Hughes might see hundreds of scripts coming his way very soon.

Despite the flick's shortcomings—which include a scene that is "deathly" similar to the end of "Die Hard"—it is still worth seeing, at least as an afternoon matinee price. Also, like several other films these days, it is based on a novel, Ryne Douglas Peardon's "Simple Simon," which is probably better. But who really reads books, anyway?



"Danger Will Robinson," is the quote of the hour with "Lost in Space." Tawdry, at best, the movie runs the gamut from cheesy camp to special effects extravaganza while never settling on one genre.

Bad sci-fi falls into black hole; 'Space' suffers from bad plot

Hollywood's obsession with doomed ships took itself to an abysmal low with "Lost in Space," which sorrowfully didn't have a Celine Dion ballad to help conjure up any emotion.

The convoluted, special-effects-laden voyage of the famed Robinson family trips over itself, stalling every 15 minutes or so — a clear sign screenwriter Akiva Goldsman had no clue what to do with the family once in space.

The robot's wail of "Danger, Will Robinson" could not have been more fitting with this movie slated as a sci-fi extravaganza. Reduced to a collective goo of camp, action-adventure with a smattering of romance and melodrama all drawn loosely together with elements of rudimentary science fiction, the movie never completely takes off.

Director Stephen Hopkins ("The

Ghost and the Darkness") guides this big cinema faux pas where the action seemingly never stops, but by the movie's end, nothing has happened.

Based on the campy television show of the 1960s, "Lost in Space" is the tale of the Robinson family and its quest to jettison off from Earth toward Alpha Prime, a far-off planet in another galaxy.

Alpha Prime is the only hope for human civilization, which has polluted Earth to its end, and to survive, Alpha Prime was found for colonization. The problem is: a) the planet is light years away, so the Robinson journey is really long; b) they have to build an ultra scientific "hypergate" for quick space travel; c) there are space terrorists trying to sabotage the family; and of course, d) the Robinson family is utterly dysfunctional and falling apart from all sides.

But Hopkins' haphazard directing style plagues the film. Scenes jump around constantly, completely disorienting the viewer and causing a rift in

the continuity of the already weak story.

The actors (Matt LeBlanc as Major West excluded, of course) cannot be blamed for their turns-for-the-worst.

William Hurt, as Professor Robinson, has not made the best of films lately, but he was in "Broadcast News" and "The Big Chill." He knows good cinema; he misread this script. Mimi Rogers as Maureen Robinson plays the concerned mother, in character as possible, for her restless kids.

Heather Graham ("Boogie Nights") plays the science-first-guys-later doctor and brightens up the movie with a spunky performance. The other kids Lacey Chabert (of television's "Party of Five") is an annoying, bratty teen, and Jack Johnson gives a somewhat impressive performance as the whiz-kid Will.

Rounding out the cast is Gary Oldman as Dr. Smith — as generically evil as his common name suggests.

The worst thing about this film is the blatant absurdity of the cliffhanger at the movie's end. Leaving the end in question assures that Hopkins will pitch New Line Cinema for a sequel. This show is not redeemable enough in itself to warrant a sequel. But, the box office receipts and the marketing ploys will tell the real future of the Robinson family.



Bruce Willis plays yet another cop-like character attempting to save innocent people in distress. This time it is Miko Hughes, an autistic computer whiz.

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