Another fall, another Bruce Willis Sci-Fi action film, this one called "Surrogates". The plot line takes us to the "not so distant future", where robotic technology has evolved so much that humans can now stay indoors 100% of the time, using their "surrogate" robot to interact for them. We sent The Mitch Man out to the theater to check this one out for our readers, and he ended up handing out a rating to it that he rarely doles out. Mitch reviews "Surrogates" for our readers.

In the latest Bruce Willis Sci-Fi action film "Surrogates", we receive another positive re-enforcement of the well known adage that movies released in September...almost without fail, stink.

Now it's not quite the level of stink of say...the other two movies released last week ("Fame" and "Pandorum"), or the epitome of Suck at the moment: the Cleveland Browns...but it is still nonetheless a huge disappointment. More so because there is such a wonderful concept to explore here, and the director and producer completely whiffed on the possibilities.

In the "not so distant future", robotic technology has evolved so much that humans can now stay indoors 100% of the time, using their "surrogate" robot to interact for them. The robots are not even

remotely sentient...they are strictly a three dimensional version of a virtual video game; one in which the operator feels everything that happens to the surrogate (short of extreme pain...at least for the most part).

Due to this wonderful advancement, everyone has become the Ultimate Couch Potato, never leaving their homes, never directly interacting with other humans, never "growing old", at least in their appearance to the outside world. Since no one is risking anything out of doors anymore, there is therefore almost no crime.

At least until some strange weapon is used against a surrogate that also fries the brains of the operator. This brings in FBI Agents Tom Greer (Willis) and Peters (no first name given...played by Radha Mitchell) to investigate. It also begins the process of uncovering the usual, paint-by-numbers conspiracies dealing with crazy inventors, greedy corporations, and corrupt law enforcement.

But wait! We have not yet begun to Cliché!

Next we have to deal with the stereotypical tragic back story to make our hero seem more human. In this case, Greer and his wife Maggie (Rosamund Pike) are still grieving the loss of their young son in an auto accident, which has caused both parents to withdrawal even further into their make-believe worlds, to the point that Maggie will not even allow herself to be seen in real-life by her husband (and when you have a surrogate that looks like Rosamund Pike does...who can blame her?). This development is supposed to make Greer more sympathetic, especially when he's dealing with the crazy old inventor of surrogacy, played by James Cromwell, as the Feds investigate the murder of his son.

What "advanced technology is bad" movie would be complete without smelly rebels who reject the advances of science? Here they are led by the mysterious Rasta-man known only as "The Prophet" (played by Ving Rhames in a really bad Bob Marley wig), and they have their dirty, trash invested

pockets of major cities as their "reservations", that are inexplicably exempt from local laws.

There are so many good movies about the advancements of high technology, and how humankind tries to deal with the advancements. Unfortunately, director Jonathan Mostow can't make up his mind which one he'd like to rip off, so he just borrows bits and pieces from several of them. "Blade Runner", "Minority Report", "A.I.: Artificial Intelligence", "Terminator", "I, Robot"...you get a smorgasbord of similarities, and consequently, nothing original. I guess this shouldn't surprise me, given Mostow's previous work, especially his last feature film, the horrible "Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines", a movie so bad that the producers decided to just pretend it didn't happen when they made the (mediocre) "Terminator: Salvation".

The biggest problem with the movie is that the sci-fi angle is not truly explored. First of all, how could crime really be reduced to near nothing? You still have the "haves and have-nots", at least that is how it is portrayed here. It is logical to expect that without fear of physical harm, some people would be inclined to use their surrogate to obtain things illegally for them. As far as "no murders", do you really expect us to believe that angry/jealous individuals wouldn't be taking their near-indestructible robotic selves to hurt/kill people who have offended them?

In great sci-fi films about the future, such as the aforementioned Blade Runner, Minority Report, and Artificial Intelligence, serious questions are asked regarding how society handles its own evolution due to quantum leaps in technology. Nothing close to that happens in "Surrogates", despite its lame, preachy attempt at sermonizing at the very end.

Maybe the biggest problem is that the surrogates themselves are not the least bit human-like (other than appearance). In other "robot" films, they underlying question is often about the humanity of these mechanical creations.

Even the near-cartoonish "I, Robot" or "Demolition Man" were far superior in that regard. Hell, even WALL-E and the T-100 in "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" have more emotions than the surrogates. But since the robots here are just brainless machines "driven" by the operators, that path cannot be taken. And the logical questions of "how do we exist as a society without real contact" is put onto the back burner by Mostow so that he can squeeze in a few more 10 minute chase scenes, and close-up shots of Bruce Willis' real-life character getting physically used and abused when he has to go out without the use of his surrogate.

Willis does try to make this movie something more than a warmed over version of "The Sarah Conners Chronicles", but there's not much he can do with the lame script. He does fare better than Mitchell, whose performance is about as robotic as her character; Cromwell, whose character is just a crankier version of the role he played in "I, Robot"; or Rhames, who looks to be visibly embarrassed by his ugly wig and ridiculous lines.

All of the holes in logic, and laughably bad dialog could at least be overlooked if the movie was at least half-way entertaining. Such as the aforementioned "Demolition Man", or another Bruce Willis sci-fi flick, "The Fifth Element". But not when the film is just a retread of any standard "corrupt corporation" story that we've seen a thousand times.

In the end, this is a completely forgettable movie that will not only bore you, but will also irk you by making you realize that in more capable hands, this could have been something well worth watching. Instead, I'd almost rather see a rerun of last week's Ravens/Browns game (the watchword here is "almost").

My Rating: Jeff Garcia (1 football). Horrible. Nothing more than unfulfilled hype.

Review Key:

Otto Graham: Over 4 Footballs. HOF quality movie

Bernie Kosar: 4 Footballs. Excellent

Brian Sipe: 3 ½ Footballs. Very Good

Frank Ryan: 3 Footballs. Good

Bill Nelsen: 2 ½ Footballs. OK, I guess. Worth renting.

Kelly Holcomb: 2 Footballs. Disappointingly inconsistent but some bright spots.

Tim Couch: 1 ½ Footballs. Poor. Had potential, but lack of support led to an overall stinker.

Jeff Garcia: 1 Football.

Mike Phipps: ½ Football. "We gave away Paul Warfield for THIS?" level of suck

Spergon Wynn: No Footballs. UberSuckitude personified.