

Surrogates

✖ Touchstone Pictures | Starring Bruce Willis, Ving Rhames, James Cromwell, Radha Mitchell, Rosamund Pike | Rated PG-13

At what point does technology begin to replace the real human experience? Perhaps I'm the wrong person to ask, being the Facebook junkie, Twitter-holic and Wii Sports lover that I am. In *Surrogates*, the latest in a long line of films to tackle the tech-run-rampant theme, moviegoers are presented with this dilemma in a future world inhabited by sleek robots connected remotely to the sloppier, human versions of themselves who "plug in" at home and live daily life vicariously through their robotic selves.

From the beginning, you can tell that Agent Greer (Bruce Willis) is uncomfortable with the trade-off, prompted in part by his wife's refusal to unplug and have any person-to-person contact. As he investigates the first ever surrogate to human homicide, he wades through an anti-surrogate human resistance led by "The Prophet" (Ving Rhames) and a conspiracy involving the corporation supplying the machines (shades of *I, Robot*).

The audience is expected to empathize with his plight, but at the screening I attended, it seemed several people (myself included) were busy caught up in the idea of how far we'd jump and how fast we'd run if we had our own alternate selves: "You can do anything and you won't get hurt." While Greer intensely wrestles with his conscience, I was imagining virtual DeWayne snowboarding down the Swiss Alps. *Surrogates*, you had me at "plug in."

Not to say I didn't have any questions. For one thing, there are a lot of cars in this film. Despite us witnessing surrogates running faster than Flo-Jo at times, these virtual beings travel mostly by automobile. You mean to tell me I have to buy a surrogate and a car for him to ride around in?

Speaking of costs, in this future, 99 percent of the world's population use surrogates. So pretty much everyone in the world can afford one if they want?

No matter how cool and easy it may seem to use surrogates, the ultimate struggle is whether or not to unplug and face reality. Crime in the surrogate world is almost nonexistent and everyone gets along (shades of *Minority Report*). So obviously, there has to be something wrong beneath all of that perfection. The problem, the film supposes, is the addiction to those ageless, shiny, glossy, beautiful surrogates (if you think it's a tad ironic for a Hollywood film to suggest that, welcome to the club).

It's also peculiar that the film is released the same week Honda unveiled its U3-X, a new personal mobility device in the same vein as the Segway but smaller and more affordable. Will the new devices allow its users to go where they can't currently go and be used to their most noble intentions; or will they become a crutch, descending society farther into a technologically augmented existence?

I'm uncomfortable making such a blanket judgment for everyone. But at least for the hour and a half while watching this science fiction thriller, it's an issue you'll both wrestle with and, in most cases, be entertained by.

Surrogates is rated PG-13 for action violence, which is mostly machine related (little blood), brief sensuality, language and a scene of "drug" use (in surrogates world, it's an electrical spark).