



Writing Sample

5 MORE SCI-FI TECHNOLOGIES WASTED BY THEIR OWN MOVIES

List-Based Article by Joseph Dino Galindez

Technology gets a bad rap in many movies. Even in sci-fi settings it goes horribly wrong as often as it goes right. If your experimental spaceship drive isn't opening portals into Hell then your engineered mutant cockroaches are turning into man-eating monsters. Sometimes the villain even uses your own invention to steal your nuclear chest implant.

The lesson seems to be that Science is Bad and that there are things man was not meant to know. But with just a little thought we see how some of those things could make the world a much better place.

5# The Doctor in Frankenstein Saved Dead People's Skills

The Tech

Kenneth Branagh's 1994 film is one of the most faithful adaptations of the classic novel. As in the book, Victor Frankenstein (Branagh) uses science to create life. He is horrified at the creature's appearance, though, and abandons him like an unplanned baby. Terribly hurt, the creature (Robert De Niro) escapes into the world and hides in a barn, where he quickly remembers how to speak, read, and chew the scenery.

Although hideously ugly, Frankenstein's monster is tough and strong. More importantly, he is sensitive, intelligent, and good-natured. He secretly helps the family that owns the barn and is heartbroken when they reject him. He later tracks down his creator and convinces him to make another creature. Despite his misgivings, Victor Frankenstein succeeds.

The Bullshit

Frankenstein, horrified by his creation's appearance, considers it an abomination and a failed experiment. But uncanny valley aside, Frankenstein had produced a being that was disabled neither mentally nor physically. He had succeeded in conquering death, his original goal. And he did this in a lab, with a box of body parts.

For that alone the creature should've been a rock star. Frankenstein could've taken him on tour and made a fortune. And the uses for big, strong, easily-trained humanoids should've been obvious too.

The real kicker is that the creature remembered things about his brain's original owner. Professor Waldman (John Cleese) had been a pioneer in vaccination and Frankenstein's mentor. Thanks to his brain donation, the creature didn't have to learn to speak or read—he already knew. He even recalled how to play the recorder. (The Monty Python sketches would've followed soon after.)

The man had been a doctor, not a musician. It seems likely that the creature would've remembered an entire lifetime of medical training with a little study. He would've been the second Dr. Frankenstein.

Think about the professionals who spend all their lives perfecting their craft, only to be lost to age and illness. It's why education is so important—skilled people keep dying and we constantly need to replace them.

Now imagine a world where no artist, scientist, or heart surgeon is ever lost to society. A world where more people strive to master difficult things, confident the training won't go to waste. It would've been a much richer world, never mind if it was full of uggos.

4# The Med Students in Flatliners Made Psychotherapy Obsolete

The Tech

Flatliners is a 1990 movie about med students giving each other near-death experiences to find out about the afterlife. In this universe, you can have your heart stopped for one minute and still be brought back, with no brain damage and only minor risk.

The four test subjects soon begin to hallucinate. The playboy (William Baldwin) starts seeing the women he videotaped during sex. The former bully (Kevin Bacon) is harassed by a black girl he taunted as a child. The girl (Julia Roberts) is haunted by her father, who committed suicide when she was five. Worst of all, their leader (Kiefer Sutherland) is repeatedly attacked by a boy he killed by accident.

The group realizes that flatlining has brought their sins to the surface. The four try to make amends. William Baldwin's girlfriend finds the videotapes and dumps him, Kevin Bacon apologizes to the black girl (now grown up), and Julia Roberts learns she was not actually at fault for her father's suicide. And it takes another near-death experience, but Kiefer Sutherland makes peace with the dead boy and everyone is able to move on. Except for Oliver Platt, because he didn't go under.

The Bullshit

The four uncovered their deep-seated issues and resolved them in just a few days. Not a single therapist was in sight—there wasn't even a licensed doctor on hand. They saved on hundreds of hours of couch time with only the resources available to med students.

Sure, the experience is painful and scary, but the cure is fast, cheap, and permanent—those ghosts will never bother you again once you've banished them. We can easily see people taking this route rather than go through years of therapy.

It's true that the treatment can cause you to hallucinate, Fight Club-style, and then try to kill yourself, but that's what padded cells are for.

3# The Shrink Ray in Honey, I Shrank the Kids Revolutionized Travel, Solved World Hunger

The Tech

In this 1989 film, a stay-at-home inventor (Rick Moranis) develops a shrink ray that accidentally miniaturizes his two kids plus two from next door. The device works so well that the four suffer no ill effects from being a quarter-inch tall. The inventor accidentally sweeps them up and deposits them in the garbage can.

In an epic journey that takes the kids across the entire backyard, they encounter a gigantic bee, a flood caused by the lawn sprinklers, and a murderous scorpion. They are nearly killed by the lawnmower, and one of them is almost eaten with a spoonful of cereal. Eventually they return to normal and the film ends with Rick Moranis showing that the shrink ray can also enlarge things... We're talking about turkeys.

The Bullshit

A shrink ray that runs off household electricity, ignores the square/cube law and physics in general, and whose effects are safe and reversible. Who wouldn't want one of those? The applications are endless, from giving yourself more closet space to eliminating the need for construction equipment. Who needs a crane or a bulldozer when you can be a hundred feet tall?

The movie illustrates the two main ways the shrink ray would change the world. Although the four children are miniaturized, they don't get denser. This means they don't instantly sink into the ground. They're light enough to ride on bees and ants and small enough that a single cookie is a feast. And, of course, they can sleep in a single Lego brick.

Air travel just got much, much cheaper with this technology. So did space travel. And nobody would have to starve anymore. Famine victims could choose to be miniaturized, or else they could live on giant turkey legs and M&M's.

Unfortunately, Rick Moranis and family are only a little better off in 1992's *Honey, I Blew Up the Kid*. In this sequel, set three years after the first film, they only live in a slightly bigger house. It isn't even a cool one, like a dollhouse made full-scale. Instead of earning the inventor billions and transforming the world, the technology only seems to be good for generating sequels.

2# Jurassic Park Advanced Medical Science by Decades

The Tech

In *Jurassic Park* (1993), a billionaire throws money at a problem until it goes away. That problem is not enough dinosaur.

By extracting dinosaur blood from prehistoric mosquitoes in amber, the billionaire (Richard Attenborough) gets enough DNA fragments to clone dinosaurs. Other technical problems are overcome until he fills an entire island with dinosaurs. Planning to turn it into a theme park, he and his investors invite experts to test the experience. There is a paleontologist (Sam Neill), a paleobotanist (Laura Dern), and a deadpan snarker (Jeff Goldblum).

Attenborough assures them that the island is perfectly safe and that nothing could go wrong. Predictably, the park breaks down from a combination of human error, faulty technology, and Jeff Goldblum. The dinosaurs escape, a lawyer is eaten, and a good time is had by all.

The Bullshit

The film ends with the survivors evacuating by helicopter. Attenborough's theme-park dream is in ruins. But fridge logic dictates that he should brighten up when he remembers what else he's achieved.

He brought dinosaurs back to life. And if you can clone a dinosaur, you can clone anything. It's like the Space Race—if you can put a man on the moon, then landing a nuke on the next continent is no problem at all.

To start with, getting usable DNA out of 65-million-year-old fossils is certain to benefit forensic science, which involves genetic samples that are nowhere near as old and degraded. What's more, not only did they insert frog DNA, but they also tailored the genome so that every dinosaur was both female and incapable of producing lysine. Both were business measures, like DRM for critters, ensuring that the dinosaurs could neither breed nor survive without special food.

The dinosaurs were not 100% cloned animals. Instead, they were creatures purposely designed to look and act the way people thought dinosaurs should look and act. That's like playing God with a full set of toys.

Naturally, human cloning would be no problem. What's more, with this level of bioengineering you could wipe out genetic disorders and start breeding superhumans.

Finally, the folks at Jurassic Park had turned cloning into a mature technology capable of turning out animals on an industrial scale. How else could they have filled an entire island with single-sex dinosaurs? Richard Attenborough could've just switched to selling panda cubs and dodo eggs.

1# The Teleporter in The Fly Was a Game-Breaker for Shipping, Travel, Medicine

The Tech

David Cronenberg's 1986 classic still has the power to make you queasy. Even in this age of ultra-gory horror films, one man's physical and mental transformation into a fly is as gruesome as ever.

An inventor (Jeff Goldblum) has invented a teleporter. It's not finished yet, and the first attempt at teleporting a live animal result in an inside-out baboon. He persists, however, and succeeds in teleporting another baboon, this time without complications.

Jeff Goldblum's personal life intrudes, unfortunately, and he makes the drunken decision to be the first human test subject. A fly gets into the telepod with him and the machine combines them into a single being.

All is well at first. The experience has enhanced his strength, stamina, and sex drive, and he mistakenly believes that the telepod computer has "purified" his body. Then the changes take a sinister turn. He begins to shed body parts, replacing them with insectoid features. He sheds his humanity, gets in another teleporter accident, and has to be mercy-killed by his terrified girlfriend.

The Bullshit

The movie ends on a sad note, but there's no denying that the teleporter worked. The entire mess could've been prevented if Goldblum had gone public even as early as the beginning of the film.

At first the teleporter only worked with inanimate objects like stockings, but even at that point it does so economically. It runs off city power, and the bill can't be too much because Goldblum says he has no problem being funded because he's "not expensive." Right there you have an instantaneous way of transporting raw material or finished goods. It's exactly what you need when you have to move a ton of gold safely or move a case of vaccine quickly.

The first animal trial doesn't go well, but the second one does. At that point he could have told the world and it would've stuffed his ears with money. With more resources, he could've easily worked out the bugs (heh). The fly problem? He could've solved it with a smarter computer program or a goddamn airlock.

Finally, if the computer were smart enough to create something that was half-fly, half-human, it would've been an excellent medical tool. You could probably cure many people just by merging them with healthy tissue samples. Hell, you could probably go right ahead and just tell the computer to make new men out of them. Just because an invention turns its creator into a misshapen alien horror doesn't mean it's worthless.

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