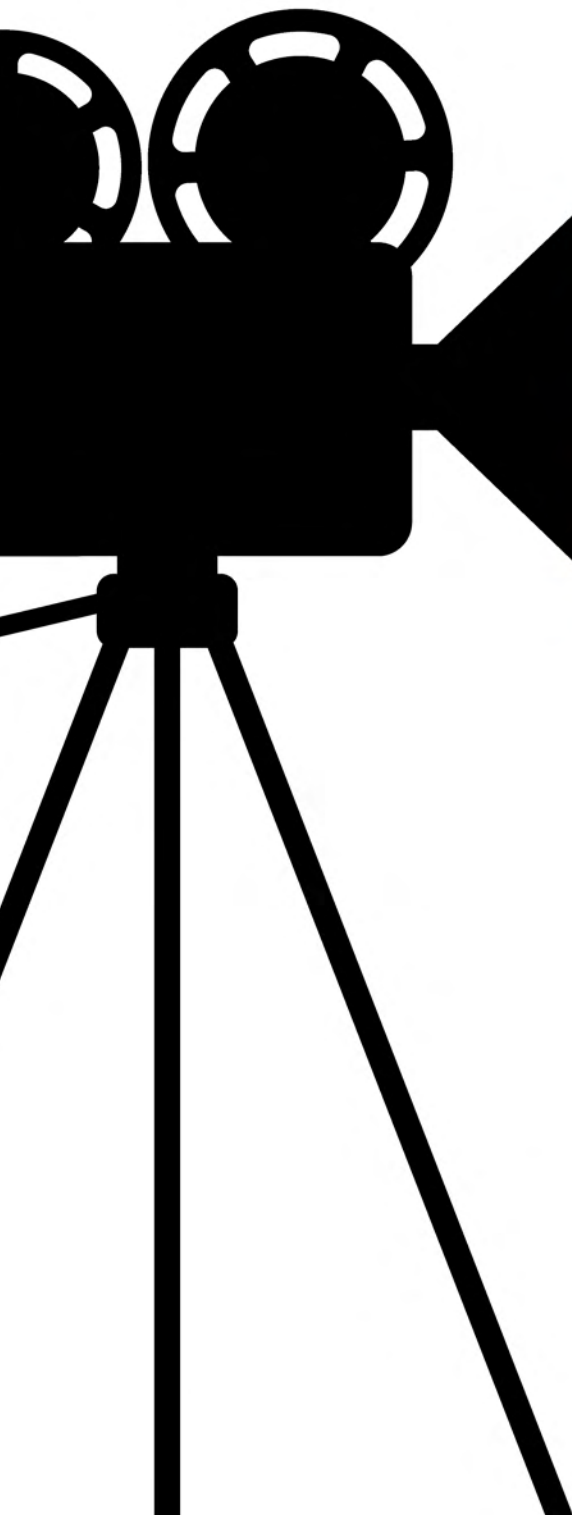


Stanisław Lem is one of the most famous Polish prose writers. His novels and short stories have been translated into over 40 languages, and the entry "Stanisław Lem" on Wikipedia is available in 69 languages, dialects, and language varieties. The stories constructed by Lem take readers to very different, not always wonderful, but always extraordinary worlds.



AN AUTHOR WHO HATED MOVIE ADAPTATIONS OF HIS BOOKS



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Today, we also know that Lem was an exceptionally far-sighted writer: “Spent the afternoon in a bookstore. There were no books in it. None had been printed for nearly half a century. [...] The bookstore resembled, instead, an electronic laboratory. The books were crystals with recorded contents. [...] They could be read with the aid of an opton. It was similar to a book but had only one page between the covers. At a touch, successive pages of the text appeared on it. But optons were little used, the sales-robot told me. The public preferred lectons – lectons read out loud, they could be set to any voice, tempo, and modulation (S. Lem, *Return from the Stars*).

In this short excerpt of Lem's novel which, what should be emphasized, was written in 1961 (sic!), not only can we see today's fully-fledged e-books, but the author also accurately predicts the domination of audio content over writing, and the quoted excerpt is just one of the numerous examples showing that Lem was not only an excellent writer but also possessed an extraordinary gift of observation, thanks to which he was able to create alternative, quite attractive worlds.

How is it then possible that we still have not seen a Marvel blockbuster in the form of a movie adaptation of the novels by this extremely popular science fiction author? The answer to this question is very simple: Stanisław Lem chronically hated films based on his texts and treated every adaptation as a sacrilege. The only adaptations he recalls with a positive feeling are those that were never made. “I made the best deal with the Americans in the late 1960s. At that time, Michael Rudesone bought the rights from me to produce *The*

Invincible. I believe *The Invincible* is a work that could look very well on the screen. It is spectacular, has an amazing scenery: flying clouds of insects. However, the production of such a film would have to cost a fortune, and it would be a commercially risky project. Therefore, Rudesone spent four years unsuccessfully looking for producers, while paying me considerable royalties due for option extensions. After all, the film wasn't made, and it would probably be terrible, but I earned a lot. Nice memories.” (source: www.lem.pl)

“Terrible” is one of the milder words Lem used with regard to “his” movies. So let us take the risk and make a brief overview of the most famous screen adaptations of Stanisław Lem's prose in the eyes of its author (the screen adaptations were discussed in a famous interview conducted with the writer in 2000 by film critic Łukasz Maciejewski): *The Silent Star* (a Soviet version of *Solaris*): trash and socialist realist ugliness; “On the set of this film, I was so angry that I stomped my feet and yelled to Tarkovsky: You, durak (fool)!; *Inquest of Pilot Pirx*: cheap and boring; *Hospital of the Transfiguration*: “all I saw on the screen was a variety of elementary nonsense”; *Professor Tarantoga's Expedition*: “You should thank God you didn't have to watch this.” Lem also completely distanced himself from the most successful film adaptation of his prose, the American version of *Solaris*. Actually, the “parting” with the work took place with the consent and even encouragement of the producers. “The more the American side becomes involved in a project, the thicker is the contract restricting the author's rights to interfere, and the thought that

forty screenwriters decompose my text doesn't give me much satisfaction. At this point, I'm not even allowed to have a look at the text of this script. I'm not allowed, but I also don't want to, because I'm afraid that after reading this, I'd probably go crazy on the spot.” Actually, the only film that the writer accepted is the short movie *Przekładaniec* (translated to English as *Layer Cake*, *Hodge Podge*, or *Roly Poly*) directed by Andrzej Wajda. However, the approval comes from the fact that it was Lem who wrote the script for the adaptation.

Was it the writer's character that did not permit any changes in the texts he had written, or was Lem unaware of film language rules and did not want to come to terms with the framework of the audiovisual translation process, including the sometimes necessary interference with the content? Probably not. Perhaps it was rather the directors and screenwriters who did not want to accept that Lem's faithfully screened texts would actually bring the best results and profits. “The biggest problem of contemporary science fiction is [...] infantilism. For years, all those poor scriptwriters have not been able to tell anything new except space wars and sinister visitors from an alien planet, and this seems increasingly boring, monotonous and stupid to me,” Lem said, and it is impossible not to agree with him. 20 years after this interview was conducted, not much has changed... What would an ideal movie production based on Stanisław Lem's novel look like? Let us hope that someday we will finally find out, although the writer himself would certainly consider this currently non-existent film as garbage unworthy of his work.