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INFO-I 101

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Technology on Screen: Agent Cody Banks

*Agent Cody Banks* is a 2003 action film starring Frankie Muniz as Cody Banks and Hilary Duff as Natalie Connors. The film begins at Cody’s home just before he heads off for school. Cody leaves for school on his skateboard and encounters a runaway car. He stops the car, attracting the attention of the CIA. A CIA agent then meets with Cody to discuss the possibility of him becoming a Junior Secret Agent. Cody agrees, and they head to the CIA headquarters. There, Cody is given his mission: get close to prep student Natalie Connors to gain intel on her father’s nanobot technology. To help him along the way, he is given a pair of X-ray glasses, an electrocuting watch, a holographic cell phone, and a versatile MP3 player. Cody is then transferred to Natalie’s prep academy and enrolled in all her classes. He has a number of awkward encounters with Natalie, but he gets her attention when he saves her from falling off a ladder. She invites him to her birthday party, giving him an opportunity to investigate her father’s lab. At the party, Cody discovers that Natalie’s father’s research is being controlled by a man named Dr. Brinkman who plans to use the nanobot technology to destroy the world’s defense systems. Natalie is later kidnapped by Dr. Brinkman’s men. Cody then steals a rocket snowboard from the CIA and goes to the factory where Natalie is being held. Cody and his CIA handler work together to rescue Natalie and destroy the factory. The team returns home and the film ends.

Out of all the gadgets and technology shown in the movie, only three are feasible and could exist in the future. The remaining gadgets are unrealistic and impractical. To begin, the X-ray glasses given to Cody can only see through clothes, making them unrealistic. However, glasses have been developed that use X-rays to locate veins for IVs, reducing pain for patients and making it easier for nurses to access the vein (Carr). Next, the electrocuting watch is feasible, as shock bracelets are commonly used in addiction therapy. The MP3 player given to Cody is unrealistic because of its extra features. For example, it has a password cracker that works by putting the MP3 player over the lock. The next piece of feasible technology is the skateboard. The only unusual feature of the skateboard is its ability to rotate the wheels by 45 degrees. This is definitely possible, but it is impractical. Another piece of technology is the rocket snowboard. This technology can be recreated, but only in certain situations. The snowboard must remain on the ground or the user would rotate uncontrollably in the air.

2. Some of the technologies portrayed in the movie may seem peculiar or impractical, but explain why they are useful to others like Cody? Do you think of these pieces of technology would be beneficial to you? Why or why not?

As stated before, there are a variety of technologies shown in the movie *Agent Cody Banks*, some of which are realistic and some of which are impractical. For example, the electrocuting watch shown early in the movie doesn’t seem to be very useful, but Cody found himself in the perfect situation to use the watch. As Cody entered his first class with Natalie, he was confronted by a group of bullies. They stole his watch and refused to give it back, so Cody made use of the watch’s limited features. He said, “Whatever you do, don’t press the gray button.” To irritate Cody, the bullies pressed the button, only to get electrocuted. If a watch like this existed in real life, I don’t believe it would be beneficial to many. However, if the electricity was distributed in quick bursts, the watch could be used as an emergency defibrillator. This wouldn’t be applicable to many people outside the elderly but having a defibrillator with them at all times could be the difference in saving their life in time. Although this would be a suitable application of the watch’s features, there is a possibility that the technology could be used in the wrong way (Onesti, “Technoethics”) Defibrillators commonly output a high amount of power, ranging from 4000 to 36000 W (Romanowich). If a child were to get a hold of the watch, they could electrocute themselves which could be fatal.

4. Agent Cody Banks is now over 15 years old and features several technologies that seem advanced at the time. What are some of the “advanced technologies” portrayed in the movie that seem dated now? Explain why the technology seems dated in hindsight. Which current piece of technology do you think will one day seem obsolete in the future? Why do you think that?

There are a variety of gadgets and technologies shown in *Agent Cody Banks*, most of which were futuristic when the movie was released in 2003. However, in the last 15 years, technology has drastically improved, to the point where some of the “futuristic” technologies shown in the movie are now obsolete. For example, Cody was given an MP3 player with multiple features including a strong magnet, a password breaker and a retractable cord that can support the weight of Cody’s body. The design of the MP3 player most closely resembles an Apple iPod 1st Generation, with its blocky design and monochrome display. The movie was released just six years after the first MP3 player, the MPMan F10, was released (Smith). As shown in the movie, the MP3 player had buttons that required affordances, or clues as to how a product or part of a product should be used (Onesti, “HCI”). The MP3 player was current technology, but all the extra features made it seem futuristic. However, if you were to ask a kid nowadays if they knew what it was, they’d have no idea because MP3 players like this haven’t been in use for nearly a decade. The MP3 players they’re familiar with are called iPods, and they have touchscreens and over 5 GB of song storage. They also don’t require affordances on their home, power and volume buttons. As for current technology, I believe that wireless earbuds will become obsolete soon. They’re already being used less and less frequently with the emergence of wireless earbuds and headphones. Once all electronics companies decide to remove the headphone jack altogether, people will be more inclined to purchase a pair of wireless earbuds for convenience.

5. In the movie, Cody wears various technologies that help him on his missions. What are some examples of wearable technologies that help us in our daily lives even if we’re not Junior CIA agents? (Well, most of us.)

Wearable technology has become more and more prevalent in recent years, with the emergence of fitness trackers, smartwatches, and smart glasses. Fitness trackers were some of the first forms of wearable technology to be created, and their sole purpose is to gather information about a person’s movement and health. Although most smartphones now come with a built-in fitness tracker, having a separate wearable allows people to leave their phones somewhere else, preventing any distractions during their workout. Smartwatches also contain fitness trackers, but they have other defining features as well. Most can view and send messages, and some can even play music or games. Smart glasses are a form of wearable technology that aren’t commonly used but are well-known due to their odd aesthetic. The designers of these products had UX in mind rather than UI (Onesti, “HCI”). The most prevalent smart glasses are Google Glass, introduced on April 5, 2012. The purpose of Google Glass was to perform most of the same functions of a smartphone, but hands-free. The glasses worked by projecting an image onto a glass block in front of the eye of the user. The glasses are also capable of taking pictures, tracking faces, scanning QR codes, and taking calls. However, instead of using speakers to output sound, the glasses use a bone conduction transducer, which vibrate the skull bone and send the sound directly to the inner ear (“How Bone Conduction Systems Work”).

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