How *The Karate Kid* Ruined The Modern World
by David Wong

I think *The Karate Kid* ruined the modern world.

Not just that movie, but all of the movies like it (you certainly can't let the Rocky sequels escape blame). Basically any movie with a training montage.

You know what I'm talking about; the main character is very bad at something, then there is a sequence in the middle of the film set to upbeat music that shows him practicing. When it's done, he's an expert.

We have a vague idea in our head of the "price" of certain accomplishments, how difficult it *should* be to get a degree, or succeed at a job, or stay in shape, or raise a kid, or build a house. And that vague idea is almost always *catastrophically* wrong.

Accomplishing worthwhile things isn't just a *little* harder than people think; it's 10 or 20 times harder. Like losing weight. You make yourself miserable for six months and find yourself down a whopping four pounds. Let yourself go at a single all-you-can-eat buffet and you've gained it all back.

So, people bail on diets. Not just because they're harder than they expected, but because they're so much harder it seems unfair, almost criminally unjust. You can't shake the bitter thought that, "This amount of effort *should* result in me looking like a panty model."

It applies to everything. America is full of frustrated, broken, baffled people because so many of us think, "If I work this hard, this many hours a week, I should have (a great job, a nice house, a nice car, etc). I *don't* have that thing, therefore *something* has corrupted the system and kept me from getting what I deserve, and that something must be (the government, illegal immigrants, my wife, my boss, my bad luck, etc)."

I really think Effort Shock has been one of the major drivers of world events. Think about the whole economic collapse and the bad credit bubble. You can imagine millions of working types saying, "All right, I have NO free time. I work every day, all day. I come home and take care of the kids. We live in a tiny house, with two shitty cars. *And we are still deeper in debt every single month.*" So they borrow and buy on credit because they have this unspoken assumption that, dammit, the universe will surely right itself at some point and the amount of money we *should* have been making all along (according to our level of effort) will come raining down.

All of it comes back to having those massively skewed expectations of the world. Even the people you think of as pessimists, they got their pessimism by continually seeing the world fail to live up to their expectations, which only happened because their expectations were grossly inaccurate in the first place.

You know that TV show where Gordon Ramsay tours various failing restaurants and swears at the owners until everything is fine again? Every episode is a great example. They all involve some haggard restaurant owner, a half a million dollars in debt, looking exhausted into the camera and saying, "How can we be losing money? I work 90 hours a week!"

The world demands more. So, so much more. How have we gotten to adulthood and failed to realize this? Why would our expectations of the world be so off? I blame the montages. Five breezy minutes, from sucking at karate to being great at karate, from morbid obesity to trim, from geeky girl to prom queen, from terrible garage band to awesome rock band.

In the real world, the winners of the All Valley Karate Championship in *The Karate Kid* would be the kids who had been at it since they were in elementary school. The kids who act like douchebags because their parents made them skip video games and days out with their friends and birthday parties so they could practice, practice, practice. And that's just what it takes to get "pretty good" at it. Want to know how long it takes to become an expert at something? About 10,000 hours, according to research.

That's practicing two hours a day, every day, for *almost 14 years*.

Don't let me act like I'm some kind of guru here, either. I write boner jokes for a living now, but I'm three years removed from looking at the Classifieds and seriously considering making ends meet with night jobs that would have had me cleaning toilets.

I walked out of college at 22 thinking I was going to be king of the world within a few years. Ten years later I had failed at one career, then failed at another, tried to go back to school twice, accumulated $15,000 in credit card debt, and was working at a job where I was one promotion above high school kids.

I felt like I was working myself to death. Year after year. And even then, *so many things had to break my way* to get what I have now. A company happened to get sold to the right people, a guy happened to quit his job. Another dude died. If those dominoes hadn't fallen in just the right way, instead of Editor of Cracked I'd be behind the counter at Denny's, getting wrestled to the ground by cops because I don't actually work there. Before this happened to come along I had lost hope and lowered my expectations over and over and over and nothing that had happened in my life up to that point prepared me for it. Nobody told me how hard this was going to be.

All I had was fucking Karate Kid.