

Why ‘unnatural’ life probably doesn’t deserve the reputation of Frankenstein

In the standard Frankenstein story, a scientist creates an unnatural monster that breaks out of the lab and runs amok. But why should unnatural make something unstoppable? The contrary is possible, too. Imagine a different story: Frankenstein’s monster escapes, realizes that it can’t survive in the outside world, and retreats back to the lab. This story line may not make for a satisfying movie, but it might be a good goal for real life.

In 2009, a University of Chicago scientist named Malcolm Casabanan got infected by a lab strain of *Y. pestis* and died of the plague. Unfortunately, neither he nor anyone else knew that he suffered from a genetic disorder called hemochromatosis, which caused him to accumulate high levels of iron in his blood. Investigators concluded that his body probably served the same role as an iron-rich lab flask. Inside him, the hobbled bacteria could grow.

Casabanan didn’t die because the engineered *Y. pestis* that infected him was unnatural. The problem was that it wasn’t unnatural enough. That is, it could still find a place in the natural world where it could thrive. Some scientists think a better safeguard would be to create life that is fundamentally unnatural—in other words, that cannot possibly survive without our help, because the natural world is alien to it.

Read full, original article: [Frankenstein Can’t Come Out And Play Today](#)