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The great Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir painted *The Swing* in 1876.

His son, the great filmmaker Jean Renoir, created the delightful *A Day in the Country* sixty years later — which revisits some of the themes and landscape of his father's paintings. A sweet, short & simple feature, about summer and love, with trees in the wind, rain on the river, and a songbird. A historically abandoned film that was rescued.

Pic-a-Flic carries several of Jean Renoir's films, including *A Day in the Country*, *The Rules of the Game*, and *The River*, each in a Criterion edition with extra features.



The Rules of the Game (1939)

A scathing critique of corrupt French society, cloaked in a comedy of manners. Originally banned by the wartime French government for "having an undesirable influence over the young", and regarded by many film critics and directors as one of the greatest films of all time.

"Jean Renoir's masterpiece remains the gold standard against which all ensemble dramas are measured. Renoir juggles a number of major characters and honors each one's perspective, resulting in a group portrait in which every character is sympathetic while remaining poignantly fallible."

— Cine-File



The River (1951)

Jean Renoir's entrancing first colour feature — shot entirely on location in India — eloquently contrasts the growing pains of three young women with the immutability of the holy Bengal River. Martin Scorsese describes his love of this film in [this personal interview](#).

"The River, as celebratory of people as anything ever made, is a triumph. It is not a defense of colonialism. There are no heroes or villains. There is us."

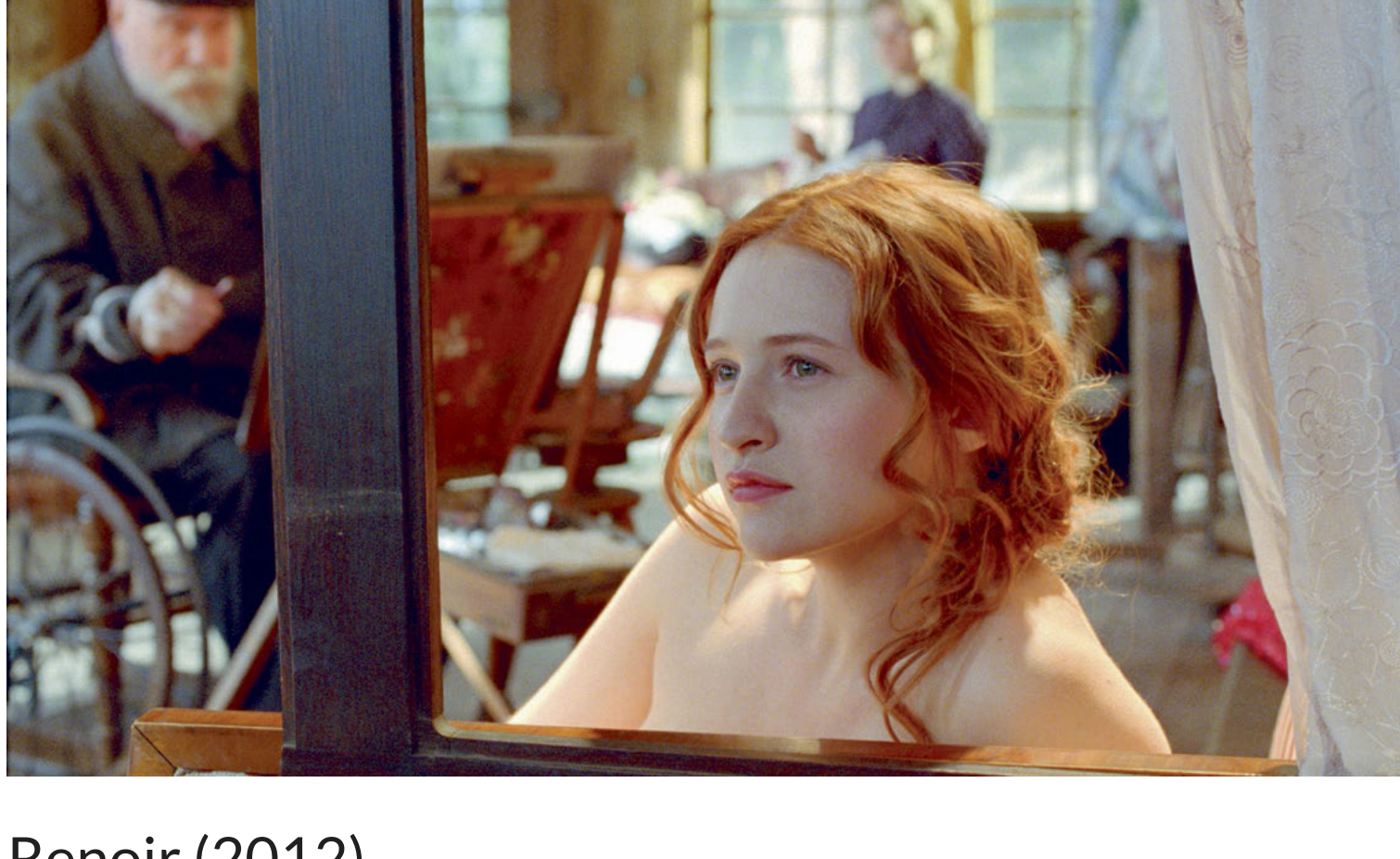
— comment left at Mubi



French Cancan (1955)

Nineteenth-century Paris comes vibrantly alive in this tale of the opening of the Moulin Rouge, by Jean Renoir. François Truffaut called it a milestone in the history of colour of cinema. "Every scene is a cartoon in movement — Madame Guibole's dance class reminds us of a Degas sketch."

The film received the Grand Prix de l'Académie du Cinéma, and Roger Ebert included it in his "Great Movies" list.



Renoir (2012)

The film *Renoir* depicts the relationship between the father, famous painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir — and his son, filmmaker Jean Renoir — and Catherine Hessling (aka Andrée Heuschling), who modelled for Pierre-Auguste in his later years, then married Jean, recently back from WWI. Catherine also starred in Jean's early films.

"With its warm colors and sweet streams of light, its love of both the countryside and the human form, it makes you dream of painting. Or making movies. Or just luxuriating in the brilliance."

— Detroit News

One of [over 800 titles in Pic-a-Flic's French collection](#).



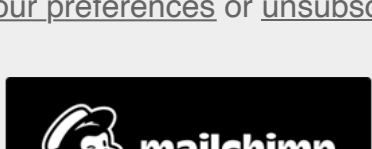
Recent Additions to Pic-a-Flic

- *The Aerialist* (2020)
- *The Bletchley Circle: San Francisco*, season 1
- *The Bureau*, season 5 (French)
- *Coma* (2019, Russian Sci-fi)
- *Death of Me* (2020)
- ***Fleabag*, complete series (pictured above)**
- ***I Am Woman* (1990, Derek Jarman, pictured above)**
- *I Am Woman* Helen Reddy biopic, Blu-ray only)
- *Mulan* (2020)
- *Quiz* (2020 British TV series)
- *Tortilla Flat* (1942)
- *Upside-Down Magic* (2020)
- ***Wonders of Aladdin* (1961, pictured above)**



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Let's continue with the theme of "girlhood" in cinema.

My friend and fellow Pic-a-Flic customer [Margo listed some of her favourite movies that explore "girlhood"](#) in last week's newsletter. In a future newsletter, we'll return for more of her personal favourites.

This week, I'll list some of the films that left a lasting impression on me. Each is "Certified Fresh" from Rotten Tomatoes, not available on Netflix, though available to rent from Pic-a-Flic.

- Emrys Damon Miller,
customer and "guest curator"



Beasts of the Southern Wild (2012)

I thought about this for many days after seeing it, particularly after watching the behind-the-scenes extra featurette that's included on the rental disc. A wild, warm, community-made film. Low-budget, shot on Super 16mm film, with a 6-year-old lead and other non-actors, in a southern Louisiana bayou community.

The result is described so well in a review by the *Eugene Weekly*, that it "has the contradictory, inevitable, glorious feel of a myth, a folk tale about a place that never was but is everywhere, in a time that's entirely now and could have been decades ago."

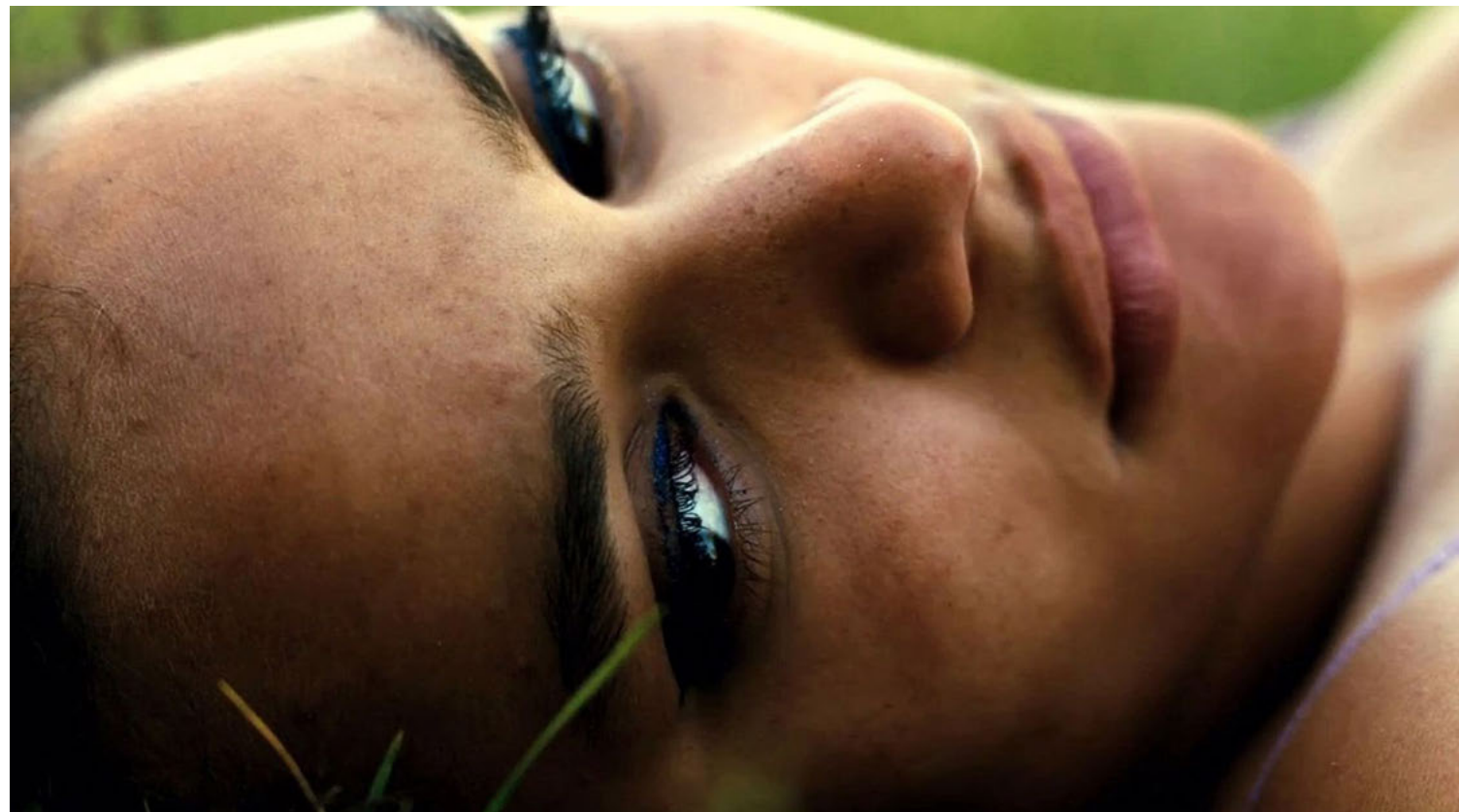
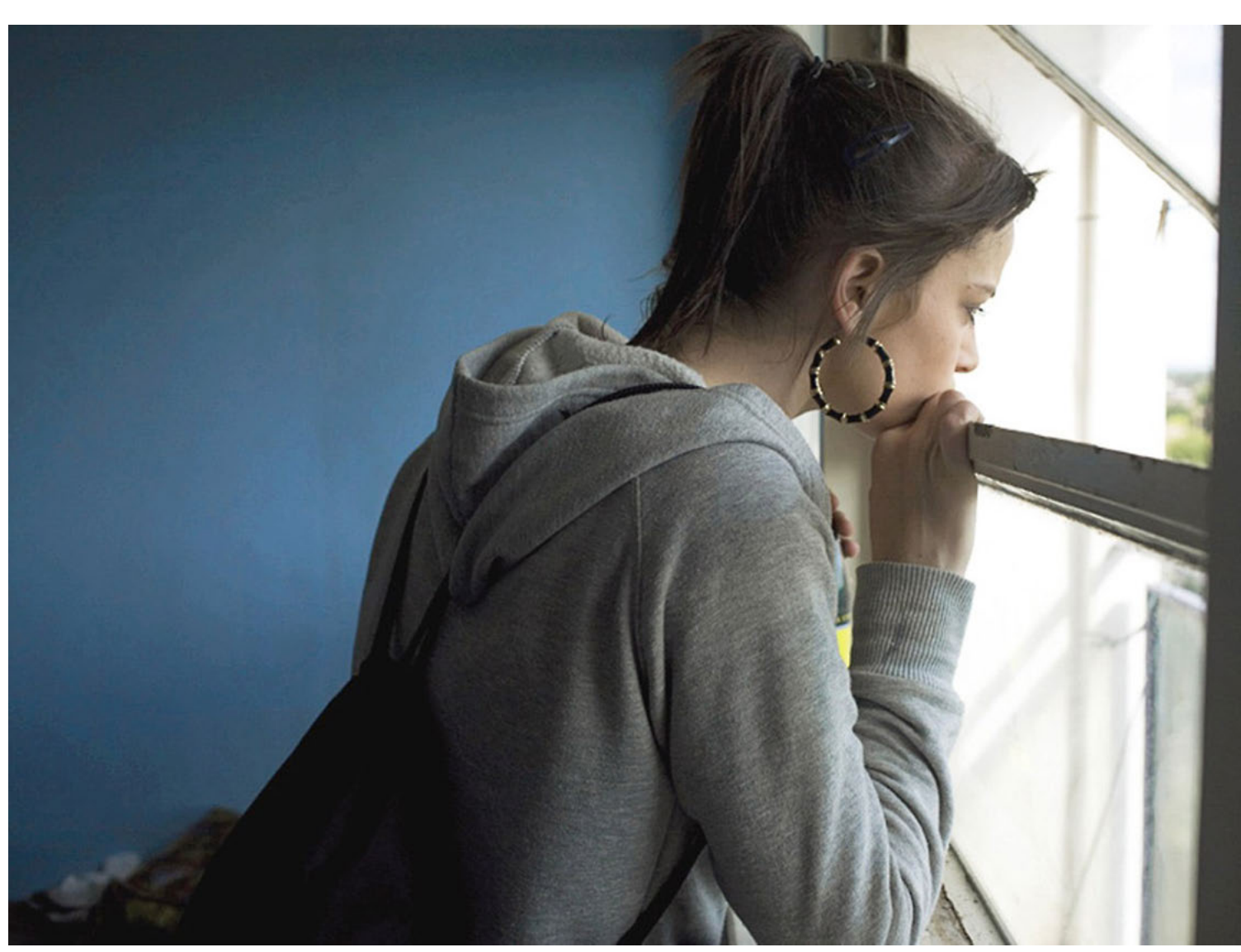
And by Roger Ebert, "Sometimes miraculous films come into being, made by people you've never heard of, starring unknown faces, blindsiding you with creative genius."



Persepolis (2007)

I originally watched this with my (then) 13-year-old daughters, a very interesting movie for our politically-curious Canadian family. This autobiographical story, based on a graphic novel by the same name, follows a young girl as she grows up, against the backdrop of the Iranian Revolution.

Fun, personal, winner of a Cannes Jury Prize, and named by *Empire* magazine as one of the 100 Best Films of World Cinema. The film was initially banned in Lebanon, but released after Lebanese intellectuals criticized the ban.



Fish Tank (2009) and American Honey (2016)

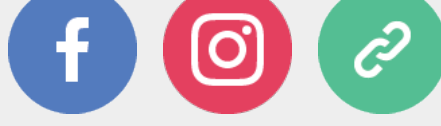
There are two movies by the English director Andrea Arnold that I still think about: *Fish Tank* and *American Honey*. Like *Persepolis*, both of these movies also won the Cannes Jury Prize.

Both explore girlhood from a rough, working class perspective, informed by the environments of Andrea's own youth. Both are stories centred around a teenage girl, trying to find herself and her place in the world, having to distance herself from a deeply dysfunctional family. And both are uniquely personal and sympathetic portraits.



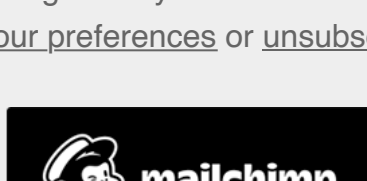
Recent Additions to Pic-a-Flic

- *The Broken Hearts Gallery* (2020, Comedy)
- *Dinner with Friends* (aka *Friendsgiving*) (2020, Comedy)
- *Extra Ordinary* (2020, British, Comedy)
- *Fatman* (2020, Thriller, Comedy)
- ***The Irishman* (2019, Scorsese, pictured above)**
- ***Laserblast* (1978, Sci-fi, pictured above)**
- *Rising Hawk* (2020, Drama, History)
- *Summerland* (2020, British, Drama)



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Welcome to the Anthropocene.

Last month, a study showed that [human-made materials now outweigh Earth's entire biomass](#). This is a pretty substantial moment in history, and I want to take a moment to internalize this. Welcome, everyone, to the #Anthropocene.

We use the term *Holocene* to describe the period that started around 12,000 years ago, during which civilizations appeared. Before that was the *Pleistocene*, which lasted about 2 million years, through the ice ages. The *Anthropocene* is the name proposed for this new epoch, when human activity starts to have a significant impact on the planet's whole climate and ecosystems.

Cinema has a role in helping us think about this world shift, and below are three movies that made a lasting impression on me. Each presents some cautionary images, hopefully helping us to be intentional in how we navigate this next century.

- Emrys Damon Miller,
customer and "guest curator"



Anthropocene: The Human Epoch (2018)

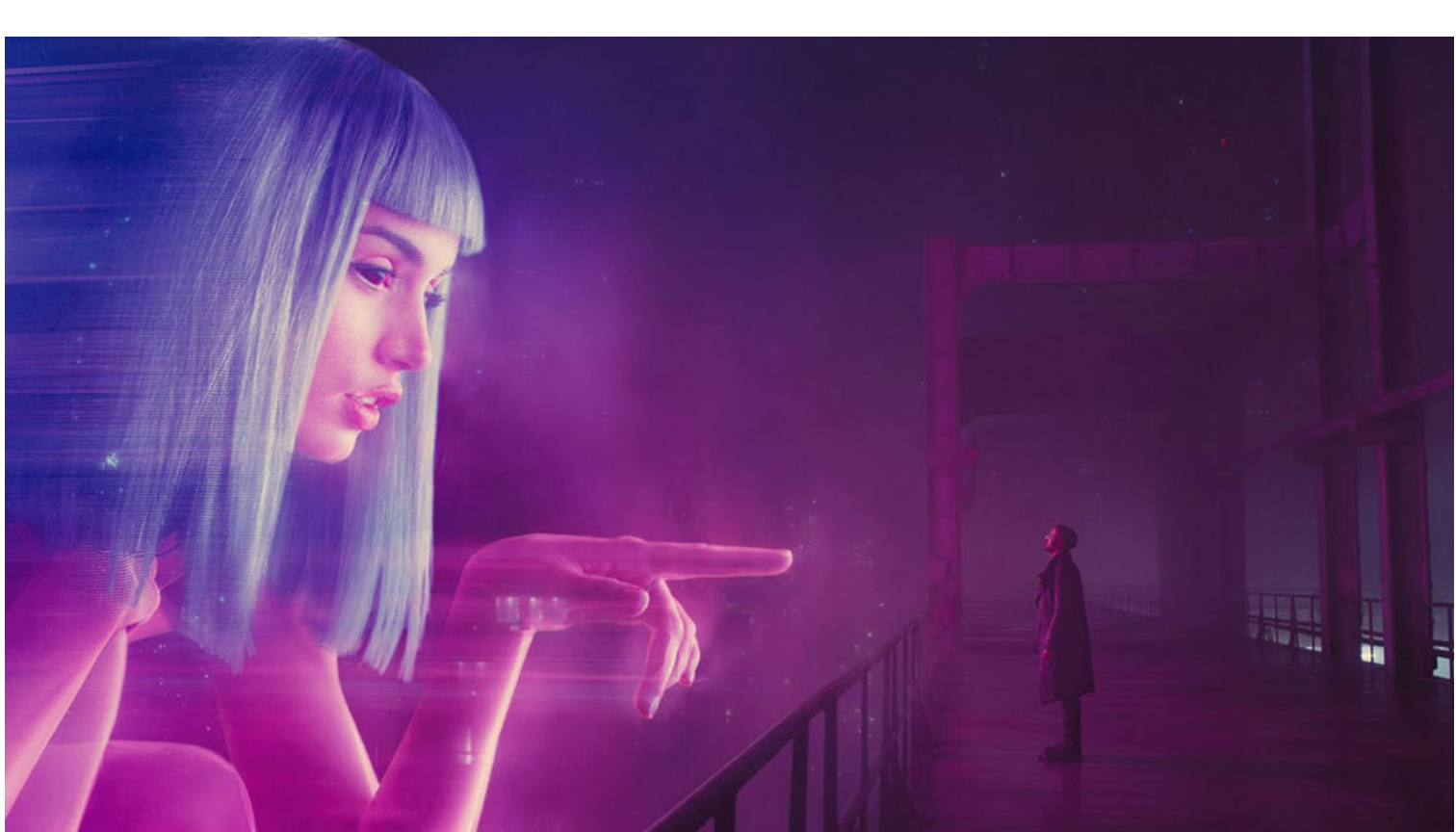
This Canadian documentary has small bits of narration, but is otherwise pure cinema, with mesmerizing long shots of our enormous machines extracting resources and transforming our landscape. It received a lot of praise, as well as the 2019 Best Canadian Film Award.

"The film's stunning visuals, particularly the aerial shots, capture an abstract imagery that is at once beautiful and horrifying." — Austin Chronicle

"Rarely has a film about the end of the world looked as beautiful." — Reel Talk

"A dizzying, dimensional tour of scale and time, forcing us to wonder how a sense of earth-centric balance can be restored." — Los Angeles Times

Available at Pic-a-Flic on Blu-ray only. Two films on the same topic preceded this, by the same filmmakers, *Manufactured Landscapes* and *Watermark*, which are available at Pic-a-Flic on DVD.

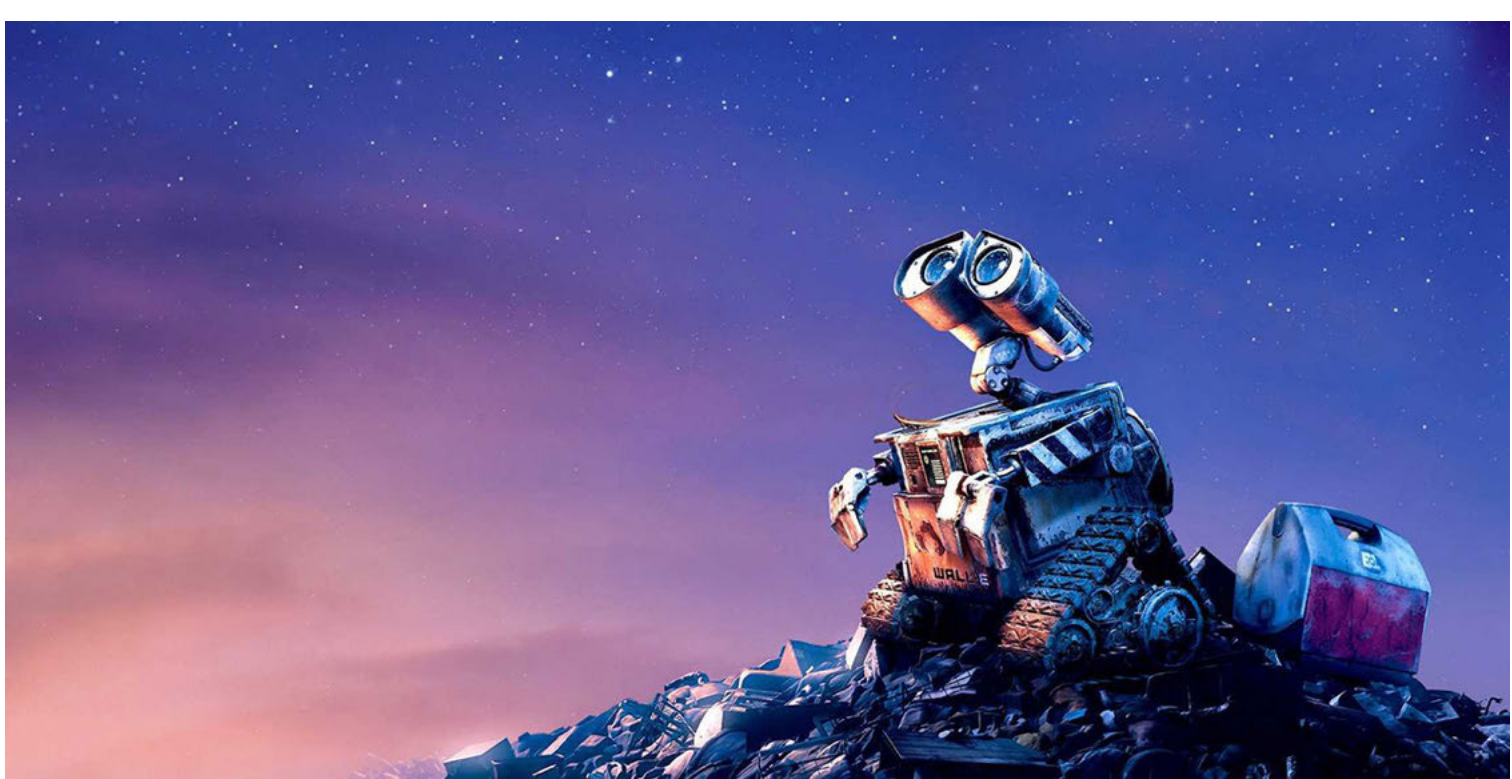


Blade Runner 2049 (2017)

The Canadian director Denis Villeneuve made this sequel, released 35 years after Ridley Scott's original *Blade Runner*. There is a lot to appreciate in *Blade Runner 2049*, and I thought both the plot and the characters were a smart complement to the first film.

But what impressed me the most was its setting. All the landscapes in the film are man-made, and take place after the end of wild nature. Los Angeles is raining and dark, with a huge sea wall protecting the dense and tall cityscape. Las Vegas is a desolate and radioactive ex-playland of vice, where a few bees make a cameo to suggest small and hopeful remnants of nature. San Diego is a giant landfill, where child labor extracts microchips from discarded electronics.

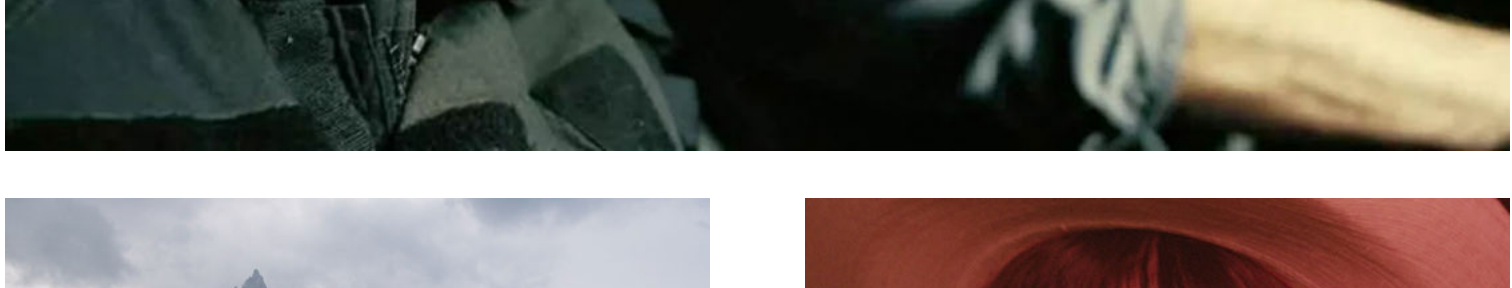
Our protagonist turns to digital, commercialized, sexual company, in hopes to fight loneliness, always aware of the shortcomings, that it's not authentic companionship. To me it's all the details in this setting that are most interesting in this film, because however surreal, these details are all extensions of current issues.



WALL-E (2008)

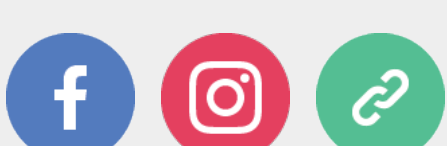
The ninth feature film by Pixar features a quirky and lonely robot, left behind on Earth to clean up the remaining landscape of garbage, while humankind leaves our planet on luxury cruise ships, plugged into digital entertainment systems. It's also beautifully animated and so fun for all ages, and received 95% on Rotten Tomatoes.

"A charming love story of two lonely robots surrounding a satire of consumer culture. Strong stuff." — Boulder Weekly



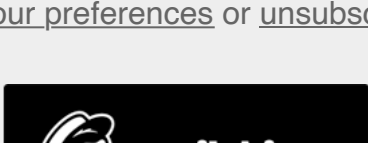
Selected Recent Additions to Pic-a-Flic

- *Dating Amber* (2020, comedy, drama)
- *Guest of Honour* (2020, Atom Egoyan, drama)
- ***A Hidden Life* (2020, Terrance Malick, drama, pictured above)**
- *Kajillionaire* (2020, Miranda July, comedy, drama)
- *Possessor* (2020, Brandon Cronenberg, sci fi horror)
- ***Tenet* (2020, Christopher Nolan, sci fi, action, pictured above)**
- *Yellow Rose* (2020, music, drama, pictured above)

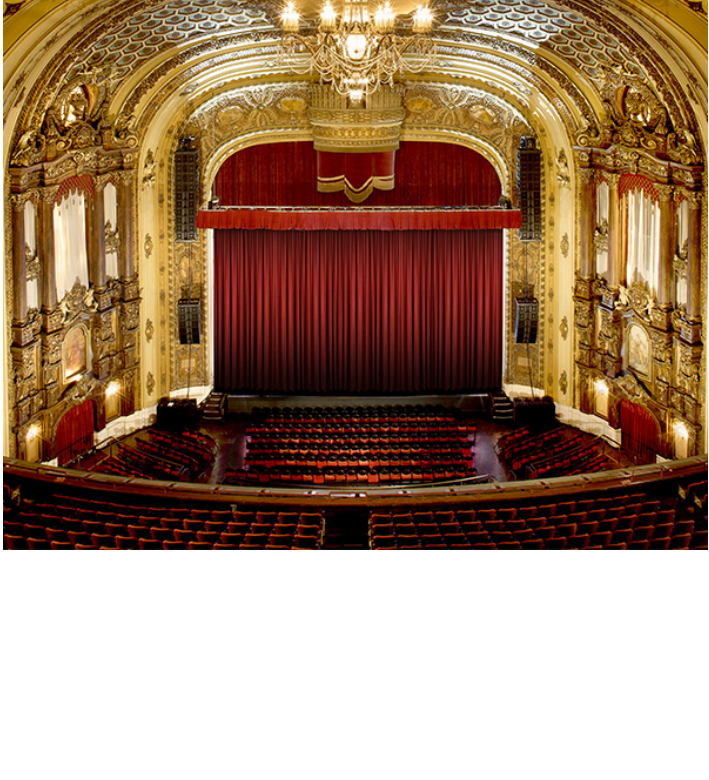


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Sci-Fi in the 1950s

My dad grew up in Kansas City, a teenager in the 1950s. He was the first in his family to take a real interest in science, and his parents let him set up a “laboratory” in the basement. He participated in science fairs, and even ground the lens for his telescope by hand. Of course, he was excited to see all the science fiction films as they came out.

He’d sometimes climb the fence to sneak into the local 40 Hiway Drive-In movie theatre. And other times he’d see first-run movie in the majestic Loew’s Midland Theatre, with its 3,200 seats and gold marquee with 3,600 light bulbs. (Both pictured above.)

Decades later, I watched all sorts of science fiction with my dad, including his favourites from the 1950s. We recently revisited his top four. These days, the best way to see these is to rent them from Pic-a-Flic.

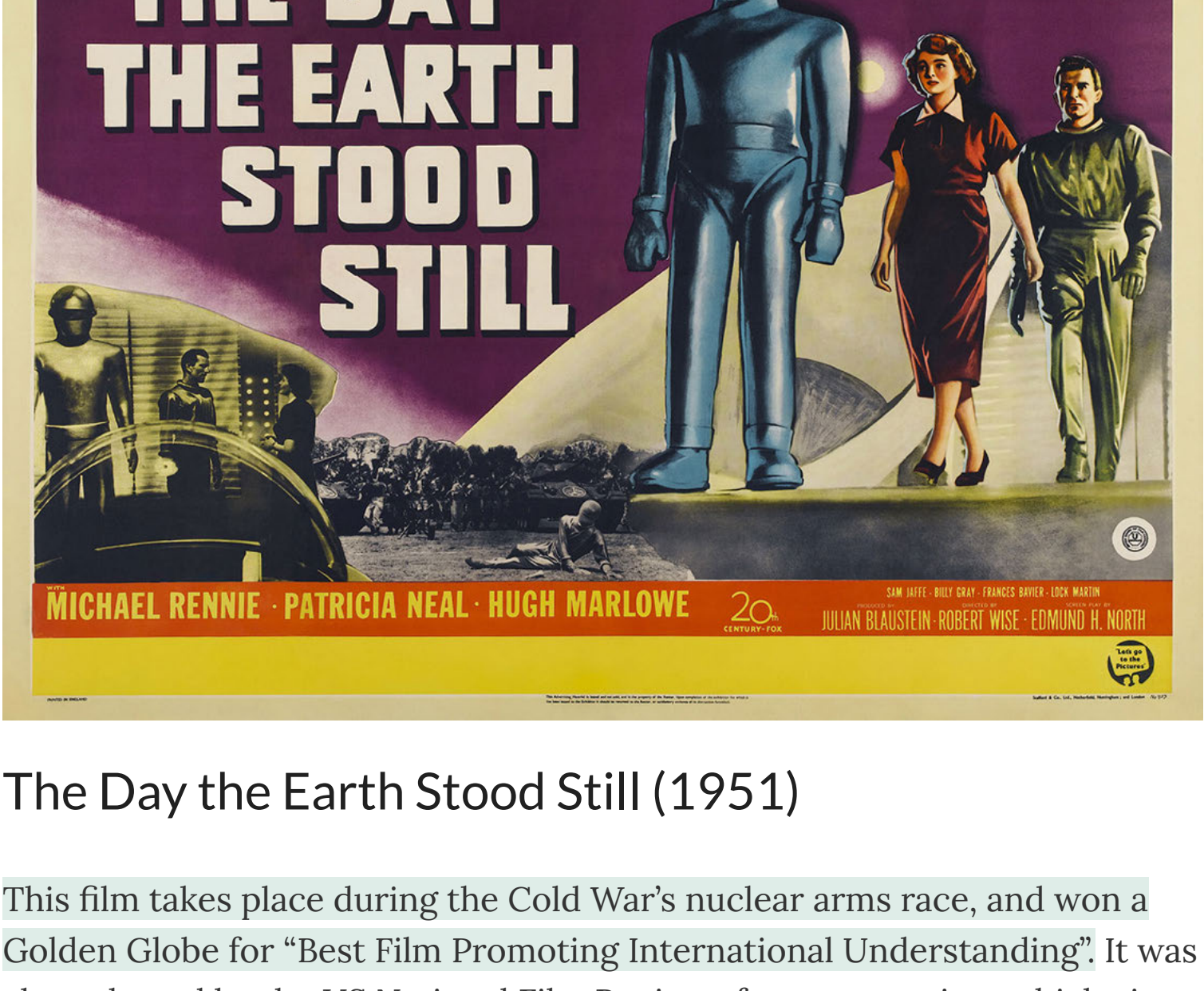
- Emrys Damon Miller, customer and “guest curator”



Forbidden Planet (1956)

This was the first science fiction movie to take itself seriously, with a good budget and more serious actors (including a young Leslie Nielsen). It takes Freud’s concept of the Id, and marries it with a story that echos *The Tempest*, with deeply innovative special effects and art direction, as well as the first electronic music soundtrack. It was significant inspiration for *Star Trek* (1966), and it introduced us to Robby the Robot!

(Consider pairing with *The Tempest*, 2011, with Christopher Plumber.)



The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951)

This film takes place during the Cold War’s nuclear arms race, and won a Golden Globe for “Best Film Promoting International Understanding”. It was also selected by the US National Film Registry for preservation, which aims to protect “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” films. The movie’s unusual score (by Bernard Herrmann) inspired Danny Elfman to become a film composer. My dad appreciated many things about this film, and like many kids at the time, memorized the movie’s famous alien phrase “Klaatu barada nikto”!

When Ronald Reagan met with Gorbachev in 1985, he discussed the US and Russia uniting against potential otherworldly threats, should that ever come to be. Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell believed that Regan was inspired by *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

(Consider pairing with *Army of Darkness*, 1992, by Sam Rami.)



The War of the Worlds (1953)

The War of the Worlds is an important science fiction novel, written in the late 1890s by HG Wells. Wells had been talking to his brother about the catastrophic effect of the British on Indigenous Tasmanians. What would happen, he wondered, if Martians did to Britain what the British had done to the Tasmanians? This gave birth to his *War of the Worlds* story.

In 1938, Orson Welles adapted the story for radio, which caused a stir when it aired. Some listeners apparently mistook the radio drama for an actual news report of a real Martian invasion.

This 1953 film adaptation is an important part of sci-fi film history, with its Technicolor and Academy Award-winning special effects.

(Consider pairing with *Mars Attacks!*, 1996, by Tim Burton.)



Them! (1954)

This sci-fi film was much better than average, with a smart cast that fights giant radioactive ants in Los Angeles storm drains! These monster ants mutated in the desert, a side effect of atomic bomb testing. As one of the first “nuclear monster” movies, and the first “big bug” feature, the film demonstrates some of our collective anxiety as we entered into an atomic age.

(Consider pairing with *Aliens*, 1986, by James Cameron.)



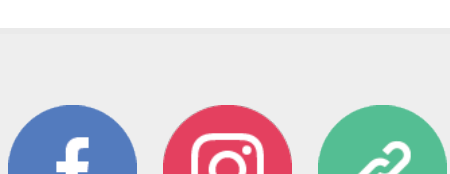
Select Recent Additions to Pic-a-Flic

Each of these movies are “Certified Fresh” by Rotten Tomatoes (a website which collects and summarizes reviews from top critics):

- Elizabeth is Missing (2019, Drama, Mystery, British)
- Freaky (2020, Comedy, Horror)
- Synchronic (2019, Mystery, Sci-Fi)

We’ve also expanded our collection with:

- Curse of the Undead (1959, Horror, pictured above)
- The Batwoman / The Panther Women (1968, Adventure, Sci-Fi, Mexico, pictured above)
- Operation Chromite (2016 Drama, War, Korean)



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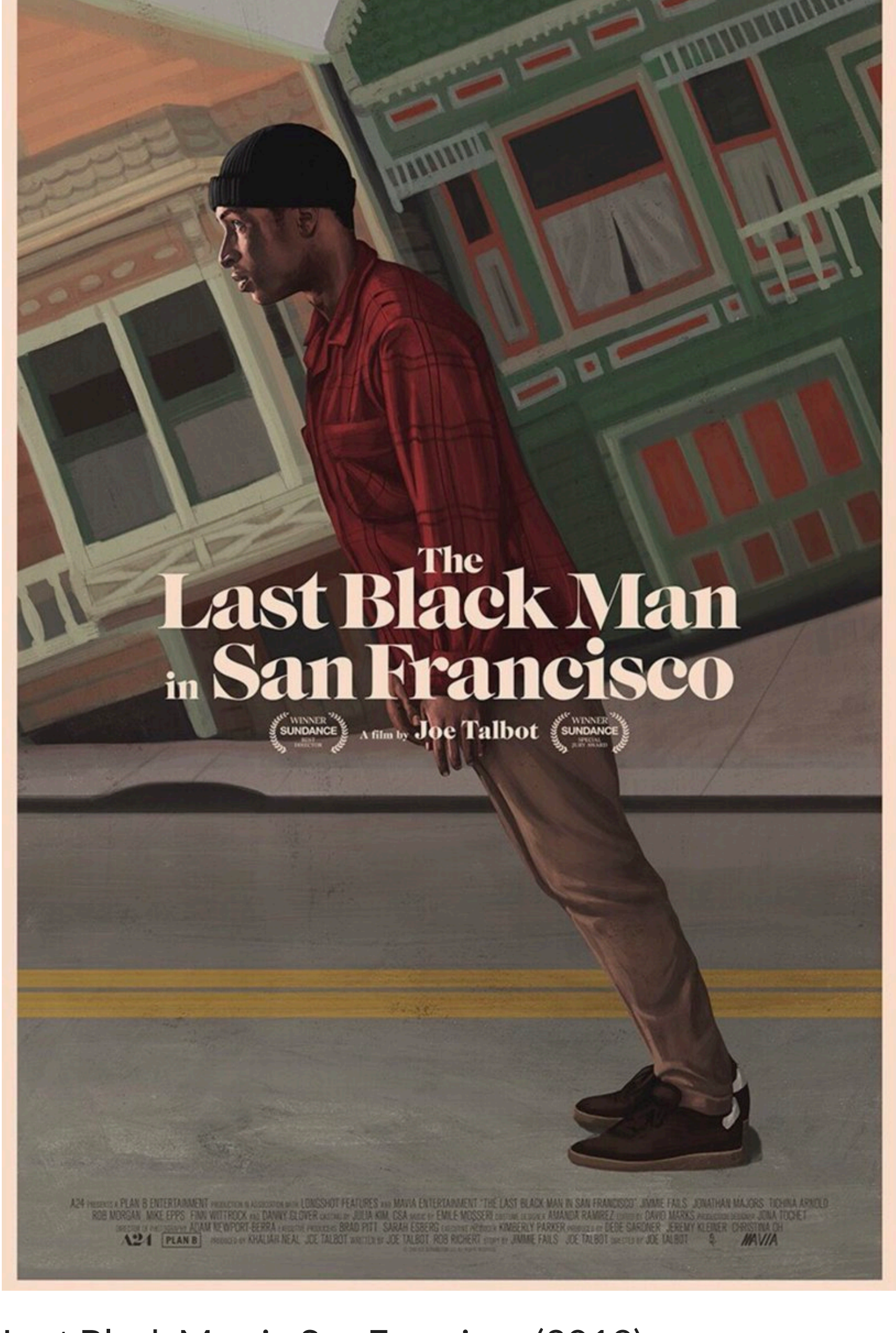
“You don’t get to hate it unless you love it.”

This line from *Last Black Man in San Francisco* sticks with me.

The film deals with serious issues, but has a lightness to it that I admire. I’m not the only fan of the movie. It won two top awards from Sundance, and Black Reel Awards’ *Outstanding Independent Film*. The light, the playfulness of the filmmaking, the lush soundtrack by Emile Mosseri, and various aspects of the characters all carry my interest.

The movie conveys a love for San Francisco, the love for a particular place. Below are three of my favourite movies about racial struggles and the love of a city.

- Emrys Damon Miller,
customer and “guest curator”



Last Black Man in San Francisco (2019)

The creation of this film is almost as interesting as the film itself. Two local creators birthed the idea, and crowd-funded it through Kickstarter, with 1,500 contributors giving the film production its first \$75,000. It later caught the attention of studios, growing its budget to \$2 million. The cast includes actors and non-actors from San Francisco, ranging from Danny Glover (an established actor with a history of Civil Rights activism in the city) to Jello Biafra (of the city’s legendary punk band The Dead Kennedys, who once ran for city mayor). The end result is a movie created by a broad, invested community, about *place*.



Do the Right Thing (1989)

“My people, my people, what can I say; say what I can. I saw it but didn’t believe it; I didn’t believe what I saw. Are we gonna live together? Together are we gonna live?” — Mister Señor Love Daddy (played by Samuel L Jackson)

Who owns the city block? I keep coming back to this early Spike Lee movie, which he wrote, directed and starred in. It explores the racial tensions in 1980s Brooklyn, and gets even more specific, focusing on a single block in the Bed-Stuy region. Underneath the story I get a strong sense of Lee’s love of this neighbourhood, especially the vibrancy that comes from racial diversity. This movie celebrates this complex community, while also critiquing its divisive racism.

Pic-a-Flic has the Criterion Edition available to rent, loaded with extra features.



Treme (tv series 2010–2013)

Toni: Davis, you do not motherfuck the national guard.

Davis: I just want my city back.

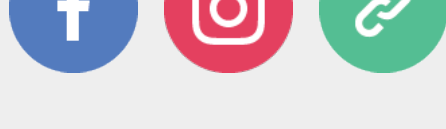
Made by the same team behind *The Wire* tv series, *Treme* goes even deeper into exploring types of invested citizens within a city. All the characters have roles to play in the city’s ecosystem, and participate in rebuilding it, post-Katrina. New Orleans’ newspaper *The Times-Picayune* shared what many locals felt about the gritty show: “the screen depiction that New Orleans deserves, has always desired, but has been denied.” In addition to sharp writing and an excellent cast, the music is richly curated and produced, showcasing some of the very best music of this special place.

Both *The Wire* and *Treme* are available at Pic-a-Flic in full.



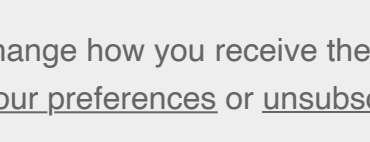
Select Recent Additions to Pic-a-Flic

- Croods: A New Age (2020, kids)
- **Fantastic Fungi (Blu-ray only, 2019, documentary, pictured above)**
- The Keeper (2018, romance, biography)
- The Last Vermeer (2019, drama)
- The Parallax View (1974, mystery, thriller, Criterion Edition)



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Thanks for spending time with me over the last six months.

I love Pic-a-Flic, and it's been a delight to write about some of the gems in their catalogue, and to hear from other customers that love the place, like you. I'm saying good-bye now — with this is the closing newsletter from my stint as “guest curator”.

I'd like to thank Pic-a-Flic's owner Kent and his sister Kelli for hosting me here, and for keeping this collection of [over 25,000 titles](#) available to the community! Thank you to my friends who helped with various themes: Gareth & Bronwyn & the Monster Sisters ([Halloween](#)), Margo ([girlhood](#)), Andrew ([Melville](#)), my dad ([1950s sci-fi](#)), and Kevin ([animated features](#)). And thank you to my excellent English teachers who decades ago helped me survive high school and encouraged an interest in storytelling. (Kent tells me that one of my favourite teachers is also a Pic-a-Flic customer!)

On my way out, I'll share three of my favourite films, from my favourite filmmaker, Jim Jarmusch. The first movie I saw by Jarmusch was *Stranger than Paradise* (1984). Its slow, deadpan, low-budget style was unlike anything I'd seen before in cinema. I must have been around 18, and up until then, everything I'd seen was a major Hollywood production, with a lot more action. I've since followed Jarmusch through his career, catching most of his films as they've come out. It's hard to narrow it down to three, but the ones below carry some spiritual wisdom beneath their fashionably cool surface. And so I keep returning to them, as they don't just entertain me, they help me think about how to live.

Each of these (along with the rest of Jarmusch's feature films) are available to rent a Pic-a-Flic.

– Emrys Damon Miller,
customer and “guest curator”

ps. You can keep in touch with me via my studio [Rocketday Arts](#), where you'll find social media links and my studio's email newsletter.



1. Mystery Train (1989)

Jarmusch has made several films which are odes to various American cities: New Orleans in *Down by Law*; Detroit in *Only Lovers Left Alive*; Memphis in *Mystery Train*. Each of these cities, with their decaying buildings and unique personalities, feels like the film's lead character. The human characters could be seen as supporting roles. *Mystery Train* is my favourite because of the particular collection of quirky characters from different corners of the world, all sharing one night in this special city. The film may seem superficial, but underneath it is [one of Jarmusch's spiritual proclamations: life is full of things to appreciate](#). Simply dig these people, this music, this city.



2. Dead Man (1995)

In this period Western, our central character is a weak and scared man — an accountant coincidentally named William Blake. William gets shot near the beginning of the film. So most of this film is the journey of a man with a fatal gunshot wound as he struggles across the Old West. He befriends an Indigenous man named Nobody, who happens to be a deep admirer of the famous poet William Blake. [The two men travel together, with Nobody helping the accountant William learn poetry and strength in his final days](#).

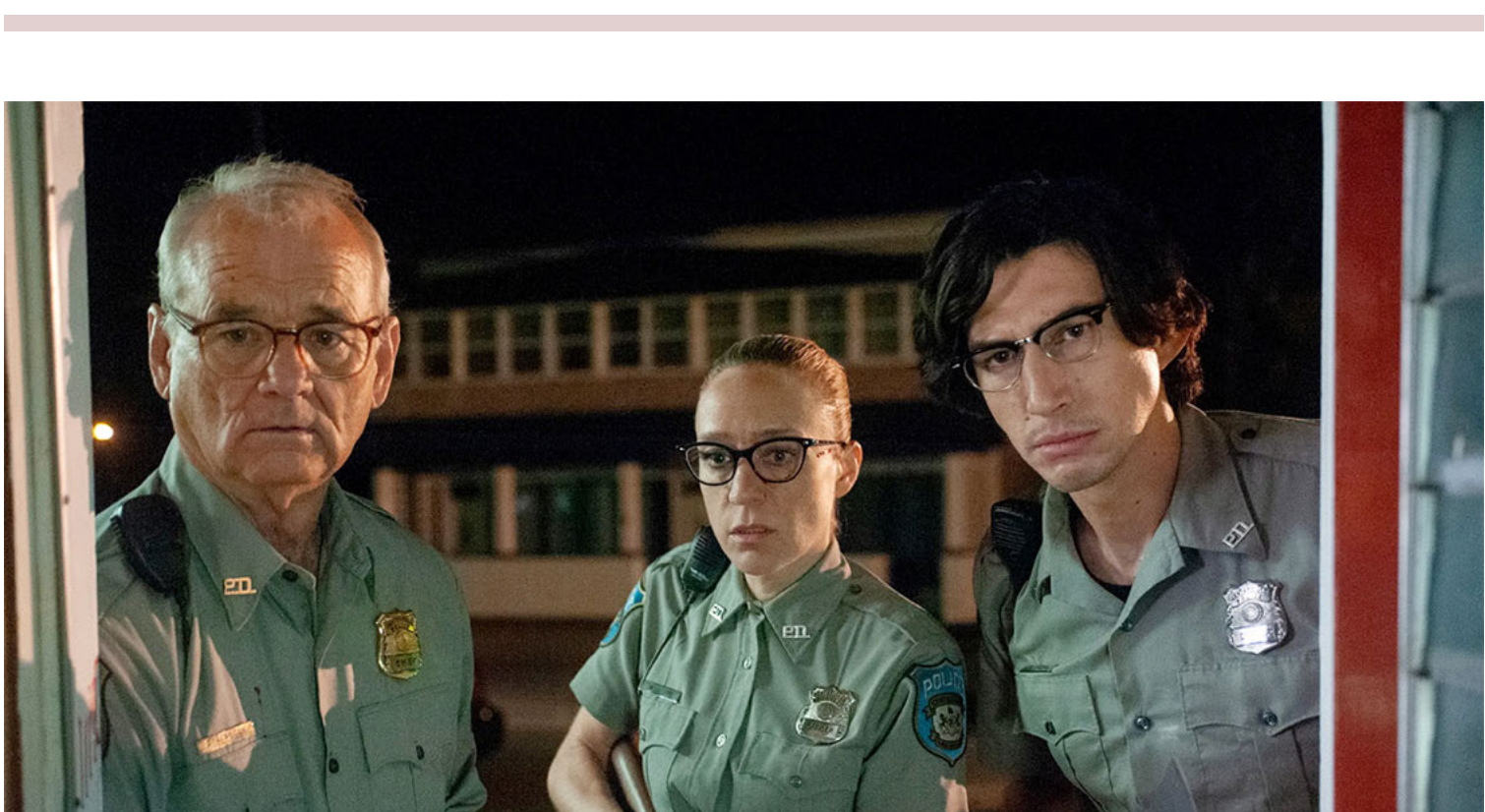
Neil Young created the heavy, distortiony, electric guitar score, live, while watching the film.

There are many movies about dying, but none quite like this. We don't meet William's loved ones, we aren't mourning for him, nor are we watching him rehash the details of his younger life. Instead, it feels like we're watching a man slowly wake up, even as he's drifting away. I've watched this film three times now, and each time it felt like I'd been taken on an important, bewildering, transcendental journey.



3. Paterson (2016)

The movie follows a public bus driver named Paterson, who lives in Paterson, New Jersey. We see him having seemingly repetitive days: each day eating Cheerios for breakfast, driving his bus route, walking the dog, getting a beer at the pub, spending time with his girlfriend. Throughout each of these days, we join him as he writes, then slowly refines and re-writes his simple poems. [The film celebrates the act of writing poetry as an enriching activity in itself, like a form of mediation, regardless of whether there's an audience](#).

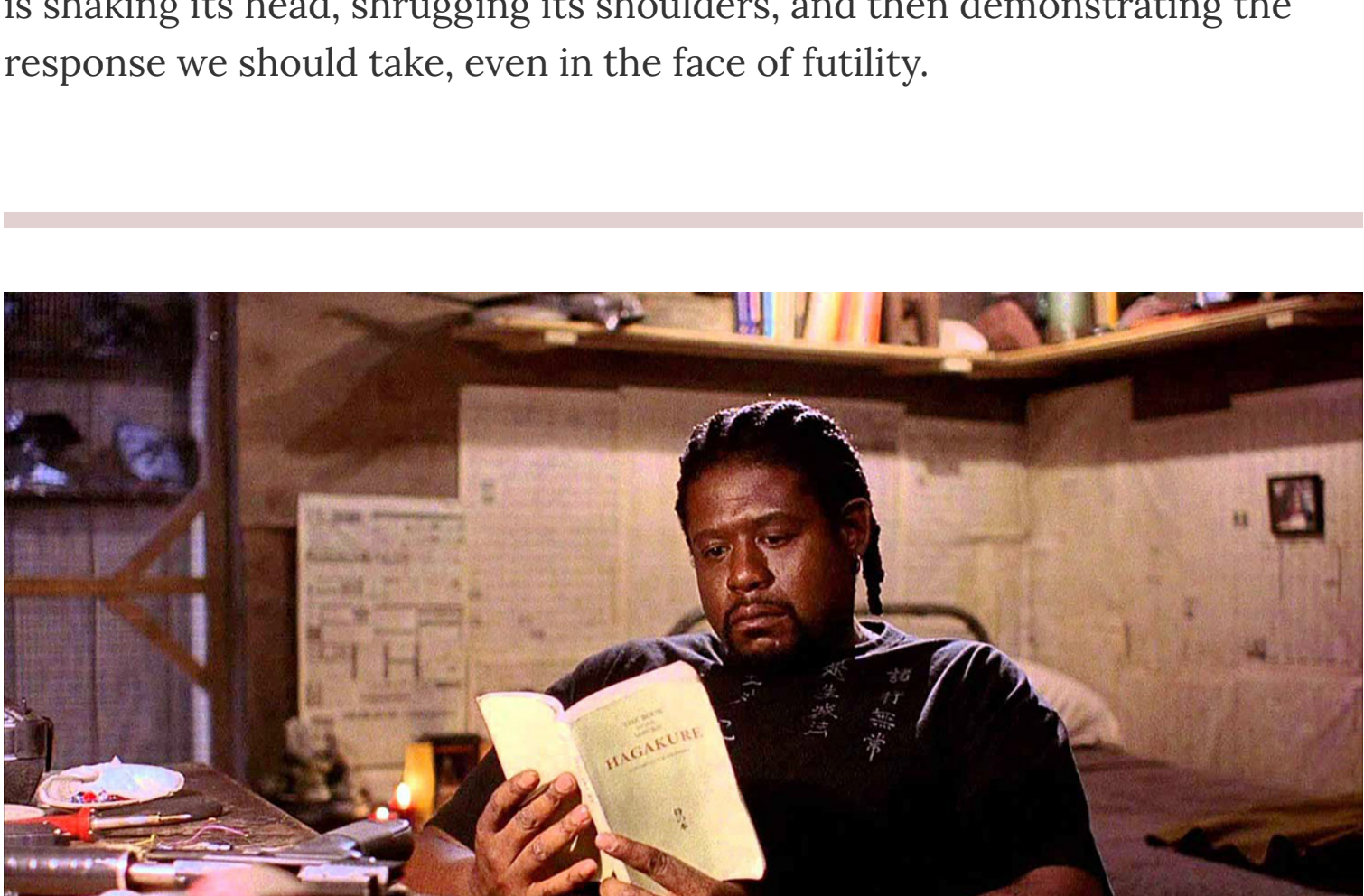


ps. The Dead Don't Die (2019)

I'll also mention his latest movie, *The Dead Don't Die*, which is, by any measurement, a bad movie. It's intended to be a silly and stupid zombie movie, and it's even bad within the genre of zombie comedies!

[The film is an overt allegory for how most of humankind is acting like zombies — we shop and consume and entertain ourselves, while ignoring real, serious threats like climate change and mass species extinctions](#). In real life, the scale of destruction that humanity brings upon ourselves and our environment is so overwhelming that the people who are fighting for a healthier world can feel hopelessly outnumbered ... not unlike characters in a zombie apocalypse.

Underneath the very silly movie *The Dead Don't Die* is a very angry Jim Jarmusch. But also underneath is a manifesto on how to respond to being part of a society that is self-destructing. When the film came out, two years ago, I was personally feeling a bit stunned, unsure what to do about what seemed like an imploding world. However silly and stupid this movie is, it seemed to be directly responding to people in my position. The movie itself is shaking its head, shrugging its shoulders, and then demonstrating the response we should take, even in the face of futility.



Select Recent Additions to Pic-a-Flic

Each of these movies are “Certified Fresh” or have ratings over 90% by Rotten Tomatoes (a website which collects and summarizes reviews from top critics):

- *Barb & Star Go to Del Mar* (2021, comedy)
- *Billie* (2020, documentary, music)
- *Chavela* (2017, Mexican, documentary, music)
- *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999, gangster, samurai, drama, Criterion edition, pictured above)
- *News of the World* (2020, western, drama, adventure)
- *Soul* (2020, animation, family)

We've also expanded our collection with:

- *Sky Sharks* (2020, sci-fi, comedy)
- *Wonder Woman* 1984 (2020, fantasy, adventure)



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