

# Ideal Film Shelf



## The Artwork:

I wanted the artwork to be in the same vein as Jane Mount's Ideal Bookshelf series, and so instead of having a stack of books I opted for a pile of DVDs.

## The Movies:

### 1. **Come and See (1985)**

*Come and See* by director Elem Klimov is a very disturbing movie. It's the tale of a fourteen year old boy, Flyora, in Nazi occupied Belarus, who joins a group of soviet partisans. Over the course of the film he goes from an excited, young boy into a cold, hardened, soldier. It is fundamentally an anti-war movie, and possibly the greatest one ever made. It pulls no punches depicting the harsh realities of the second world war. Klimov goes as far as using live ammunition over blank

rounds. Which just goes to show the painstaking lengths Klimov went to achieve realism. All the vehicles, uniforms, and weapons are surplus from the war. The film is also a masterpiece of subjective storytelling. The audio is specifically designed to tell you the emotions that Flyora is feeling at any given moment. During the most intense scenes the audio is almost overwhelming. Other, more technical, parts of the film add to the intense grittiness of it all. The cinematographer wanted to shoot exclusively using natural lighting, and had to use high ISO film stock in order for us to actually see everything going on. However this high ISO has a major drawback that any photographer could tell you about: grain. The pictures in this film are extremely grainy, which in any other film would be a downside (especially if it were shot with digital cameras), but it only adds to the grit of the story. Ultimately, what really resonates with me about this film is that this was Elem Klimov's last film ever. He felt that he had said everything he had to say artistically. I really admire artists like that, who know when they've said everything and just disappear into the sea like some Lovecraftian creature of the deep.

## **2. Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio (2022)**

This movie came out just two months ago and it's already one of my favorite movies of 2022. It's Guillermo del Toro's adaptation of the classic Italian children's tale, *Pinocchio*. This movie stood out to me because it's a stop motion animation, and as my capstone project is based around stop motion animation, and I'm an admirer of del Toro's work. It was a great retelling of the classic story. What stood out to me is how his version stands out to the original story. The original *Pinocchio* is a series of stories meant to teach children to respect their parents and obey authority, del Toro takes a completely different approach. His story is about how everybody has something to learn from *Pinocchio* rather than *Pinocchio* learning from his adult figures around him. A notable difference is that the film is also set during Mussolini's reign over Italy, and contains very subtle themes of resistance against fascism. In an interview I saw, del Toro explained how fascism is a very paternalistic system, which connects with what he was trying to do by changing the story from *Pinocchio* being a cautionary tale for children to listen to their parents to one that's more sympathetic with a child's view of the world.

## **3. Stalker (1979)**

I watched *Stalker* on a whim one day because I knew it was somewhat related to the game series. I can't say that it's my favorite movie, it was kind of boring but it made up for that with its cinematography. I'm a sucker for natural lighting, what can I say. The story is fairly interesting, it's essentially Tarkovsky arguing that the world needs more faith. All of his movies are religious allegories in one way or another. The basic set up is there's a zone in Ukraine where a meteorite crashed, and this zone has the ability to give someone their deepest desires. The people who explore this zone are called Stalkers. The plot of the movie is one Stalker taking a disillusioned writer and a scientist into the zone. The production of the movie is almost as wild as *Come and See's*. They had to completely reshoot the movie because someone messed up the film reels and it was completely unusable. They filmed it primarily at abandoned chemical factories, and as you can expect that was a terrible idea. The actor for the disillusioned writer, Anatoly Solonitsyn died of lung cancer years later due to the toxic chemicals he was exposed to. Tarkovsky himself had numerous medical problems related to exposure to chemical waste too.

## **4. Free State of Jones (2016)**

This is probably one of my favorite Civil War movies that I've seen so far. It's about the Jones County Mississippi Rebellion, which was led by Confederate deserter Newton Knight, and escaped slaves in 1863. They managed to liberate Jones and several neighboring counties for the rest of the war. It's a really interesting chapter of our country's history. The film also goes beyond the end of the war into reconstruction and rise of Jim Crow in Mississippi. I must admit that the film is boring at parts, the director seems to have forgotten that he doesn't need to show Newton walking everywhere. But the opening scene is probably the closest we get to accurate Civil War combat. A lot of Civil War movies are very sanitized when it comes to the combat, but from the accounts I read it was extremely brutal. Some parts of the war even were comparable to the brutality of World War One. Trench warfare was even used extensively in some battles. It does a good job of showing the Confederate side of the war without veering into Lost Cause mythology.

#### **5. Dune (2021)**

This Dune film was certainly contentious, and I can understand why some people didn't like it, but I still really enjoyed this film. Dennis Villeneuve is one of my favorite directors, and Dune is my favorite book, so it was really a match made in heaven. The film is very loyal to the book, and ends exactly at the halfway point in the book too. Which makes the ending less clunky, but it's still an odd place to end. Villeneuve's use of modern technology to make Frank Herbert's universe is masterful. Too many sci-fi films nowadays use too much CGI and always have this uncanny valley look to them (like MCU spider man's weird CGI spider suit), but Dennis used it in the perfect way. Every spaceship in the film that is CGI is usually obscured by dust, mist, or lighting tricks. This helps cover up imperfections in the CG rendering, and prevents any uncanny valley look. He also combines special effects with practical effects to give them a more realistic look. Villeneuve did a great job creating the world of Dune. It all felt alien yet familiar. The actors all gave great performances, Stellan Skarsgard made a great Baron Harkonnen.