

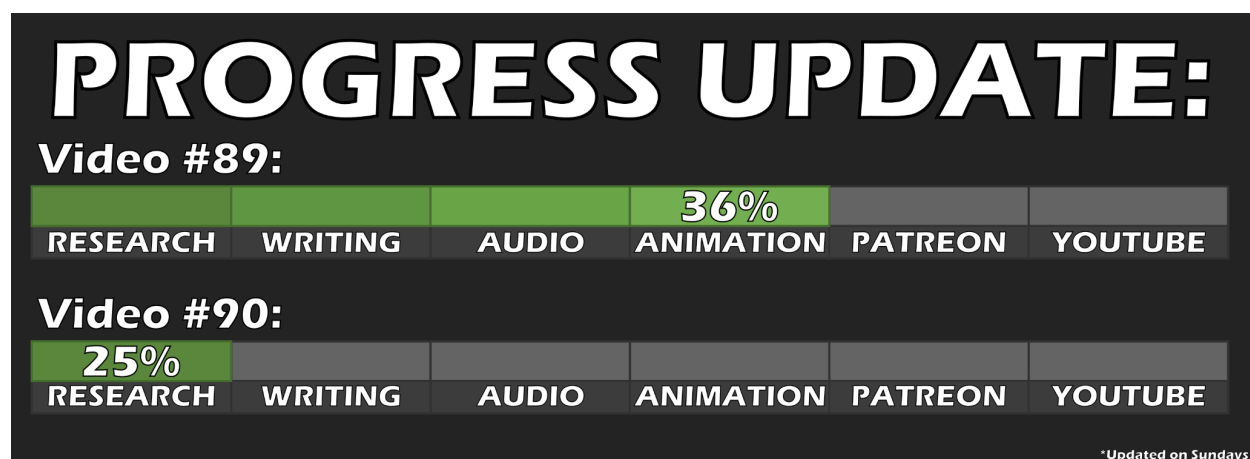
The Public Square for February 2026

Attention Citizens!

Every January, the director Steven Soderbergh [publishes a complete list](#) of every movie, TV show, or book that he's watched/read over the previous year. For some silly reason, I always find it really interesting to learn about what other people are consuming, and I always look forward to spending some time slowly going through this list line-by-line. This is eccentric behaviour on my part, it's just a dry list, it's kinda like looking forward to going through the phone book line-by-line.

But nevertheless, I always come away from it with a few ideas for myself that otherwise I would not have had. For example, this year he had **The Exterminating Angel (1962)** on his list. I've ALWAYS wanted to see this movie, but to be honest, it's been so long that I completely forgot that it existed. Turns out they have it at my local library. Now I'm gonna watch it.

Anyways, this list was very inspirational to me. For a long time I would think to myself, "this is very helpful when trying to find new things to see, more people should do this." But then eventually I was like "wait... I'm people...why don't I do this?" So that's why I share "BOOKS/FILMS/MUSIC I'VE RECENTLY ENJOYED" at the end of these newsletters. Mine's a little different, I don't really want to waste anybody's time talking about things I didn't like, but otherwise it's the same. The idea is that a few people will be randomly inspired to watch or read or listen to stuff that they normally wouldn't, much like I was inspired by Soderbergh to finally see **The Exterminating Angel (1962)**.



Books I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **Waste Land: A World in Permanent Crisis (2025), by Robert Kaplan**
 - International Relations book, Realist, extremely pessimistic, just the world needs right now. The central argument in the book is that the USA, China, and Russia are all in structural decline, and nobody else is rising to replace them, which will lead to power vacuums and instability and “bad actors” all over the world. He compares the international system right now to Weimar Germany, and kinda says that we’re all just waiting for the next shoe to drop. Like I said, extremely pessimistic.

One prediction he makes is that Africa’s huge population boom and the global instability will accelerate African migration north into Europe, which he argues will completely preoccupy and distract the southern European states. He argues that if the northern European states are preoccupied with the Arctic, and the southern European states are preoccupied with African migration, it might become much more difficult to come to a political consensus within the EU or NATO. I’m not sure that I fully agree with this, but it’s an interesting argument, and I will be curious to see if he is right about a growing north-south European split. If he’s right, then it might become necessary to split into smaller groups within the EU or NATO if they actually want to come to a political consensus and accomplish anything.

But I will say that there’s a bit of conservative-brained silliness going on here, Kaplan is VERY concerned with migration, and specifically migration from Africa, since it’s projected to grow from 1 billion to 4 billion people. My counter to that would be... in the 20th century, Asia grew from 1 billion to 4 billion people, and there was increased Asian migration all over the world, but was it a problem? Not really. Isn’t it possible that there’s just a lot more African migration over the 21st century, but it’s not really a problem?

But that being said, I enjoyed the extreme pessimism. For a long time I always found that American political scientists were almost pathologically optimistic when talking about the 21st century. Now, the pendulum has finally swung in the other direction. I don’t think it’s quite as bad as Kaplan describes, but I do find it encouraging that American political scientists are beginning to drop the magical thinking.

- **2010: Odyssey Two (1982), by Arthur C. Clarke**
 - I really really really enjoy the **2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)** book, and I found this at a used book store for literally \$1. What the hell are they thinking? Haven’t they heard of inflation? It should be illegal to spend \$1 at a bookstore.

2010 is like... medium good. I enjoyed it, but it doesn't have nearly the juice and excitement that **2001** has. I have very dim memories of seeing the **2010** movie many years ago and not really liking it, so maybe this is just par for the course. This book goes way out of its way to rehabilitate HAL9000 and turn him into a hero, which I think is just silly. I had high hopes, I thought that maybe I would like it as much as **2001**, but I didn't. Liked it just fine, but won't be checking out the two other sequels.

Films I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **Winter Light (1963)**
 - This is one of my favourite movies, about a rural Swedish priest who has stopped believing in God. A perfectly depressing movie for being stuck inside during the winter, lol. **Winter Light (1963)** served as the inspiration for the movie **First Reformed (2017)**, which kinda takes the same premise and spins it off into new directions. Both movies are excellent.
- **Beau is Afraid (2023)**
 - While watching this movie I wasn't sure that I liked it, I found it pretty nasty and hateful and unpleasant. But it's been almost a month and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. It might be a masterpiece, I'll have to revisit it soon.

Music I've Recently Enjoyed:

- **Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds**
 - I spent some time listening to the album **Wild God (2024)** again, and wow. I think I always thought that the song **Wild God** was great, but this time **Joy** hit me really hard. This whole album is so damn impressive.

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