of hero. This type of plot involves a character that is at first somehow distanced from and skeptical of society. He does not maintain any real relationships, follows a different stream of thought than the general population, and is not afraid to disregard laws he finds unjust or useless. Then, spontaneously, a crisis occurs that severely limits the character's outlaw freedom, and forces him to act on behalf of the common good. In doing so, he becomes the story's official hero. Ray maintains that this model is so popular because it allows people to reconcile dichotomies. In other words, a hero can be both an immature outlaw and a sophisticated upstanding citizen, and because "the American, on the whole, lives by two sets of 'truths,'" there is extreme appeal in a character and a lifestyle that embodies "diametrically opposing traits" (Ray).

The type of logic embodied in "The Thematic Paradigm" permeates from fictional stories into real American society, leaving the general public susceptible to the belief that they can preserve the natural world while simultaneously disregarding the effects that their actions may have on it. Dark green environmentalist Dave Foreman expresses in his book *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* just how profound societal influences can be on humans' attitudes towards the environment, and the negative impacts that result when people fail to acknowledge the realities of pollution, resource exhaustion, and habitat destruction. He argues that humans have been conditioned over time to treat nature as a bank of resources rather than a valuable, living entity. "Society has lobotomized us. Our social environment today can work as a drug…to keep us in line, to sedate us, to remove our capacity for passion" (Foreman 5). Essentially, humans are being trained to develop indifference to their responsibility for the devastation of their natural surroundings, and thus are led to take part in activities that harm the Earth without thinking twice about it.

Included in this "social environment" discussed by Foreman is the film industry, and many notable American movies casually incorporate environmental destruction into their storylines. Common themes within these films include the negative impacts of waste and pollution, destruction of native habitats and ecosystems, exhaustion of natural resources, and the perceived superiority of the corporation over nature. These ideas serve as the source of conflict in the stories, and therefore are presented negatively. However, in accord with the typical Hollywood storyline, the conflicts are often unrealistically resolved, lessening the degree of seriousness and urgency placed on these environmental issues, and audiences leave the theater feeling as though the problem has been resolved. Ironically, such films rationalize the view that humans are superior to all other forms of life on Earth by subtly and continually diminishing the importance of environmental protection, and thereby influence people to accept the destruction of the nature as a normal and perfectly acceptable occurrence.

Many prominent popular films focus on the rapid resolution of problems associated with the environment. *Avatar*, a 2009 blockbuster hit directed by James Cameron, follows a paralyzed Marine named Jake Sully as he fights to keep

a powerful corporation from obliterating the natural habitat of the Na'vi people, a tribe of aliens that reside over a massive deposit of precious minerals on a planet called Pandora. Pixar Animation Studios' *WALL-E*, released in 2008, tells the story of a robot that was built specifically to clean up waste on Earth, because humans had made such a mess that the planet had become entirely uninhabitable. *Pocahontas* (1995), one of Disney's greatest classics, focuses on the white man's invasion of Native American lands, their overuse of resources, and their annihilation of animals' habitats. Lastly, *Flipper*, originally created in 1963 and remade in 1996, documents the efforts of a young boy and his friends to stop pollution in their area and cure a dolphin that became sick as a result of toxic waste being dumped into the ocean.

All four films attempt to portray harm to the environment in a negative way. In each story, there are clearly identifiable antagonists that perform the activities that are harming nature, and the movies revolve around the plight of the "good guys" to undo the damage. Through an appeal to sympathy and passions, the films easily convince viewers to take the side of the protagonist and wish defeat upon the polluters and habitat-destroyers. In *Flipper*, for example, the audience grows to love a boy named Sandy and his dolphin pal, Flipper, so when it is discovered that Dirk Moran, a commercial fisherman with a reputation for trouble, is shooting dolphins and dumping toxic waste into the ocean, it becomes easy to declare him the story's indisputable villain. The British explorers in *Pocahontas* that are clearing the forest in search for gold, and the humans that are mining for the mineral Unobtanium in *Avatar* both act as brutal oppressors as they destroy the natural environment and force relocation upon the tribes they conquer. *WALL-E* shows the evil of a human race that produced so much waste that it destroyed the Earth's ability to sustain life.

These agents responsible for environmental damage within the films are unarguably the villains of the story, and the basic human response to resist a villain theoretically will lead a person to also oppose that villain's actions. According to Edelman, to classify someone as a villain is to place them in a predetermined "stock category" that consists of negatively characterized individuals who are generally disliked and distrusted (126). Within this stock category are many variations of the typical villain, and these four environmental films use the same specific model—a greedy, selfish character that will sacrifice anything, including the well-being of others and the environment, to increase his personal wealth. They are "fiends who hold nothing of value but a greasy dollar bill [and they] are tearing down the pillars of evolution," and because they fit perfectly into the villain stock category, they are viewed by the audience as cruel, terrible, and wrong (Foreman 5). In theory, the easily identifiable existence of these characters is instrumental in getting the attention of the audience and making the claim that actions that harm the environment are indeed negative. As Edelman notes, "the reduction of rational action to neat contrasts between evil and virtue, competence and error, evoke[s] a herd spirit" that is often central to politics (Edelman 127).