“Is there a Ralphs near here?”

The Dude’s Ralphs card in The Big Lebowski

Neil Fox

My friend Wayne picked us up in Los Angeles, the first time I went there in 2002, and drove us South to his home in Temecula, a couple of hours away, to stay with him for a few nights. While staying there we drove past a Ralphs supermarket and I got very excited. I had to go in. I explained with glee how in the Coen Brother’s breathless *The Big Lebowski*, Ralphs plays a pivotal role. It’s where we first meet The Dude at the film’s outset, it’s where The Dude and Walter collect a receptacle for poor Donny who loved bowling and The Dude’s Ralphs card is the only ID he carries, something the chief of police of Malibu adds to the list of reasons to hate the bum in his office who has disturbed the monied conservatism of his beach town milieu.

*The Big Lebowski* is one of my favourite films, a high point of the genre (critic Ryan Gilbey calls) ’hang out’ movies. It sits alongside the likes of *Inherent Vice, The Long Goodbye* and *Get Shorty*, all films that I love spending time in. The characters, the music, the pace, the tone, the humour and the easy coolness all remind me of a Los Angeles I have visited and spent time in and one I will never know, simultaneously. I had always assumed that Ralphs was a fictional place, so imagine how when bathing in the glow of Southern California for the first time I saw it shining there in all its glory, the refracted glory of my love for this movie to be fair.

Since 2002 I have carried a Ralphs card in my wallet. My dear Temecula friend got one and gave it to me. I’ve mislaid my wallet a few times, thankfully always getting it back, and each time its the Ralphs card that would pain me the most to lose. It’s a silly thing that means the world because of the memories of when I acquired it and because it’s a tangible, tactile connection, however small, to a perfect and personal piece of cinema.