

2010 Movie Draft

by Tenessa Gemelke, Brandon Kruse, Joe Mulder, Jameson Simmons, & Mike Wagner

No need to worry. We got your cards and letters (and those muffins you sent – thanks!) and we know that the vast majority of our 59 readers have just been lingering around in hopes that we'd repeat our glorious movie draft from last year. Well... here goes.

Just like last time, we've begun with the 20 actors nominated in this year's Academy Awards, and drafted them, fantasy-sports-style:

Jeff Bridges
Sandra Bullock
George Clooney
Penelope Cruz
Matt Damon
Vera Farmiga
Colin Firth
Morgan Freeman
Maggie Gyllenhaal
Woody Harrelson
Anna Kendrick
Helen Mirren
Mo'Nique
Carey Mulligan
Christopher Plummer
Jeremy Renner
Gabourey Sidibe
Meryl Streep
Stanley Tucci
Christoph Waltz

As before, our goal wasn't necessarily to rack up awards or sell tickets (we'll leave that to James Cameron and his wheelbarrow full of motion-capture ping pong balls). All we aimed to do was create the most completely kick-ass movie possible with the talent on offer. With our cast in place, we each selected a movie title from the following list – forgotten movie titles which originally appeared in the party game Beyond Balderdash.

The Apple
Bad Jim
Bad Taste
Blades
Dirty Little Billy
Down the Drain
If You Knew Suzie...
Man From Nowhere
Phase Four
Once Upon a Time
Rattled
Rule #3
Second Thought
Seconds

Signal 7
Smash Palace
The Stuff
Thirteen Women
Twelve Plus One
What Waits Below

With cast and title in place, we thought about it a few hours and came up with a movie – just like they do in Hollywood! The results are as follows. (And stay tuned, because we'll be providing you with fake reviews of the five fake movies all next week...)

Round 1, Pick 1: Brandon

Jeff Bridges. Jeff Bridges is awesome. There are many other great actors on this list, several worthy of consideration for the first pick, but none of them are as awesome as Jeff Bridges. He was awesome in *The Fisher King* (yet ignored by the Academy), he was doubly awesome in *Fearless* (yet ignored by the Academy), and he was awesome to the power of awesome (A.W.E.S.O.M.-O?) as The Dude in *The Big Lebowski* (and yet still ignored by the Academy). So while I haven't yet seen *Crazy Heart*, I can only assume, since he was nominated by the Academy, that he must be crazy awesome in it (see what I did there?).

And, as is always a key for me in this draft, he's versatile. He can do drama or comedy equally well. Muthafucka can even sing and play guitar. Can George Clooney or Matt Damon sing? I'm guessing the answer is the same as the answer Ron Howard gave when asked by Kim Basinger in an episode of *The Simpsons* whether he could drive: not well. I can do anything with Bridges: cast him as a smart-yet-troubled NYC detective tracking a serial killer in *The Apple*, as a man who loses everything in *Down the Drain*, as a goofball dad with too many kids in *Twelve Plus One*, or I can even go all Oscar-baity with him as an amnesia victim in *Man From Nowhere*. (Not that I'm going to do any of these things.) Jeff Bridges is my ticket to endless possibilities and awesome possibilities. I bid the rest of you good luck. (Note: I do not bid any of you good luck.)

Now, here comes Joe with Penelope Cruz...

Pick 2: Joe

George Clooney. Clooney, bitches.

Yes, it's tempting to pick my darling Penelope yet again, but now that Brandon dashed my dreams of a Lebowski sequel, I think the prudent choice is to take the biggest movie star on the planet and go from there. Doesn't really matter which other actors, or what title, I end up with; George Clooney can anchor it. Although now I wish Brandon didn't have first pick on titles, because an NYC-themed piece called *The*

Apple would be pretty frickin' sweet.

So yes, I'm happy to take the equivalent of Chris Johnson in every 2010 fantasy football draft (i.e., the lead-pipe cinch no-brainer of a consensus #1 overall pick) with the second choice. Now, you're all in trouble. More trouble than you were in last year, when, as you recall, you were all in an appreciable amount of trouble. Except Tenessa. Because she didn't do this last year.

Clooney, bitches.

Besides, last year I had a plan. A plan that necessitated me getting Penelope Cruz. This year, I'm just winging it.

MIKE: *I'd love to rip these first two picks, but mostly, I'm just spending my time cutting out magazine letters that I will use to assemble frightening-looking threats mailed to Brandon and Joe...*

Pick 3: Tenessa

Matt Damon. Will he be working retail, criticizing frumpy customers with Mo'Nique in *Bad Taste*? Will he be the introspective hospice worker/sculptor who nurses Christopher Plummer through his final days in *Second Thought*? Or perhaps he's surprised to learn he's Maggie Gyllenhaal's baby daddy in *Rattled*. Whoever he is, we know he'll steal our hearts with his Sarah-Silverman-fucking smile.

Matt Damon, bitches.

Pick 4: Mike

Meryl Streep. Oh, no! I have to take Meryl Streep! Now I can make a movie about anything I want to. Woe is me! Man, I just have the greatest living actress in my cast; I'm sure that your movies will have fine casts and nice plots and all that shit, but I just secured an Oscar nomination and I don't even know if it's for Meryl's tour-de-force performance as a wealthy coke fiend in *Blades* or in a shockingly hilarious turn as a woman who became a man who became a woman again in *If You Knew Suzie...* or a past her prime state fair pavillion-maven in *Smash Palace*.

Streep, bitches.

JOE: *Bridges, Clooney, Damon, Streep. Not a bad top four. Plus, now our wives and girlfriends can go out to see whatever Meryl Streep vehicle Mike puts together, which will free us up to hang out and do guy stuff.*

Pick 5: Jameson

Penelope Cruz. I assumed the first non-Mulder pick would be Penelope Cruz, just to prevent another *Americano*-style trouncing. I was ready to organize and fund a PAC around it if necessary. But here she is unspoken for at the fifth pick - and surprisingly enough my reasons for taking her have nothing to do with cock-blocking Joe and everything to do with actually casting my movie. Sure, if Clooney were available, I'd take him and let Joe have Penelope Cruz. (I normally say that about them as sexual partners, but it fits here, too.) The other casting I need to worry about is more flexible; Cruz fits my needs now and won't be around for the 15th pick. (Granted, grabbing her fifth instead of sixth is intended as a middle finger to Joe.)

My early strategy focuses on versatility, and Cruz packs a wallop in that department. If you've seen her Spanish-language work (or Cameron Crowe's clumsy attempts to adapt it), you know she can handle drama; if you've seen the underrated *Sahara* you know she does action better than most; and if you're in the lifeboat-sized group of people who saw *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* you know what an unstoppable comic force she can be. All of these are important tools to have aboard, since one never knows how the draft will play out, but I'm leaning mostly towards the latter, since I know at least I'll be pairing her with...

Round 2, Pick 6: Jameson

Stanley Tucci. ...who was damn near destined to be my second pick all along. Pairing him with Clooney would have been inspired (it's absurd this hasn't happened before - get on it, Hollywood!), but no matter who else was on the table I think I had to take the Tooch at #6. He, too, can do anything, but he's at his best in the comic realm. My sister and I discovered him when our undying crush on Dennis Quaid caused us to rent a weird little movie called *Undercover Blues* (co-starring Kathleen Turner, of all people) and Tucci stole every scene as a bumbling assassin named Muerte. He's great at the broad stuff, and equally good doing charming subtle work (like Julia Child's husband in *Julie & Julia* for which he'd surely have been nominated if not for *The Lovely Bones*). Paired with Cruz, we could remake *The Out-of-Towners* (again, but funny this time) or *The War of the Roses* or, hell, even *Undercover Blues*. Or he could play a Rookie-type pitcher returning to the game with Cruz as his wife and chief supporter, in *The Stuff*. With these two playing off each other, every script starts to look better. Sorry, Meryl Streep.

Tucci, bitches.

Pick 7: Mike

Morgan Freeman. I had been wrestling with whether to pair Streep with Tucci again but Jameson has thankfully taken that off the table. So, now I can plunge headlong into an

empty nester dramedy *Phase Four* or the well-acted apocalyptic popcorn thriller *Signal 7*. Or, the crazy-bold post-modern sequel that combines *Hot Tub Time Machine* with *Invictus* and *Julie and Julia: Seconds*.

With Freeman and Streep, I can go "pure, elegant grace" or "wise and cantankerous" or "jewish." Suck on that triple threat! Gee, I sure hope that having two of the greatest actors ever will help my movie!

BRANDON: *Damn! I had the delusional hope that Freeman might somehow slide down to me at #10. I should probably stop drinking paint first thing in the morning. That's really more of an afternoon thing.*

MIKE: *Well, that depends. Does the paint have a high gloss sheen? If so, you can drink it from 8-11am (Miss Manners, June 24, 1987).*

Pick 8: Tenessa

Woody Harrelson. Is she going to do it? She is.

Woody Mother-Fucking Harrelson.

Didn't see that one coming, did you? My movie is already written. It's a comedy with 3 billion tons of heart. It's a tribute to my father. It's an Oscar-winning **machine**. I can build the rest of it on any – **any** – cast and title that fall into place. You are entering a world of hurt.

Pick 9: Joe

Sandra Bullock.

BAM!

That's right.

Clooney and Bullock, this generation's Humphrey Bogart and the biggest female box office star in the world. And they've never appeared in a movie together.

I could pretty much conduct the rest of this draft, movie title included, with a monkey-flinging-poop level of randomness and it doesn't really matter. This thing is over.

In fact... let's just see. 2, 5, 17. I just randomly picked those numbers out of thin air, so I'll see which titles on our list they correspond to...

Bad Jim – Clooney is James McManus, ex-Irish mob heavy who got out of the game as a young man. Twenty years later he's a happily married suburban schlub with a beautiful wife (Bullock) and a white picket fence. Somehow his past catches up with him in the form of (ANY OTHER

ACTOR!), who tracks him down with some news that Clooney might not like to hear. But we do it *Whole Nine Yards* style, yukking it up. *A History of Violence* meets *A Whole Nine Yards* meets box office gold!

Dirty Little Billy – I don't like that one and would never pick it, but even still: Janine and Will (Sandra Bullock and ANY OTHER ACTOR!) seem like the perfect couple... to everyone except Janine's brother Rick (George Clooney), that is. It's the little things that Rick, a clinical psychologist who has extensive experience working with prisoners and other sociopaths, picks up on at first. When Rick receives a troubling text message from Will, meant for Janine, he figures that's all the proof he needs. Everyone else in the family, though – especially Mom and/or Dad (Helen Mirren and/or Christopher Plummer) thinks that Rick is simply being the over-protective older brother he's always been. Anyway, things eventually go *Sleeping With the Enemy* on us... can Clooney stop Will in time?

The Stuff – Brilliant physics professor/slash/triathlete Sandra Bullock vows to try to fulfill a childhood wish of becoming an astronaut after the tragic death of her (dad, mom, sister, cousin, best friend). Clooney, like, doesn't want her to, or something. And he's in charge of who gets to be an astronaut, or whatever.

All right, that one needs some refining. But still. It's *The Right Stuff* meets *G.I. Jane* meets you guys getting your asses kicked! I breathlessly await Brandon's next two picks, so I can get back to rocking you guys's faces off.

JAMESON: *Three quickie hypothetical fake movies off the top of the head - brilliant stuff. My movie will be Cruz and Tucci watching those three movies, then reading your fake Oscar picks from two years ago.*

Pick 10: Brandon

Christoph Waltz. *Inglorious Basterds* is one of the few Best Picture nominees I've actually seen, and if, like me, you've seen it, then you know that Christoph Waltz is a force to be reckoned with. There is not a movie around that he could not make better (well, except perhaps for *Dirty Little Billy*; I agree with Joe, that's gotta be the worst title on our list).

You want to know how good Waltz is in *Basterds*? Check this out: the guy has received 28 award nominations for his performance (from entities ranging from the Cannes Film Festival to various film critics associations to the Golden Globes), and so far, he has won 26 of them, with only the Saturn Award and the Oscars yet to be determined. Yeah, you read that right. He may pull off a clean sweep of 28 fuckin' awards. Go ahead, take a minute to go change your underwear, because I know you just soiled yourself in terror (or possibly in aroused excitement).

Jeff Bridges and Christoph Waltz. The agents for dozens of famous Hollywood directors are now calling my phone, just on the off-chance this is an actual movie. But wait, I'm not done...

Round 3, Pick 11: Brandon

Vera Farmiga. If you've seen *Up in the Air*, then you know that Vera Farmiga can play smart, she can play sexy, and she can play tough. She'll put all of those skills to use in...

Rattled (Formerly *The Apple*) – Jeff Bridges is a whip-smart big city police detective, considered by his peers to be a genius, one of the best in the business. But he's got his demons too, obsessing over his cases to an unhealthy degree, bit of a drinking problem... you know the drill. His current obsession is a serial killer who has been terrorizing the city for the better part of a year and leaving teasing clues for Bridges, a killer played of course by Christoph Waltz, doing his restrained, mannered evil bit to perfection. Waltz and Bridges have a history – about two years ago, while on the job, Bridges shot and killed Waltz's son. Only Bridges doesn't know this, he doesn't know Waltz from a hole in the ground, they've never met. But Waltz has dedicated himself to learning everything he can about Bridges, including the identity of his wife, Vera Farmiga, who just happens to be a psychologist. And guess who has been one of her therapy patients for the better part of the last year? Yeah, that's right, bitches: Waltz.

So... Waltz continues taunting Bridges with clues while playing mind games in his sessions with Farmiga. Maybe Waltz finds a way to push Bridges into prying into Farmiga's professional territory, to pit the two of them against each other. Bridges starts losing it, Waltz is in his head, he's making bad decisions, getting reckless, he's (yeah, you guessed it) rattled. Can he piece together Waltz's puzzle in time to save his wife?

Guess you'll have to wait to find out.

Yeah, that just happened. Shit just got real.

Pick 12: Joe

Hm...

Last time I had a plan. I had my title and my cast all picked out essentially before the thing even started, and I got just who I needed (if not exactly who I wanted).

This time, I just thought "if they're dumb/slash/grief-stricken enough to let me get Clooney *and* Sandra Bullock, I can write my own ticket," so I haven't really been thinking ahead.

So... Let's see...

You know what? I'm like the Saints, basically; I'm actually set (Bullock and the Cloon), I have no gaping needs that need addressing right away, so I'm just going to go "best available," which in this case is:

Colin Firth.

Actually, "best available" in this case would be Helen Mirren, probably, but I'm still picking Colin Firth. There's only three men left, after all, so I can't really risk no dudes being there at Pick #19 when I'm up next. Then we're into chick flick territory, and nobody wins. Except perhaps chicks.

Anyway, I'm not saying I'm necessarily going to need anybody to be playing a romantic rival to Clooney, but if I do decide to go that way, Firth is my secret weapon. With the Britishness, and the "Ooooo, he's so British and proper and sexy," and all that. Don't believe it would work? Check this out: maybe Clooney is blue collar in my movie. Boom! Instant vulnerable-to-a-rich-classy-British-guy-ness.

Pick 13: Tenessa

Oh, boys. It is so adorable watching you play right into my hands. I already have Matt Damon and Woody Harrelson, and you're just going to leave my secret weapon lying RIGHT THERE? That's painfully cute.

I don't have the patience to type a lengthy smackdown on my iPod, so let me put you out of your misery:

Helen Mirren.

You can blame Joe when all of your dicks fall off in shame.

JOE: Hey, if I'd wanted Helen Mirren 45 minutes ago, I totally could have had her. (And I mean that in every possible way in which it could be interpreted. Bow-chicka-bow.)

Pick 14: Mike

(91 minutes of crying, 8 of which were chest-throbbing sobs into a thrown pillow stuffed with Colin Firth's chest hair that I purchased on ebay from a suspiciously hairy dude...)

Ok. I am over losing Colin Firth. I had a great idea for him.

Gay Hitler.

Now I move to plan E (To be determined). Having just seen *Crazy Heart*, **Maggie Gyllenhaal** is off the board, bitches. Now, I have a young actress who can play hottie with depth,

or grizzled with style, or married to Peter Skarsgaard. Streep. Freeman. Gyllenhaal. I only pick actors with two vowels in a row in their last names. This, of course, means I might have to abdicate my final round pick unless you are willing to give me a "spelling flyer" on Gabourey Sidibe or count l's, m's, and n's as honorary vowels.

Hey, where's my dick? Did it fall off in shame again? Christ.

Gyllenhaal, bitches.

Pick 15: Jameson

Christopher Plummer. I had to gamble that Plummer would stick around until pick 15. If not, I wagered there'd be some other dudes around to take his place, but last night we were down to only Plummer and Renner. Tenessa mercifully picked a lady, so at least I had a fallback dude if Wagner took Plummer, but would Wagner pick Plummer? A cast of Freeman, Streep, and Plummer would mean no actors under age 60 in his film, guaranteeing nobody would go see his movie who still had their original colon. Still, Mike's a maverick – I barely slept last night.

Round 4, Pick 16: Jameson

Carey Mulligan.

With Gyllenhaal off the table, my choice of which young cutie to round out my cast got pretty simple, too. (I looked over some clips from *An Education* – taking this Mulligan will be no compromise at all.) (What? Stop hitting me!!)

Obviously, this is not a team of All-Stars (or, to put it more accurately, all stars) – on his or her own, none of these actors is known for "opening" a movie, Clooney-style. Still, each is a powerhouse performer, and together they make a team that will capsize your \$80-\$150 million juggernaut and its bloated above-the-line budget before you even see us coming. ("Would Mr. Clooney like a two-story trailer?" "Does Mr. Bridges need a per diem for his beard fluffer?" "Will Ms. Mirren's Pekingese be taking another shit in this gilded, silk-lined receptacle, or shall I throw it away?")

For proof of their nimble, jaunty versatility, I'll deploy Mr. Mulder's ingenious device of pitching you three random story ideas to tide us over until I get my shot at the title-drafting round and the real magic begins. I'll just throw three darts at our list of titles...

Hm. Wall, baseboard, some guy's leg.

Listen, why don't we just let our good friends at random.org select three titles?

What Waits Below - Tucci finally made partner at his law firm and he and Cruz are spending the bonus check on that plot of land they've had their eye on in the country, a few hours outside of town. She's got dreams of building a little getaway cottage down by the lake, but as soon as they break ground a body turns up (Kevin Costner in an uncredited role). Tucci's builder urges them to cover it up rather than suffer costly delays, but then strange things start to happen. After Tucci suffers a nasty fall out of his office window and Cruz has a run-in with a spectral vision, they finally go to the cops and lead investigator Christopher Plummer is not happy about the attempted cover-up. But since his daughter (Mulligan) seems to be able to talk to the spirits, maybe they're uniquely able to help?

Rattled - I'm thinking we go Pixar with this one: partly because we've never drafted for an animated film before; partly because I don't think we mention Pixar enough on this site these days; partly because I think it'll steam Joe's hams if I draft Penelope Cruz and then never show her body on-screen. The actors lend their voices to a bunch of babies, and the whole thing takes place in a nursery day care. It's *Muppet Babies* meets *The A-Team* – building off Maggie's great escape from the Ayn Rand School for Tots. Plummer is the grizzled team-leader baby who's getting too old for this shit. Tucci is the loose-cannon baby who always goes off-book at the wrong moment, but damn if he doesn't get results. Cruz is the sexy, cat burglar baby who never met a security system she can't disarm (the same part I assume she played in *G-Force*). And Mulligan plays the new baby to the group, eager to join the fight for justice – but it turns out her dad has shady mob ties she doesn't know about, so she brings trouble ...and maybe the first case the baby squad can't cutely wriggle its way out of?

Phase Four - Tucci leads the final phase to prepare a colony on Mars for a mining mission. Cruz is his able sidekick, who completed her geology Ph.D. three years early. Plummer is the CEO of the mining company, along for the photo op – he gets to turn on the gears for the first time in front of the cameras. There are three other guys (no-name actors who are there to gasp and explode first as soon as shit goes wrong) and Carey Mulligan, who wasn't supposed to be aboard, but she was tightening a bolt or something when the rocket went off. You know the rest: Tucci's hubris gets the best of him; a few bad decisions set them on a course to certain doom; Cruz in her panties for some reason; Plummer: "My name is ON THE BUILDING, for God's sake!!"; Mulligan saves the day in a clever, plucky way; slow-motion splashdown landing off the coast of Catalina.

I'm glad your faces are already rocked off and your dicks already fell off in shame. Makes it easier for me to stomp them into a pulp with my boot.

Okay Mike, you again. Shame, too – I would've loved to see Gay Hitler. I bet Mo'Nique could pull it off. (And, technically, she has no last name - we don't know how many

vowels are in there!)

Pick 17: Mike

Mo'Nique. I know what you are thinking. Is Mike making *Thirteen Women* about an aging, black Mormon polygamist? Maybe I am...maybe I am. Also, is it okay to add "Based on the Novel 'Push' by Sapphire" onto whatever title I pick? Isn't that the dumbest thing to be added to a movie title since the words "Male Gigolo" followed an otherwise stately "Deuce Bigalow?" Of course, perhaps I'll make *Rule #3* about an aging interracial couple who fancies themselves hip until the daughter brings home...a woman to meet mom and dad!

'Nique, bitches. Tenessa, you're up – though you should probably just take the time you'd take to make a pick to write a song praising my genius.

Pick 18: Tenessa

I'm not going to lie to you, Wagner. Mo'Nique was the clincher in my perfect cast. This is my first setback, but I think I can keep it going with my final pick...

Anna Kendrick.

Pick 19: Joe

Let's see... Jeremy Renner, Gabourey Sidibe... same person, really. I may as well just flip a coin.

The funny thing is, once I got Clooney I sort of started building an idea around him, Sandra Bullock, Christopher Plummer, and Gabourey Sidibe (whom I was pretty sure would be available to me as the second-to-last pick). But then when it came to me, I went and picked Colin Firth instead.

So... what to do, what to do...

You know what? Christopher Plummer doesn't have to be Clooney's dad. Colin Firth can be his brother. If I even go with that idea. Which I now almost certainly won't.

And I'd at least like to be balanced out, gender-wise, so:

Gabourey Sidibe.

I'd throw some scenarios and some prospective titles at you, but as of right now I have no clue what's going to happen.

Pick 20: Brandon

Jeremy Renner. Looking over his resume, I think I can

safely say I've never seen Jeremy Renner in anything. But I realize that says more about my recent child-driven lack of movie exposure than it does about him. He and I were apparently born just 13 days apart, so I'm sure we'll get along just fine.

Title Round, Pick 1: Brandon

I'm taking *Once Upon a Time*. I've got a rough idea of what I'd like to do with it, but I'm gonna need more time to flesh it out.

Pick 2: Joe

I still have no earthly idea what I'm going to do, but I'll take *Rule #3*.

I'm thinking of going sort of hip, self-aware comedy (think *Get Shorty*, maybe, at least in terms of tone if nothing else), so, whatever direction I go with it, Rule #1 can be, like, "Always Keep Your Eyes Peeled," Rule #2 can be "Never Forget Who's In Charge," and the breaking of – or strict adherence to – Rule #3 will be what sets our movie in motion. Whatever Rule #3 turns out to be.

And maybe that's the "reveal" at the end. In fact, that's even the poster. Clooney standing there looking wacky, Sandra Bullock looking cougarish, Colin Firth and Gabourey Sidibe in the background, and it says:

"Rule #1: [Whatever]"

"Rule #2: [Whatever]"

...and then, it bigger letters...

"Rule #3"

Then underneath the pictures of the cast, like, "What is Rule #3?"

Like the characters can always be talking about Rule #3, like a bit of a running gag. And that's the campaign. "What is Rule #3?"

(Just wait until I get the Photoshop skills necessary to put together posters for all of our fake movies, by the way. Or the balls big enough to point out to Photoshop guru Jameson, who's very busy these days, how frickin' sweet it would be if posters for these fake movies of ours existed.)

Pick 3: Tenessa

I'm not ready to tell you much about *Second Thought*, but I will tell you this much: it is loosely based on a true story that

hasn't happened yet – a true story of grave robbery.

Jameson, you can go ahead and start searching for images of shovels.

BRANDON: *Grave robbery? Oh great, here comes the chick flick...*

Pick 4: Mike

Is it my pick? I have a 20-month old with a 103.6 temp and a mommy who is out of town, that (adjective deleted) (expletive deleted). *If You Knew Suzie...*

JAMESON: *Is that the pitch for If You Knew Suzie...? I'd watch Streep go after Freeman with a rectal thermometer in that flick.*

Pick 5: Jameson

With the final pick in the best of all possible movie drafts, I select *Man From Nowhere* – my movie will mix the best elements of *The Prestige*, *Step Brothers*, and *There Will Be Blood*. You probably think I am kidding, but my script doctors are currently concocting ways to obliterate your amygdalae from the inside out – oh, you'll rue the day.

I'm talking imminent, imminent rueage.

The Films

If You Knew Suzie... – Mike

Starring Meryl Streep, Morgan Freeman, Maggie Gyllenhaal, and Mo'Nique

(Based on a true story – though by "based" I am closer to how *Fargo* is based on a true story than how *Miracle* is.)

Suzie Allard (Streep), an honest-to-goodness real life professor in the School of Informatics at the University of Tennessee, makes scientists famous. An expert in communicating enormously complicated ideas to the public, her real business is working as a consultant to academics who need help marketing their discoveries, and (less face it, they are academics) themselves. We see a montage of before/after moments of some *poindexter-cum-suave* ivory tower types on *Oppez* (Mo'Nique), who is the reigning queen of daytime television. Allard is a one-way ticket to Oppez's Monthly Science Chat – a chat that makes one's likelihood of getting a MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant 800% higher.

Cut to Sylvester Morgan's (Freeman) biophysics lab at Berkeley. Some enormous machines make horrible screeching sounds. Everyone looks worried. Morgan smiles.

"Perfect." It turns out that Morgan has invented a way to make time stop in a single living thing for "no more than 2 minutes." A know-it-all grad students explains how this could revolutionize surgery, preventing a patient from bleeding out, arresting, etc.; giving doctors a few minutes more to save them. The problem is that Morgan doesn't have a delivery system that gives precise control to *when* the time will stop. He needs grant money to make that happen. Unfortunately, the head of the National Science Foundation hates Morgan's guts – the result of a relationship gone bad. And now, Freeman's private benefactor lost it all in the great recession of '09 (as was the case with George Costanza, Madoff is to blame).

On the east coast, M.I.T. grad student Curie Applewhite (Gyllenhaal) is working on interrupting the central nervous system of prairie voles at precise times (a lot of what we know about monogamy, parenting, and autism come from studies of prairie voles). She has figured out how to deliver these interruptions – she just doesn't know what to do with it.

Morgan meets Allard. He is resistant, but she sells him eventually. She also knows Applewhite and suggests that Morgan meet her (without telling Morgan her name). When they meet, Curie Applewhite meets her father – a father who didn't know he had a daughter...a daughter whose mother runs the National Science Foundation.

Fits, starts, breakdowns and breakthroughs of both scientific and parent-child relations abound, shepherded along by Allard's sure hands. Applewhite's work leads to a theory of how Morgan could control time stoppage in surgery patients. They just need the money.

As Morgan and Applewhite's relationship gets closer both personally and professionally, Oppez gets hooked by Allard's selling of the father-daughter angle. This makes Curie uncomfortable forcing Morgan to choose between his life's work and his new daughter.

Sylvester will go on *Oppez* but only on the condition that she not ask about his daughter. What results is a bunch of uncomfortable silence and some underhanded deal-breaking questions from Oppez ending with Morgan insulting Oppez (a no-no in these United States) and seeming to sell out his daughter when in fact he is protecting her. All is lost...until Leona Applewhite hears the whole story and opens a line of funding for the research. Time hasn't healed the rift between Leona and Sylvester, but they do bond over protecting their daughter who gets a MacArthur Genius grant right before the credits roll.

If You Knew Suzie... is *Kinsey* meets *Fly By Night*.

Man From Nowhere – Jameson

Starring Stanley Tucci, Christopher Plummer, Penelope Cruz,

and Carey Mulligan

Meet Reginald MacCruiskeen (Christopher Plummer), an insanely wealthy railroad baron controlling most of the American frontier. Monocle, thick brogue, muttonchops you could lose your delousing comb in – the whole bit. He travels the countryside with Conchita (Penelope Cruz), the sister he kidnapped from a Mexican bandito three years ago. He's building an empire, taking over towns wherever he likes, and crushing any resistance with his mighty rail embargoes. As he sees it, there's nothing to prevent him from dying with at least 40% of the wealth in the known world, and he frequently hollers that fact into the face of his opponents at the poker table.

Life's pretty good for him, especially today: he's on his way to purchase the second largest railroad in America; after lunch he'll own everything west of Chicago. At the meeting, though, he learns that the head of the railroad has died, leaving control with his son-in-law, who has another buyer in mind. So MacCruiskeen meets Max Hammersmith (Stanley Tucci), who made his fortune in textiles, and thinks it would be fun to run a railroad. He casually outbids MacCruiskeen, makes several passes at Conchita, and, within an hour of meeting, the men are instant adversaries.

Now it's an escalating rivalry between two ridiculously wealthy eccentrics, playing on a massive scale for little more than their own egos. Hammersmith wins Conchita's heart and the contract for the Sierra-Nevada pass on the same day, and MacCruiskeen declares all-out war. When you're in the top 1% income and you want revenge, there's really no prank or sabotage beyond your grasp. MacCruiskeen has a thousand workmen labor overnight to redirect one of Hammersmith's railroads into the side of a mountain. Hammersmith retaliates by attaching 1,000,000 horsepower worth of locomotives to MacCruiskeen's mansion and dragging it into a lake. It intensifies to the point that they step down from day-to-day control of their businesses to focus full attention on their elaborate schemes. Even Conchita, living with Hammersmith, never sees him. She blows up at him when he explains that it's a busy time at work and she forces him to admit that his "work" is day-long strategy meetings for humiliating MacCruiskeen. When she threatens to go back to him, Hammersmith brightens – maybe he can use this as part of a ploy! She storms out, exasperated.

In his coup de grace, Hammersmith hires a young girl (Carey Mulligan) to play the part of MacCruiskeen's long-lost granddaughter. She'll cozy up to him, and he'll end up sending her back to Hammersmith, pretending to be his long-lost sister, then steal information about his business. By feeding MacCruiskeen information this way, Mulligan will gain his trust, and use it to steal information about his business for Hammersmith. It's an ingenious plot, devilishly overcomplicated as befits the deranged minds who conceived it – and it works all too well. Its only weakness is that both men are too blinded by their feud to realize that if they

could've thought of it, Conchita could have also. Mulligan is actually playing both of them on Conchita's behalf, and in the end, the two women end up with both railroads and the entire American west.

Once Upon a Time – Brandon

Starring Jeff Bridges, Christoph Waltz, Vera Farmiga, and Jeremy Renner

Jeff Bridges is Dale Jenkins, author of the best-selling "Once Upon a Time" books, a series for kids that puts a fairy tale spin on the everyday exploits of a school-age brother and sister. In his real life, however, Jenkins is hardly what you'd expect from a children's author: he's a drinker and womanizer, prone to embarrassing moments that are often kept under wraps by the dedicated efforts of his illustrator and friend, Bart Powell (Jeremy Renner).

Jenkins's chief rival in the children's book market is Karl Schreiber (Christoph Waltz), whose "L'il Herr Gestankhosen" (Little Mr. Stink Trousers) series consistently runs a close second in overall sales. He despises Jenkins, considers him a hack, and would love nothing more than to see him ruined. So when the two appear at the same convention, Schreiber uses the opportunity to get an inebriated Jenkins to punch him in the face in front of a crowd of disapproving parents and wide-eyed kids.

Powell gives Jenkins an ultimatum: either he starts working with a publicist/image consultant Powell has lined up, or their partnership is over. Jenkins knows he needs Powell, so he agrees to meet with the publicist, Maggie Hart (Vera Farmiga). Maggie is smart, sexy, and a bit of a ball-breaker; she basically tells Jenkins he's an ass, but also proceeds to lay out a step-by-step plan for rehabilitating his public image. They discuss whether Maggie has any kids and if they've ever read Jenkins's books; she does have kids (it's also made clear she's divorced), but they've never read his books because Maggie always thought they seemed like "children's books written by someone who didn't really want to be writing children's books." Jenkins is amused by her bluntness; you can tell he's smitten with her.

Jenkins continues working with Maggie, gets to know her and her kids. He finds himself not only trying to repair his damaged public image, but to change himself as a person to win her over. Meanwhile, Schreiber keeps stoking the fire of disapproval, appearing on TV wearing a cervical collar and sobbing about how the only thing he's been able to write since the punching incident is his new book "L'il Herr Gestankhosen und der Nachtterror" (Night Terror). Privately, he taunts Jenkins, laughing that he'll soon take his rightful place at number one.

Maggie pushes Jenkins to confront Schreiber in public, and orchestrates a joint appearance for the two of them on an Oprah/Ellen-style daytime talk show. She and Powell coach

Jenkins on how to push Schreiber's buttons, and during the taping, Jenkins goads Schreiber into a passionate admission that the beloved Onkel (Uncle) Rudolph character in his books is, in fact, a stand-in for Hitler. As he completes an impromptu, frenzied monologue advocating the tenets of National Socialism and snaps out of his fervor, Schreiber realizes he's been beat, that his run of success is finished.

Jenkins turns over the "Once Upon a Time" series to Powell (who is thrilled to try his hand as author and illustrator), and writes a semi-autobiographical novel that is very well received. He marries Maggie, and for the first time in his life, finds himself happy and at peace.

Rule #3 – Joe

Starring George Clooney, Sandra Bullock, Colin Firth, and Gabourey Sidibe

Con man Jerry Briscoe (George Clooney) is released from prison and picked up by old buddy Bristol Pete (Colin Firth). They were like brothers back when; learned the grift from the same mentor, drifted apart for a number of years when Pete went back to England, but reconnected as "pen pals" when Jerry was in the joint.

Pete throws Jerry a party at Pete's restaurant. There we meet Juliana (Sandra Bullock), Pete's girlfriend, and Lulu (Gabourey Sidibe), the daughter of a former cellmate of Jerry's who kept in touch after her father died. Lulu doesn't stay long; not her crowd.

After everyone leaves, Pete tells Jerry he's got something lined up but he needs \$250k more to pull it off. He knows Jerry squirreled away some cash before he went to prison. Jerry tries to deny it, but Pete says Jerry's secret stash is the worst-kept secret in the con game. Jerry wonders if Pete won't just steal his \$250k; he reminds Pete of Rule #1: "Be careful who you trust." Pete reminds Jerry of Rule #2: "But you've got to trust someone." Jerry asks Pete if he remembers Rule #3, and Pete says that he can't recall it just now.

After Jerry leaves, Juliana comes back and asks if Jerry's in. Pete says probably; turns out they *do* plan to steal Jerry's money.

We find out Jerry and Juliana were lovers at the time Jerry was arrested (Pete doesn't know; that was while he and Jerry lost touch). Juliana tells Jerry that Pete is after his stash. She proposes the two of them take *Pete's* \$250k. Jerry agrees.

Pete and Juliana follow Jerry, just in case he happens to lead them to his stash. Why not? He doesn't; they just see him catching up Lulu over lunch.

Pete does wonder why he has to bring \$250k with him just to steal the same amount from Jerry; Juliana says they have to show Jerry the money itself so he thinks the deal is genuine.

Jerry shows up at Pete's restaurant with a briefcase. Pete has a similar briefcase sitting in front of him. He opens it up. "See?" Pete says. "There's my part of it. Now, for yours..."

Juliana pulls a gun on Pete and says she'll be taking *his* briefcase. Jerry says that Juliana told him Pete was trying to screw him, so it's only fair that Jerry and Juliana take Pete's money.

Juliana points the gun at Jerry, though, and says she'll be taking all of it. She opens up Jerry's case... but it's full of newspapers. What?

Jerry says there's no stash; he went into prison broke. He told her – only her – he had a stash and made her swear not to tell anybody else, because he wasn't sure if he could trust her. Once others had heard of his "stash," he knew he couldn't.

Juliana says whatever; she's still walking with \$250k. Then she hears "not so fast." It's Lulu, gun pointed at Juliana. She makes Juliana drop her gun, they handcuff Pete and Juliana together and leave them there to be found two days later (Pete keeps the restaurant closed Mondays). By then, Jerry and Lulu will be long gone.

Jerry chides Pete and Juliana for forgetting Rule #3. Pete tells Jerry to stop being an asshole; he knows there's no Rule #3. Lulu asks what they're talking about. Jerry says Pete's right: Rule #3 is that there is no Rule #3. The first two rules are it; that's how important they are. And still, Pete trusted the wrong person in Juliana, and Juliana didn't trust anyone.

Jerry trusted Lulu, meanwhile, and guess who's leaving with the money?

Second Thought – Tenessa

Starring Matt Damon, Woody Harrelson, Helen Mirren, and Anna Kendrick

Kenny Reynolds (Woody Harrelson) does manly work in a warehouse. He banter with others in a way that makes two things clear: he is an alpha male, but he'll never be the guy with a big paycheck or even a cell phone – something confirmed when the manager hollers from the second floor office, "Reynolds! Phone! Keep it short!"

He heads to the break room to answer a call from his baby brother, David (Matt Damon). "Kenny? It's about mom." He doesn't respond. "She's sick, Kenny." Still nothing. "Look, I don't care whether you come home or not, but I thought you should know she's dying."

David Reynolds is the good son. Eight years younger than his brother, David bought a house just 12 blocks away from their parents. Kenny left town when their dad died, so David is the one who has stood by their mother, Nellie (Helen Mirren). Still single at the age of 38, David makes a good

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living as a shoe salesman.

When Kenny shows up at the doorstep during Sunday dinner, Nellie is overjoyed. She ribs him a little, saying, "Why, Kenny, I've been *dying* to see you!" David is horrified, but Kenny grins and replies, "Shit, ma, we're all dying. You're just doing it faster."

A complicated reunion ensues. As the brothers try to make peace with their situation, Kenny also has to face his estranged daughter, Pacey (Anna Kendrick), who still lives in town and has a close relationship with her grandma. Nellie eventually pulls rank on the lot of them and insists that they get together for weekly dinners during Kenny's 3-month stay. During one such dinner, she is distraught that she will not be buried with their father. "Bill's sister insisted on laying his ashes to rest in their family plot, but there's no room. We won't be together."

David steps up. He tells Kenny they have to retrieve their father's ashes to fulfill their mother's dying wish. There's no time to fill out forms and wait for permission; they have to do this themselves. Kenny is stunned but approving when David declares, "I'm not like you. I don't have a criminal record. I'm not even sure I've ever dug a hole in my life. But I'm doing this with or without your help."

The big laugh in the movie – the one you see in every preview – is Nellie announcing at dinner that she wishes they had ordered pizza instead of Chinese food. Kenny responds, "Ma, do us a favor and start filling us in on these preferences *before* it's too late to change the order."

Will they dig up their dad in time to comfort their mom? What, if anything, will they learn about brotherhood? One thing's for sure: with Pacey driving the getaway car through a downpour on the night of the attempt, *Second Thought* promises to be a hilarious and poignant romp through the challenges of grave robbery.

(Reviews of these five films can be found here: [*If You Knew Suzie...*](#); [*Man from Nowhere*](#); [*Once Upon a Time*](#); [*Rule #3*](#); [*Second Thought*](#).)

The 2010 Movie Draft is dedicated in loving memory to Tom Gemelke, Sr.
