

Oscar Picks 2010!

by Joe Mulder

Is it Oscar time again? Already?

Didn't we just do this?

Well, let's get on with it then.

Like I do every year, let me cut-and-paste what I wrote back in 2005 to tell you how this particular column works:

Please note: these are my [PoopReading.com] predictions, not to be confused with my all-important picks in [PoopReading.com co-contributor] Jameson Simmons' [Onebee.com Oscar pool](#) (aka "The Only Reason At All I Still Pay Any Attention to the Oscars"). I reserve the right to refine my choices for Jameson's until late Sunday afternoon.

I'll be telling you who *will* win, not who *should* win. As far as who should win I have very few opinions anymore, having seen very few movies this year. TV is way better. That being said, here we go:

BEST PICTURE

Nominees:

Avatar
The Blind Side
District 9
An Education
The Hurt Locker
Inglourious Basterds
Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" By Sapphire [hereafter referred to as *Precious, Etc.*]
A Serious Man
Up
Up in the Air

You know what? Usually I tackle this one first and then move on down the line, but this year we're going to save Best Picture. For the first time since I can remember, nobody really seems to know which movie is going to win (now the "consensus" has been wrong before – *Shakespeare in Love* over *Saving Private Ryan*, *Crash* over *Brokeback Mountain* – but at least there was always consensus. This year? Madness).

So let's put a pin in that one, and move on to some sure things to make us all feel better...

BEST DIRECTOR

Winner:

Kathryn Bigelow, *The Hurt Locker*

Other Nominees:

James Cameron, *Avatar*
Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*
Lee Daniels, *Precious, Etc.*
Jason Reitman, *Up in the Air*

Last June, after the good folks at the Academy announced that they were expanding the Best Picture category to ten nominees, we here at PoopReading.com did a [Baron von Funny](#) piece about *other* proposed changes to the 2010 Oscars. One of my entrants read "Women and blacks will now be eligible in the Best Director category." That was a joke, but it turned out I was right! Kathryn Bigelow and Lee Daniels became the fourth woman and the second black man, respectively, to be nominated for the award.

Avatar director James Cameron created a movie that would certainly have to be considered the "MVP" of 2009, but that's not necessarily what the Oscars are about. Cameron also won a wheelbarrow full of Academy Awards for *Titanic* back in '98, so a loss for him wouldn't necessarily feel like a snub.

And interestingly enough, though it doesn't have much to do with anything, Cameron and Bigelow were married for a brief period some years ago. The consensus this year certainly seems to be that Cameron's ex-wife will get the best of him.

(Kathryn Bigelow, that is. If all of James Cameron's ex-wives were going to win Oscars this year, there would be no Oscars left over for anybody else)

And for those of you thinking, "Wait a minute; are you *sure* Kathryn Bigelow has a chance? I mean, what are the odds that Academy voters – that *anyone* in Hollywood – would ever involve themselves in any sort of enterprise in which a smart, hard-nosed, capable woman gets the better of her cocky, pompous ex?," I'd simply say you may have a point, but I'd then remind you of every movie, TV show and commercial, ever.

BEST ACTOR

Winner:

Jeff Bridges, *Crazy Heart*

Other Nominees:

George Clooney, *Up in the Air*
Colin Firth, *A Single Man*
Morgan Freeman, *Invictus*
Jeremy Renner, *The Hurt Locker*

It would be a bit of a shock if Jeff Bridges didn't win. Up against two previous winners in Clooney and Freeman (albeit in the Supporting category, but the point is their mantles are

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not bare) and two first-time nominees in Firth and Renner, Bridges should finally get an Oscar as the cherry on top of a prolific and entertaining career.

And that's the nice thing about both the Academy Awards themselves and the relative ease of predicting them: it's not like sports. If Dan Marino is in his last season and he's never won a Super Bowl, well, he still might finish his career with a 62-7 loss to the Jaguars. Not so with the Oscars; if everyone wants the feel-good story of Jeff Bridges finally talking home an Oscar, then all they have to do is vote for it to happen.

Plus, if sports were movies, Dan Marino could have played until he was in his mid-80s.

BEST ACTRESS

Winner:

Sandra Bullock, *The Blind Side*

Other Nominees:

Helen Mirren, *The Last Station*
Carey Mulligan, *An Education*
Gabourey Sidibe, *Precious, Etc.*
Meryl Streep, *Julie & Julia*

Maybe even a week ago it looked like all of the acting categories were set in stone, but now it seems as though some folks think Meryl Streep could pull this one out and take home Oscar #3.

One of my Oscar picking rules is "Don't Be a Hero;" if pretty much everybody thinks that Sandra Bullock is going to win, just pick Sandra Bullock to win. In the long run, over the course of a lifetime of Oscar picking, this will serve you well.

(Then again, maybe you should know that the last year I actually won an Oscar pool, I think the Oakland Raiders had a winning record. So, take it for what it's worth)

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

Winner:

Christoph Waltz, *Inglourious Basterds*

Other Nominees:

Matt Damon, *Invictus*
Woody Harrelson, *The Messenger*
Christopher Plummer, *The Last Station*
Stanley Tucci, *The Lovely Bones*

This race was over approximately two weeks before *Basterds*

opened last summer. There's no chance that Christoph Waltz won't win.

If this were any other Oscars one might have some slight trepidation about a possible "lifetime achievement" sort of vote going to first-time nominee Christopher Plummer, who's 80 – sort of like when Peter O'Toole was up against *The Last King of Scotland's* Forest Whitaker a few years ago (although that trepidation was very slight indeed).

Not this year. If you're in an Oscar pool and you don't pick Christoph Waltz, you're clearly just doing it to be a dick. "Ooooo, look at me, everybody... I'm the one who didn't pick Christoph Waltz."

Come on, man. Grow up.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Winner:

Mo'Nique, *Precious, Etc.*

Other Nominees:

Penélope Cruz, *Nine*
Vera Farmiga, *Up in the Air*
Maggie Gyllenhaal, *Crazy Heart*
Anna Kendrick, *Up in the Air*

Pretty much just take what I said about Christoph Waltz; that goes for Mo'Nique as well.

Also working in her favor: remember a couple of years ago when Eddie Murphy was a Best Supporting Actor contender for *Dreamgirls*, only the posters for *Norbit* were plastered all around town during the weeks leading up to the Oscars? And people were wondering whether that may subconsciously – or consciously – sway some voters away from him? He ended up losing out to Alan Arkin in *Little Miss Sunshine*, as it happens.

Well, the good news for Mo'Nique is that I've seen nary a *Phat Girlz* or *Beerfest* poster anywhere in the last few months, so she's as safe a bet as there will ever be.

BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

Winner:

Mark Boal, *The Hurt Locker*

Other Nominees:

Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*
Alessandro Camon and Owen Moverman, *The Messenger*
Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, *A Serious Man*
Bob Peterson, Pete Docter and Tom McCarthy, *Up*

This is considered one of the closest races of the entire night. The Best Picture winner tends to get a screenplay award, and since *Avatar* wasn't nominated for one, that trend can only continue if Best Picture contender *The Hurt Locker* or semi-contender *Inglourious Basterds* pulls out a win here. Screenplay awards can also function as a "We Couldn't Really Give You Best Picture, But We All Know You're Really the Best Picture" honorific (one could argue that movies such as *Sideways*, *Almost Famous*, *L.A. Confidential* and *Fargo*, to name but a few, fall into this category).

So who wins? This seems as good a time as any to break out Roger Ebert's old Oscar-predicting trope: when in doubt, replace the word "Best" with the word "Most," and that's how the votes will usually go. If we did that here then *Basterds* would be a shoo-in; say what you want about Quentin Tarantino, the man sure writes the ever-loving hell out of his movies, with *Inglourious Basterds* being the best (or most egregious, depending on where you stand) example yet.

And yet for all the uncertainty in trying to predict this year's awards, there remains a possibility that it could simply end up being *The Hurt Locker's* night altogether. I still don't know about that but I do know that at least the possibility exists, I do know that Quentin Tarantino has already got an Oscar for Original Screenplay and that might be enough to sway a tiiiiiny number of voters away from him in a very close race, and I know that if there are open seats on the *Hurt Locker* bandwagon I'd be silly not to jump on and claim one.

BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Winner:

Jason Reitman and Sheldon Turner, *Up in the Air*

Other Nominees:

Neill Blomkamp and Teri Tatchell, *District 9*

Nick Horby, *An Education*

Jesse Armstrong, Simon Blackwell, Armando Iannucci and Tony Roche, *In the Loop*

Geoffrey Fletcher, *Precious*, *Etc.*

Everyone seems to think that *Up in the Air* is the very likely winner, and since I am, by definition, included in that group, then add me to the list.

And maybe it's just me, but right before *Avatar* opened, wasn't *Up in the Air* considered a Best Picture front-runner? I swear I kept hearing that it was. And it's not like people didn't know about *The Hurt Locker* at that point; *The Hurt Locker* had been out for months.

Who knows how why it all works how it works, huh?

I will say that, when done well, the "People Pretty Much Just

Sitting Around Talking" genre of film is probably my favorite, and for the first three-quarters of its running time at least, *Up in the Air* was one of the best examples of that type of movie I've seen in a long time. So while it's the only one of this category's nominees that I actually saw, I'm sure it deserves a writing Oscar nonetheless.

And now we come, as we do every year, to the pee break categories (but don't worry: I haven't forgotten about Best Picture. We'll get to that at the end).

In the past I've always quoted my 2005 self to explain how I pick these categories, but now, for the first time in a half-decade, those words no longer apply. As such, the following paragraph will now be what I cut and paste in Oscar picks columns to come. So if you miss anything, don't fret; you'll read it again next year:

I use two primary sources, *Entertainment Weekly* and AwardsDaily.com (a website that assembles several predictions into something of a consensus), to determine my picks for these categories. If I make a pick that differs from either or both of these sources, I'll be sure to tell you why.

BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM

Winner:

The Secret in Their Eyes (El Secreto de Sus Ojos), Argentina

Other Nominees:

Ajami, Israel

The Milk of Sorrow (La Teta Asustada), Peru

A Prophet (Un Prophete), France

The White Ribbon (Das Weisse Band), Germany

I actually demoted this category to the pee break section this year because I haven't heard word one about any of these films. That's more my fault than theirs, I think, but the fact remains. Most years it seems like at least one foreign movie breaks out to at least modest U.S. success and fame, gets picked by me in the Oscar pool, and then never, ever wins. This year, though, if one of these movies broke out, I completely missed it.

Anyway, AwardsDaily.com and *Entertainment Weekly* both say *El Secreto* (though *EW* picks it "to pull off an upset").

EDITING: *The Hurt Locker*. The "Triple A" categories, which is a thing I just made up, will probably come down to *Avatar* and *The Hurt Locker* just like Best Picture will. We've seen one movie take everything else and then lose *Best Picture* – not often, but we've seen it – so I'm somewhat inclined to believe the sort-of consensus that says *The Hurt*

Locker for editing.

CINEMATOGRAPHY: *Avatar* looked simply stunning, apparently (didn't see it), so much so that it might actually win Best Picture even though everyone pretty much agrees that it's kind of bad. *The Hurt Locker* is a Best Picture contender with, from what I can gather, lots of stuff talking place outdoors, and those kinds of movies generally win cinematography Oscars. And foreign film nominee *The White Ribbon* beat both movies for the American Society of Cinematographers award, but isn't considered as much of an Oscar threat.

AwardsDaily.com says *Avatar* or *The Hurt Locker*. *EW* says *The Hurt Locker*, because "[t]echnology could work against *Avatar*. I don't entirely buy that reasoning, so I'm picking *Avatar*, with reservations.

ART DIRECTION: Everyone says *Avatar*.

ORIGINAL SCORE: *Up* seems to be as close to a lock as we tend to get in this category.

ORIGINAL SONG: My favorite, "Ma Belle Evangeline" from *The Princess and the Frog*, didn't make the cut, but two others from that movie did. Still, as convinced as everyone is that Jeff Bridges will win for *Crazy Heart*, they're just about as convinced that *Crazy Heart's* "The Weary Kind," by Ryan Bingham and T Bone Burnett, will take this category.

And by the way: in *Up in the Air*, George Clooney's character is named... Ryan Bingham. Exactly the same is this Best Original Song guy. Evidently nobody else thinks this is mind-blowing, because looking up the Original Song nominees for the purposes of writing this piece was the first I ever heard about it. This sort of stuff needs to be brought to our attention, people! Thank goodness I'm here. For that reason among many...

COSTUME DESIGN: *The Young Victoria*. That's about all you need to know to predict the costume design category, isn't it? That there was a movie called *The Young Victoria*?

MAKEUP: Everyone says *Star Trek*. See, without your fancy computers, Mr. James Cameron, they actually have to glue crap onto actors' faces and then paint it if they want to have aliens in a movie.

SOUND EDITING: *Avatar*.

SOUND MIXING: *The Hurt Locker*. *EW* says *Avatar* for both, but I looked it up, and these categories tend to split more often than they align, at least in the last ten years. That's not of any great predictive value as far as this year is concerned, but it does at least demonstrate that one should not simply lump these two categories together, as I have always been wont to do. So I'll take *Hurt Locker* here. As *EW* explained this year, sound mixing covers a film's overall

sound (which I suppose is why the category is sometimes referred to simply as "sound"), while sound editing covers aural effects (and it strikes me that I've heard this category as "sound effects editing").

Heck, let's just call the categories "Best Sound" and "Best Sound Effects Editing," why don't we? That creates more of a distinction than just "Sound Editing" and "Sound Mixing."

(And I do understand that I wrote those last two paragraphs as if I were absolutely determined to win a bet that I could write at least 150 words on the Oscar sound categories. Just hang on; we're almost done)

VISUAL EFFECTS: Even I'd be pissed if *Avatar* didn't win this, and I am almost completely disinterested in *Avatar*.

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE: If there's a movie in this category you've heard of, there's almost no chance it'll win (*March of the Penguins* being the exception that proves the rule). So it's *The Cove* over *Food, Inc.*

DOCUMENTARY SHORT: *AD* says *The Last Truck*. *EW* mentions *The Last Truck*, but picks *Music By Prudence*. I'll go with more of a consensus and take *The Last Truck* as well.

ANIMATED FEATURE: *Up*. Pixar rarely has to worry in this category. I wonder where all the love is for *The Princess and the Frog*, which I found delightful, but there's no way that the second-ever animated Best Picture nominee (after 1991's *Beauty and the Beast*) isn't going to win in its own little niche category.

ANIMATED SHORT: *A Matter of Loaf and Death* was made by Nick Park, who has previously been nominated for five Oscars and has lost only once... to himself. *AD*, *EW* and I all agree.

LIVE-ACTION SHORT: *EW* says *The New Tenants*, *AD* says *The Door*. I have no idea; let's see what Google says...

[Googling...]

I'll pick *Kavi*. Mostly just because. If you can hedge your bets in your Oscar pool, like I can hedge in mine, this is the category to do it.

Ah, but we're not quite done yet, are we? What of Best Picture? Just about everyone seems agreed that it'll be either *Avatar* or *The Hurt Locker*... but which one to pick?

My Don't Be a Hero rule says *The Hurt Locker*. *Entertainment Weekly* says it'll win, and so does AwardsDaily.com. It seems to be everybody's prediction for

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Best Picture. Then again, so was *Brokeback Mountain*.

My Think Ahead rule, the disobeying of which cost me a first-place tie in last year's Oscar pool, says *Avatar*. The think ahead rule goes like this: think ahead to a few years from now, and will you feel like a dope for having guessed wrong about a certain category? See, there was no shame in missing *Crash* for Best Picture; *Brokeback Mountain* seemed like a lock (so you weren't being a hero if you picked it), and even now, four years later, I can hardly tell myself that I should have known to pick *Crash*.

I violated the Think Ahead rule last year in picking Mickey Rourke for Best Actor over Sean Penn, and it cost me the title. And really, in five years, when I think about the fact that I picked Mickey Rourke playing a pro wrestler to win an Oscar over Sean Penn playing a murdered civil rights crusader, I'm really going to wish that I had that pick back. Even more than I already do. Basically the premise of the Think Ahead rule is that if you can foresee a future in which a certain pick could seem dumb, it's probably dumb *now*.

And so, in a few years, if I pick *Avatar* and *The Hurt Locker* wins, I can at least say, "Well, I know most signs pointed to *The Hurt Locker* but I still thought they'd throw a Best Picture bone to the biggest movie of all time." Whereas I could really be kicking my future self for thinking that a small, grim, \$12 million-grossing Iraq war picture could have beaten the film that "changed the way we watch movies forever!"

Perhaps the rule that breaks the deadlock, then, will be the Outcome I'd Least Like To See rule. That one is pretty self-explanatory. I disobeyed that one too, last year, right as I was disobeying the Think Ahead rule; I was a huge, *huge* fan of Mickey Rourke's work in *The Wrestler* and hadn't yet seen Sean Penn in *Milk*, and I really, really wanted Mickey Rourke to win. Therefore, by the properties of the Outcome I'd Least Like To See rule, Sean Penn should have been my prediction.

I tend to root for the underdog, the upset, the more interesting choice, and the Academy tends not to go that way. Hence the rule's general effectiveness.

And while I have nothing against (or for) *Avatar*, from what I've heard it's really just not all that great once you strip away all the effects and 3D and computer animation and whatnot. So, while I barely care enough for it to register with me, the Outcome I'd Least Like To See is, technically, a Best Picture win for *Avatar*.

So... should I pick it?

Nope. I'm still picking *The Hurt Locker*.

The Don't Be a Hero rule trumps all.