

Oscar Picks 2010 (Jameson Edition)!

by Jameson Simmons

It's Oscar time again, and two things are guaranteed this year. We know at least the beginning of the show will be fun, because Steve Martin and Alec Baldwin are hosting, and they're always funny when they share the screen – as they did on *30 Rock*, and in *one measly scene* of *It's Complicated*. (Seriously, Nancy Meyers, way to blow it. And you made Steve high on pot the whole time? It's really okay if you ask people under the age of 35 what they think is funny; they'll tell you and then you can put that in your movie, if that's what you're going for.)

Anyway, the other sure thing is that nobody will be honoring the "Thank-You Cam" request – wherein the show's producers have asked Oscar winners not to bog down their speeches thanking people, but to save those remarks for a special backstage camera that's live to the web. That's going to go over about as well as those .biz domain names a few years ago. "Gee, whenever anyone wants to buy discount airplane parts, the first thing they're going to do is type in 'discountairplaneparts.com' but since that's already taken, I guess I'll buy up 'discountairplaneparts.biz' and take my chances." Billions of people make dot-com their destination, and billions of people watch the Oscars. The Thank-You Cam is an also-ran, and anyone thanked on it is going to feel slapped in the face. Most of these nominees will only have one shot to win an Oscar in their lives, and they're not going to hold their tongue on their most exciting night. Further, they probably didn't compose a speech – they're not as smug as George Clooney, nor as eloquent as Tom Hanks. Maybe they genuinely weren't sure they'd win, or they thought that to be prepared would be to jinx it. When they get up there, the only thing they can think to say is "thank you." And if they say thanks and don't mention Mom, Dad, or their agent, they're going to hear about it in the morning.

So, yeah, after the ridiculous montages, the speech from Academy President Tom Sherak, and the interpretive dance to the nominated musical scores, the Thank-You Cam is the most idiotic concept in the whole show. **Best Picture:** *The Hurt Locker*

Also nominated: *Avatar*, *An Education*, *Precious*, and *Up in the Air*.

For a while, it really seemed like *Avatar* was going to win... Whoa.

Also also nominated... *The Blind Side*, *District 9*, *Inglourious Basterds*, *A Serious Man*, and *Up*.

My heart still tells me this idea of ten best picture nominees is the most idiotic concept in the whole show, but as the creator and overseer of the world's most insanely awesome Oscar pool, I have come to embrace it. If there's one thing I'd like to see, it's an Oscar telecast where the Best Picture

winner is actually a surprise – where the Oscar pool leaderboard actually undergoes a little shuffling after that last envelope is opened. (Yes, we have a leaderboard – didn't I say it was awesome?) If there's something I'd **really** like to see, it's people having to split their wager on Best Picture (in our pool, you have ten points in each category, and you spread them among the nominees – I told you it kicked ass). With so many films vying for gold, and a wacky new tabulation procedure where an Academy voter's first pick doesn't count if that film is already sure to lose, this race is harder than ever to predict, which means some pool entrants will have to go 5-5 between *Avatar* and *The Hurt Locker*. I like that a lot. It keeps things interesting.

This race is also a nice illustration of the amorphous concept of "Oscar season momentum;" back when *Avatar* won the Golden Globe, I assumed its Oscar was already won, and I went ahead and started cutting myself. But somehow, plucky little *Hurt Locker* seems to have wedged itself in there, at least according to the people who monitor such things. Maybe it's the ten-way race, with pockets of supporters dividing up the pack of voters who would normally follow in lockstep and just vote *Avatar* because everyone else is doing it. There's still a lot of support for *Avatar*, though, so you kind of have to take a gamble. For the first time since I can remember, it's actually worth paying attention to the show after the end of the Best Actor winner's speech. So, hat tip to the Academy for that one.

What Should Win: I'm all for showering Pixar with whatever accolades are around – and then inventing some new ones – but giving *Up* a Best Picture trophy just because it's the movie that happened to be out the first year there were enough slots for someone to get around to nominating it feels like a cheap way to win. Sack up and nominate *The Incredibles*, *Finding Nemo*, or *Ratatouille* (still tied for fifth all-time best-reviewed movie ever), or don't bother. What I'm saying is, *Up in the Air* should win. Of all the movies nominated, it's the one I saw that felt like a worthwhile cinematic experience stem-to-stern, which was very rare for a 2009 movie. **Best Director:** Kathryn Bigelow, *The Hurt Locker*

Also nominated: *Avatar* (James Cameron), *Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino), *Precious* (Lee Daniels), and *Up in the Air* (Jason Reitman).

With the Director's Guild Award in her pocket (not literally, that wouldn't fit; plus, don't chicks carry purses?) Bigelow's chances of grabbing Oscar in this category are considered quite a bit stronger than her movie's Best Picture odds. And, since Best Picture and Best Director *almost* always align, this is a good reason to figure on *The Hurt Locker* in that category, too. (Good reasons to remain doubtful include the precedents set by weirdo wins like *Crash* and *Shakespeare in Love*, plus the five extra nominees and that weird tabulation scheme.)

Bigelow used to be married to fellow nominee James Cameron, but if you're just finding that out now, you really haven't been paying attention to much Oscar coverage. Other fun facts: Cameron also used to be married to *Terminator* star Linda Hamilton, and Cameron's current wife Suzy Amis (*Titanic*) used to have something other than skin and sinew attached to her bones. It's true!

Who Should Win: Anyone other than Tarantino wins, and I promise not to take any hostages. **Best Actor:** Jeff Bridges, *Crazy Heart*

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

Bridges has picked up the major lead-in awards and everyone loves him. Many consider this a make up award for *The Big Lebowski* – not Hollywood journalists or Oscar voters, of course, just slacker film nerds with blogs and stuff.

Who Should Win: I can't say I'd be disappointed if Kate Winslet announced a five-way tie in this race. I didn't see the performances by Firth, Bridges, or Freeman, but they're all fine, fine actors. EW shrugs off Clooney's performance as too "effortless," which begs the question: *Why do you bother putting him in your fucking magazine so often?* All his performances are effortless – that's what he does! He's supposed to make it look like a big showy disaster every time? Forgive me, but that's the reason I *don't* go to Sean Penn movies. **Best Actress:** Sandra Bullock, *The Blind Side*

Also nominated: Helen Mirren in *The Last Station*, Carey Mulligan in *An Education*, Gabourey Sidibe in *Precious*, and Meryl Streep in *Julie & Julia*.

I like Sandra Bullock a lot. I think most people dismiss her as something of a trifle, and that seems unfair because I don't know what she's necessarily done to deserve that. Whenever I start to defend her, I feel like a Tea Partier defending Sarah Palin against perceived slights by the "media elite," though, which scares me.

Still, she's not quite a performer on a Julia Roberts level, or even quite Reese Witherspoon. And *The Blind Side* has its good qualities, but it doesn't rise to the level of an *Erin Brockovich* or a *Walk the Line*. Yet here we are: before it's too late, let's Oscar her up. I thought she did fantastic work in the movie – just as she did in *Speed*, quite frankly – and if now is the time for some recognition for a solid career, then so be it. She and Meryl Streep have split a lot of the awards leading up to Oscar, though, which makes it a tough call – but Streep's nomination is the only one for *Julie & Julia*, while *The Blind Side* picked up that all-important (and puzzling) Best Picture nomination.

Who Should Win: Unfortunately, it's no contest – Meryl Streep disappeared into the role of Julia Child in *Julie &*

Julia. When I come out of an Amy Adams movie talking only about Meryl Streep, you know Meryl Streep is doing some fantastic work. In this case, I came out of *Julie & Julia* talking only about *Julia Child* – Meryl Streep simply disappeared. It was amazing. **Best Supporting Actor:** Christoph Waltz, *Inglourious Basterds*

Also nominated: Matt Damon in *Invictus*, Woody Harrelson in *The Messenger*, Christopher Plummer in *The Last Station*, and Stanley Tucci in *The Lovely Bones*.

This is one of those categories you don't even have to think about – even people who detested *Inglourious Basterds* raved about Christoph Waltz in it. He's racked up every single award they have for supporting actors in movies. Oscar voters love to confound our expectations, but think about it – even if they do that and Woody Harrelson walks away with the prize (a red-blooded American!), everyone else will have to put their points on Waltz, too, so you come out just fine. Don't be a hero. Waltz.

Who Should Win: I run screaming from Tarantino's schlocky fare these days, but I read a lot of reviews of *Inglourious Basterds* to be sure I wasn't missing anything, and everything I read convinced me that I would have been very sorry if I'd gone to see it, except that I would've been mesmerized by Waltz's work. I'm pretty sure he earned his Oscar. **Best Supporting Actress:** Mo'Nique, *Precious*

Also nominated: Penélope Cruz in *Nine*, Vera Farmiga in *Up in the Air*, Maggie Gyllenhaal in *Crazy Heart*, and Anna Kendrick in *Up in the Air*.

Another no-brainer. Mo'Nique by the widest margin of the night. You can't win an Oscar for being a poor black kid in a miserable situation, but you can win one for beating one to a pulp – or inspiring one to play football. Keep it in mind.

Who Should Win: I personally think Vera Farmiga can never have too many Oscars. **Best Original Screenplay:** *The Hurt Locker*

My head hurts from the amount of Googling I've had to do on this one in the last five minutes – suffice it to say, it's a close race between *The Hurt Locker* and Quentin Tarantino's script for *Inglourious Basterds*, a hyperviolent revisionist-history romp through Nazi Germany with Brad Pitt as a crazed American lieutenant leading a pack of Jewish avengers behind enemy lines to collect Nazi scalps. (That's from the trailer – they didn't tell you, but there are a bunch of parallel story lines, too; this is Tarantino, after all.) The thing is, Tarantino's writing is really showy and full of itself – yes it grabs your attention, but doesn't it also wear you out? I think it's great the Academy recognized it with an Oscar in this category for *Pulp Fiction*, but I think voters might be willing to say, "Yeah. We've seen that – show us that you can do something else, or just leave us alone."

POOP READING

Like I said, I read a lot of reviews of *Inglourious Basterds*, and I grabbed a couple of choice quotes which express the weariness I've experienced with Tarantino over the years.

Tarantino has become an embarrassment: his virtuosity as a maker of images has been overwhelmed by his inanity as an *idiot de la cinémathèque*. –David Denby, *The New Yorker*

Mr. Tarantino is a great writer and director of individual scenes, though he can have trouble putting those together, a difficulty that has sometimes been obscured by the clever temporal kinks in his earlier work. –Manohla Dargis, *The New York Times*

Kinda sums it up for me, from *Jackie Brown* onward. Will the voters put this much thought into it, or will they just get a kick out of the wildness of his movie and give him the award? Will the momentum behind *The Hurt Locker* play a factor? If these kinds of things aren't keeping you up nights, you're probably not playing in our Oscar pool.

What Should Win: Let's say *Up*. **Best Adapted Screenplay:** *Up in the Air*

Still the make up award for Best Picture. It's easy to get jaded about it, but at least it makes it easy to pick up points in this category!

What Should Win: Definitely *Up in the Air* – I wasn't head-over-heels for the ending, but the movie was really well done. **Best Foreign Language Film:** *El Secreto de Sus Ojos* (*The Secret in Their Eyes*)

Another one that's splitting the prognosticators. Germany's *The White Ribbon* was picking up a lot of the buzz early on, and considering it's nominated in the Cinematography category as well, it may have name recognition going for it. I will probably switch this pick a few times between now and Sunday.

Best Art Direction: *Avatar*

This award and the Cinematography one get to an interesting debate about how the art of moviemaking gets results onto the screen. Art direction typically means designing and building sets, and most of the sets in *Avatar* were built in computers and superimposed in place of greenscreens, or as wholly animated environments where motion-capture characters interacted. Still, all the design work and conceptualization took place on paper with colored pencils just like it did on *Sleepy Hollow* or *Memoirs of a Geisha*, so the conventional wisdom is that voters will go ahead and acknowledge *Avatar's* right to win this award. **Best Cinematography:** *The Hurt Locker*

But not in this category, because the camera in *Avatar* is a virtual one, with virtual lenses (except for the times when a

real camera with real lenses was shooting real actors against real greenscreens, which must then be painstakingly matched against virtual lighting and environments). Here, all the same careful planning it would take to shoot a "normal" 20th century movie applies, and then some, but somehow it feels fishy so Best Picture front-runner *The Hurt Locker* is set to win this one instead. Makes no sense to me – if no less brilliant a cinematographer than Academy darling Roger Deakins can embrace the virtual realm by sitting in to assist the Pixar wizards with *WALL-E*, it seems like people could go ahead and give the virtual camera their blessing.

Especially since the innovations that allowed *Avatar's* camera to feel like a real one even within the completely pretend world of Pandora are easily among Cameron's most praiseworthy achievements in the film. But I suppose that sort of thing is really better awarded at the Scientific and Technical Awards luncheon – that thing they hold a few weeks in advance of the TV broadcast, hosted by some cute starlet who really has better things to do. **Best Film Editing:** *The Hurt Locker*

Tends to follow Best Picture, which is just bizarre if you ask me – why even have this award if it's not going to have something to do with editing? At least it stands to reason that a movie with a good script is going to be a good movie, but where's the correlation with editing? I think editing is much more closely tied to performance, because it's about the rhythm and timing of small nuances. Reading most Oscar predictions, it sounds like people think of editing in terms of what order the scenes are in: "Should he pick her up at the airport and then drive her home? Or drive her home first and then pick her up?" **Best Original Score:** *Up*

I don't believe in make up Oscars, but goddamn if Michael Giacchino isn't owed a make up award for *Ratatouille*. (*Atonement*?! Are you kidding me? Show of hands – who even remembers that was a movie?) He could also do with a full-fledged apology and a national holiday in his honor for being snubbed entirely for his ingenious work on *The Incredibles*. If I were him, I'd even be a little offended I wasn't nominated for *Star Trek* this year. Every year, there's one award I care way too much about; this year, if they don't call Giacchino's name in this category, I'm going on a mad rampage.

(Seriously, I don't want to spoil anything if you haven't seen *Up* yet, but that first four minutes rests pretty squarely on Giacchino's shoulders, and he delivers like a champ. If that's not an Oscar-winning score, then this is no longer an America I recognize.) **Best Original Song:** "The Weary Kind" from *Crazy Heart*

This is the only category in which the Academy allows a film to be nominated more than once. Each of the last four years, some movie has done it, and each time, *Entertainment Weekly* has peed all over itself worrying about a "split vote" causing that movie's nominees to cancel each other out.

They're at it again this year, whimpering that Randy Newman's two nominated songs from Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* will evaporate each other like a *Star Trek* matter/anti-matter collision and the *Crazy Heart* song will surge into the lead. Two things:

1. The reason these multiply-nominated movies often lose is that they're from musicals, and by and large the trend lately has been to reward songs that sound more like radio hits than musical show-stoppers. That's all there is to it.

2. Academy voters are stupid, stupid people, but I think they're still capable of identifying which song they like when presented with a list of song titles. If they're really just going to check a box at random without realizing which song is which, what makes you think the title of the movie is going to play into it? By that logic, doesn't it stand to reason that their votes will be split evenly among all five nominees?

Madness, I tell you. I don't even know why I buy the *Entertainment Weekly* Oscar issue. Between this and the numbskulled commentary from the anonymous panel of Academy voters, all it does is get my blood boiling. **Best Visual Effects:** *Avatar*

Hard to argue with that. When your visual effects represent a decade of efforts and something like two dozen patents, you sort of deserve a pat on the back.

James Cameron, a legendary egotist, was on Oprah's Oscar special this week saying he doesn't care if he wins the directing award, he just wants his team recognized for their work. Pretty clever: now he looks magnanimous and prescient, because he selflessly waved off an Oscar few people predict he'll win and crossed his fingers for the most obvious award this side of Mo'Nique. **Best Sound Editing:** *Avatar*

...and... **Best Sound Mixing:** *Avatar*

Sometimes these split; sometimes they go together. This year feels like one of those years where they go together, because the technical wizardry of *Avatar* is so undeniable, and people are dazzled enough by it that I doubt they really take the time to think beyond that. I would love, just once, for the Oscar broadcast to include a detailed explanation of the difference between these two categories, so voters would know how to make up their minds. (They could make room by cutting one of the tedious montages – an Oscar tribute to horror? Seriously?) But voters don't care, the home viewer doesn't care – nobody cares. I think they're going to be like, "Technical stuff? Yeah, *Avatar*."

(Fair warning: a fair number of predictors say they think *The Hurt Locker* will take the Sound Mixing prize.) **Best Costume Design:** *The Young Victoria*

The winner in this category last year was a film called *The*

Duchess, which none of us had heard of. I wouldn't be surprised if someone, eager to have an Oscar to call his own, heard about that and quickly commissioned a movie called *The Young Victoria*, just to scoop up this award. I would also not be surprised to learn that he just re-submitted *The Duchess* with the title scratched out and *The Young Victoria* written over it in Sharpie. **Best Makeup:** *Star Trek*

Apparently you get an Oscar for this, even if Leonard Nimoy brings his Spock ears from home. **Best Animated Feature:** *Up*

You definitely can hedge your bets against Pixar some years – and this is not their strongest film in recent memory. However, Hayao Miyazaki isn't nominated in the category this year, and *Up* squeezed its way into the Best Picture field, so you have to figure it'll do okay. **Best Animated Short:** *A Matter of Loaf and Death*

A Wallace and Gromit adventure by Nick Park (director of *Chicken Run*), this is certainly the high-profile pick. I'm wary, though. We've been led down this path before, and Oscar voters threw us a curve ball. (The short categories are tougher to predict than usual, because only voters who attend special screenings are allowed to submit ballots in those categories.) The only other short you've heard much about is *Logorama*, a clever, irreverent send-up of corporatism made completely out of logos. If you're feeling an upset coming, maybe pick that one. **Best Documentary Feature:** *The Cove*

Fisher Stevens is credited as a producer on this movie. If he accepts the Oscar in makeup as Ben Jabituya to promote next year's *Short Circuit* remake, he will have earned a new level of respect from me. **Best Documentary Short:** *The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant* **Best Live Action Short:** *The Door*

Weirdly, EW picks *Music by Prudence* and *The New Tenants*, respectively, for these categories instead – but everyone else says these are the ones to go with, so I'm leaning in this direction. I'm just so glad the Academy maintains its commitment to the fine tradition of short filmmaking, so we can keep stressing out over decisions like these.

(In case you can't tell, I was being sarcastic.)
