

The Five-Year Oscar Rule: Best Picture, 2004

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

The voting processes by which sporting leagues induct members into their respective Halls of Fame are not without controversy, but one thing they get right is that nobody's allowed in until he's been retired from play for a period of five years. This gives voters a chance to put careers in perspective, allows hype to die down, and lets all the juicing allegations and paternity suits come to light before the big vote.

In his far-reaching wisdom, PoopReading.com co-creator Joe Mulder has long argued that the Academy Awards would benefit from a similar waiting period. (If any voting process would benefit from time, perspective, and reduced hype, it's the Oscars – if only to wear down the Harvey Weinstein Oscar-purchasing publicity machine.) Mr. Mulder's argument has become known as "The Five-Year Oscar Rule" and last year, for Poop Reading's first Oscars, we put it to the test. We began with 2003's Best Picture winner, *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, and its fellow nominees:

Lost in Translation
Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World
Mystic River
Seabiscuit

We re-worked things a bit until we had *Finding Nemo* winning the Oscar over the following contenders:

The House of Sand and Fog
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King
Lost in Translation
Seabiscuit

This year, we look back at 2004 – undeniably, an even worse year for the Best Picture race. We have the following nominees to start with:

The Aviator
Finding Neverland
Million Dollar Baby
Ray
Sideways

JAMESON: Obviously *The Aviator* has no place on this list, or any list, or even on celluloid at all (here I am taking Joe's word for it, but considering how brutally vituperative his words were, I'm pretty sure going into that movie against his advice would've meant disaster and possibly suicide). Personally, I think *Million Dollar Baby* was a mistake, and if any good comes of the *Slumdog Millionaire* victory, it's that we start to realize we can have Best Picture movies with the lights turned on. Glum, morose shit is no longer a prerequisite. As such, I'll submit my obvious nomination for

all five slots on our Five-Year Oscar roster: Brad Bird's masterwork *The Incredibles*. I don't think anything else came out in 2004 that's still as widely regarded or frequently watched. Even *Sideways*, as good as it is, hasn't exactly made for monthly viewing the way we assumed it would. *The Bourne Supremacy* turned up the juice and delivered on an action sequel in unprecedented ways, but for me this whole discussion begins and ends with *The Incredibles*.

JOE: This might be a short discussion unless anybody can come up with a convincing argument as to why *The Incredibles* shouldn't have won Best Picture. I mean, as much as I love *Sideways* (and it *has* made for, if not monthly viewing, then regular viewing, at least in my case).

We still need five Best Picture nominees, though. Jameson and I will fight anyone who doesn't think that both *The Incredibles* and *Sideways* belong, and I'll commit hari kari before I publish anything that suggests *The Aviator* does. So that leaves three spots.

I didn't see *Ray* or *Finding Neverland*, but I get the sense that the Best Picture category could have lived without them. And I did like *Million Dollar Baby*, but not enough to where I couldn't be talked out of it.

I'd like to throw it open and see if anybody saw *The Passion of the Christ*; I didn't, but more than five years after its release I'd argue that it still stands as one of the decade's cinematic cultural touchstones. But so does *Transformers*, so I'm wondering if *The Passion of the Christ* was, like, good.

JAMESON: I heard very good things about *Finding Neverland* so I wouldn't kick it out just to do it, but obviously I didn't see it. (Did anyone? At all?)

I think a case could be made for *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* - it was plenty good, even if it didn't reaffirm my life the way it seemed to for other people. (*The Passion of the Christ* wouldn't have either; that's kind of why we have other people.) It's hard for me to take *Ray* altogether seriously in light of how well its ilk were schooled by *Walk Hard* (which I know spoofed *Walk the Line*, but I lump all those overly treacly musical biopics together). I like *Collateral* Jamie Foxx so much more than *Ray* Jamie Foxx, and look what celebrating *Ray* Jamie Foxx got us: *The Soloist* Jamie Foxx (along with *The Soloist* RDJ). Who in all honesty wants that? Who is that for?

JOE: I give a big "attaboy" for *Collateral* and *Eternal Sunshine*, I'd say, even though I share your opinion about *Eternal Sunshine* (if, seemingly, no one else's).

But *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was at or near the top of just about every Best of the Decade list I looked at, and looking back after the proper amount of time to assess such things is pretty much the entire point of this exercise, so I don't see how we leave it off.

BRANDON: Okay, I'll take the contrarian role against *The Incredibles*: I liked it, I liked it very much, but I wouldn't put it in Pixar's Top 5, nor would I consider it to be Brad Bird's best film (an honor I'd reserve for *Ratatouille*, though I admit I haven't seen *The Iron Giant*). I don't consider it to be superior to *Sideways*, which I thought was simply the best piece of filmmaking we got in 2004; the writing, the direction, and the acting all come together beautifully, and no, it's not the kind of thing you watch on a regular basis, but frankly, it was never meant to be. It's powerful stuff, and best reserved for limited exposure. As good as *The Incredibles* is, if I'm going to shoot a DVD into space as an example of what we as humans were capable of moviemaking-wise in 2004, I'm loading *Sideways* into that 14-billion-dollar DVD space cannon. (God bless NASA!)

But I'll be honest: I don't really have a horse in this race. I loved *Sideways*, but my favorite movie in 2004 was *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*. And while I will argue its merits as a comedy until you are tired, agitated, and want very much to punch me in the face, I can't put on a straight face and try to position it as one of the best movies of 2004.

I'm not as down on *Million Dollar Baby* as Joe and Jameson, but I don't think it was on par with Eastwood's best work. I'll admit I haven't seen *Ray* or *Finding Neverland*, but I also can't imagine that, five years later, anyone else really wants to see them either. I suspect that if you hit the streets Leno-style (ugh) and starting asking people to tell you what either of those movies were about, more than half would think that by saying *Ray* you were talking about *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and that *Finding Neverland* had something to do with Michael Jackson. Not that I think people on the street are stupid. But Leno is. (Zing!)

Two more movies that I think deserve consideration:

I Heart Huckabees, which I liked more than *Eternal Sunshine*. They were vaguely similar enough that I think one of them deserves placement on our list. (As a bonus, *Huckabees* gave us those on-the-set videos of director David O. Russell fighting with Lily Tomlin, which, in fact, may have been the best film of 2004.)

Shaun of the Dead which, at least by internet movie viewer ratings standards, remains one of the most well-liked films of that year.

JAMESON: I was just about to mention *Huckabees* and ask Brandon to get my back on that. I see that he has mentioned it and done an excellent job of it. I was just about to get his back on that, but now I see some bullshit about a space cannon without room for the *Incredibles* DVD in it, so fuck Brandon.

I thought *Shaun of the Dead* was pretty fun but it's more of a nerdy cult hit than a truly good movie - the sort of thing that

was destined to stuff Internet ballot boxes - so I wouldn't tip the scales too far in its favor.

What's our short list looking like now... in rough order of likelihood to make the final five?

The Incredibles
Sideways
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
Collateral
The Passion of the Christ
I Heart Huckabees
Finding Neverland
Shaun of the Dead
Million Dollar Baby

JOE: I'd have to jump in on the anti-*Huckabees* side, I'm afraid to say. I eventually ended up seeing it and could barely get through it. I don't think it belongs.

JAMESON: I could absolutely say the same about *Seabiscuit* which (checking...) made last year's list, but I'm not going to be a dick about it or anything. I realize I'm in the minority twice on this one. Delightedly so.

JOE: Also I know we've had (extensive) discussions about *Anchorman*, but I will say that I think it's aging increasingly well. Maybe not quite a good enough movie to deserve consideration, but in terms of straight-up, pound-for-pound laughs, it deserves more credit that I gave it in the first few years after its release.

JAMESON: Yes, for sure, and the Oscars deserve a solid trouncing for their comedy blind spot, **but...** I still don't think that really makes *Anchorman* a Best Picture contender. In the same way *The Hangover* sure was a hoot but I just wouldn't say it's the pinnacle of cinematic achievement. There does kind of have to be a difference.

JOE: Just so everybody knows, I'll be punching Jameson in the face repeatedly when we do the 2009 "Five-Year Rule" piece. If not before, and for unrelated reasons (I mean, why take that option off the table completely for the next half-decade? I have no way of knowing what's going to come up between now and then).

Sorry... I'll try to use my words... I really felt that the ten Best Picture nominees thing would right the wrongs we've seen in the past, but it basically just made room for more homework movies. I suppose other people might not have liked it as much as I did (if they were having some sort of surgery during it without anesthesia, maybe, or I guess if they don't speak English...), but I just thought that if *The Hangover* can't score a Best Picture nomination, they may as well just go ahead and officially declare that mainstream studio comedies are ineligible. Just to save us the frustration.

JAMESON: Okay we don't have to have this whole

discussion right now but there is a goddamn difference between "Homework Movies Only, No Fun Allowed" and "Come On, Cockpunching Is The Most Fun Thing, So Let's Nominate Only That And Whoever Can Get The Most Cockpunching Into 90 Minutes Wins".

Also, *Anchorman* vs. 2004's top five is very different from *The Hangover* vs. 2009's top ten. *The Hangover* wouldn't crack my top 25 comedies and when I think of a Best Picture comedy I think of something like *Wanda* or *Guffman* that is truly the summit of the form, but it's still my #7 movie of 2009 for crying out loud. 2009 was a dud year for movies; I never said I'd fight to keep it off 2009's list, I just said it's not the pinnacle of cinematic achievement, and I will go ahead and stand by that.

JOE: I think we might actually agree on *The Hangover*, at least in that I'd have it in my Top 10 for '09 but not in my Top 1.

Getting back to our previous discussion, if I may disagree and agree with both of you simultaneously, I could watch *Sideways* on a loop for three weeks and not get sick of it, but I'd still tip the scales (although just barely, and without relishing it) in favor of *The Incredibles*. And I was going to pull rank on everyone and mention just how often I've seen every Pixar film in the last two years or so, but then I guess Brandon has little kids too so he's probably just as well-versed as I am. But I say *Incredibles* is one of Pixar's best (maybe the best; depends on what kind of mood I'm in, and how recently I've watched which *Toy Story*), so I'd have to give it a reluctant nod over *Sideways*.

This might turn out to be a photo finish...

MIKE: I kinda liked *Million Dollar Baby*, gloomy as it was. But basically, I liked Hillary Swank. Clint was okay and I thought Morgan Freeman was great, but the role was poorly written. So, I do not think it was the best picture that year. I'm glad to see Brandon stand up for *Sideways* so I don't have to. That movie holds up; one reason it isn't as rewatchable as *A Few Good Men* is that it has this pall of sadness over it. Enscenced by his alcoholism, all the funny stuff is just a twinge less funny on rewatchings. But, I would argue, that also makes the movie more compelling.

Since I've never seen *The Incredibles* (I know), I'll trust the rabidity of y'all. I liked *Eternal Sunshine* better than *I Heart Huckabees* - I liked *Huckabees* but I thought it was giving me a bit too much of a wink and a nod about how interesting and unique and quirky it was whereas I felt that *Sunshine* was just telling this wildly interesting story with 100% verve.

As for other overlooked movies, I liked *Super Size Me* in terms of a cultural touchstone for the times. That was a fun movie to watch and it certainly led to lots of interesting conversations. But I can't abide the handle bar moustache in

a documentary about fast food. So *Super Size Me* falls just short. *Mean Girls* and *Anchorman* were excellent comedies and I would actually be fine with the academy nominating them. *Before Sunset*, though, has my vote. Joe was brilliant about it in his [Snubbies piece](#), so link to that, bitches.

JAMESON: Really nice catch on *Mean Girls*. I don't know if it blows anything out of the top five, but it is silly that nobody brought it up until now.

JOE: You're right; I just spent 300 words teabagging *Before Sunset* last week, and then forgot to bring it up here. Check out its [Metacritic score](#), though; it's like page after page (just about) of 100s. You just don't see that.

JAMESON: Well, unless you also check out the page for [The Incredibles...](#)

BRANDON: *Before Sunset* was 2004?? Crap. This is embarrassing. I don't know how I let that slip through the cracks. *Sideways* is still my #1 pick, but *Before Sunset* is a strong #2 (heh-heh), and I could certainly be convinced to flip those two around with enough arm-twisting. Obviously I advocate it getting a spot among the final five films. Right now, we seem to have a pretty fair consensus on these four (alphabetical order):

Before Sunset
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
The Incredibles
Sideways

I had written down *Mean Girls* and *Super Size Me* on my original list as movies of note for 2004, but I just wasn't sure they made the cut among the elite movies that year, though I enjoyed both of them quite a bit.

Right now, we appear to have a two-way split on *Incredibles* vs. *Sideways*, and considering that Joe seems to have *Sideways* as a strong #2 (heh-heh), I think that might be our tiebreaker.

Beyond that, there's a battle yet to be waged over that last remaining slot.

JOE: Nobody for *The Passion of the Christ*, then?

Also, nobody has brought up *Spider-Man 2* which, lest we forget, was a really, really good movie.

BRANDON: How much has support (in pop culture as a whole, not just among us) for *The Passion of the Christ* been undermined by Mel Gibson's asshole? I just don't know that the movie gets talked about that much anymore.

Is there a case to be made for *Mean Girls* as the fifth pick, just in terms of it being the one movie we might all agree on? And it comes with the added bonus of giving props to Tina

Fey, which I don't think any of us feels we can do too often.

JOE: I'm not sure that I could, in good conscience, let *Mean Girls* in there over *Collateral*, which I really, really like. Or even over *Million Dollar Baby*.

BRANDON: So Joe and Jameson: why does *The Incredibles* deserve the nod over *Sideways*?

JAMESON: Must we have a point every year when I have to threaten to burn the web site down? Really?

Let's just say you can't point your kids at a TV showing *Sideways* and say "That's what you should grow up to be like." *The Incredibles* has everything *Sideways* has, plus an awesome musical score, plus that. Good enough?

Mean Girls has a lot going for it, but I don't think it's *Collateral* good. I think you have to leave out the Tina Fey angle and just focus on the work. (Otherwise, don't you have to consider Lohan, too? She was great in the movie, but since then... dear Lord!) Similarly, you should leave your Mel Gibson opinions at the door when evaluating *The Passion of the Christ* just as I'll check my attitude about Jesus being imaginary. (I say it's fit for consideration if you say so, but I wouldn't let its box office performance sway you too much since that was more or less manufactured, and its staying power doesn't seem all that overpowering since it hasn't ushered in the wave of biblical epics everyone was predicting at the time. Then again, as Mel will tell you, Hollywood is run by maniacal Atheist Jews, so that might explain that...)

JOE: Yeah, but... *who love money*. Think about *that*.

JAMESON: Okay, so roughly (roughly!) in hypothetical alternate-reality Oscar-voting order so far...

The Incredibles
Sideways
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
Before Sunset
Collateral
Million Dollar Baby
Mean Girls
Spider-Man 2

Additions/subtractions/corrections? Let's have 'em!

JOE: I'd bump Spidey up a notch, over Lohan, but since we've only got five spots to play with it doesn't seem like a ton of time should be spent worrying about that. Other than that, I'd sign off on this being our list, although I'm not saying we should close the bidding if anyone wants to chime in.

I think you've talked me out of *The Passion of the Christ*, also. Which is fine with me.

And I'm with Jameson on the *The Incredibles* Simply Has Everything bandwagon. As much as I love *Sideways* – and I'm a man who *really* loves his *Sideways* – I'm going *Incredibles* here.

BRANDON: Apparently 2003 was a deceptively easy year for us to build a consensus on Best Picture... I say that, but then I also readily admit that what's fascinating to me about this endeavor is taking a bunch of potentially disparate opinions and seeing what happens when you smash them all together and then argue about the results for two or three days.

JAMESON: Heartily seconded.

We've got two guys who say yes *The Incredibles* is our pick for #1 and two who don't say that (though Mike has said he yields to our rabidity, and I do think we make an excellent point - some would say I'm biased, though I would not say that because I'd have to spit out Brad Bird's dick first).

I think the top five look great, and I'm up for whatever people want to do for Best Picture. I wouldn't want it to look like we're just automatically handing it to Pixar every year, but on the other hand they churn out amazing stuff.

MIKE: I say we name *As Good As It Gets* Best Picture in 2004.

BRANDON: I say we name *The Incredibles* Best Picture for 2004.

I didn't realize that *Sideways* wasn't Mike's pick for the best movie that year (I'm referring, of course, to *Eternal Sunshine*, and not *As Good As It Gets*). And as I've already stated, if you had me watch that and *Before Sunset* again right now, there's a very good chance I could flip them around in my rankings. So basically, what it comes down to is that we've got a movie that two people say was the cream of the crop that year, and another that everyone agrees was fantastic, but possibly no one thinks was the outright best. In that case, you have to go with *The Incredibles*.

MIKE: 1) Agreed. 2) Brandon is a huge pussy. 3) So am I.

JOE: I actually kind of wish we hadn't gone with *Finding Nemo* last year, because it does look like we're on the Pixar payroll here. And nobody is more surprised to be arguing against *Sideways* than I am; it really is one of my all-time favorites. And maybe it's just that I've seen *The Incredibles* so many times in the past year...

But it really is just perfect.

JAMESON: The problem is, what could possibly have been better than *Finding Nemo* for 2003? It's really not our fault that Pixar makes amazing movies, and really hit a good stride for a few years there. As Steve Martin said of *Chicago*,

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"Sure... if you're going to make a great movie that everybody liked!"

Don't worry: in 2005, they held back *Cars* to give Dan Whitney more time to red-state it up and drain the perfection out of it, so we're coming up on two solid years of not looking like we're in Pixar's back pocket. After that, Brandon and I can fight over *Ratatouille* with Brad Bird's dick in *his* mouth for a change and all will be right with the world.

BRANDON: Can we have one conversation in this discussion that doesn't end with Brad Bird's dick in somebody's mouth?

JAMESON: Well I'm sorry, I thought we were here to talk about **cinema!**

So our final list of 2004 Best Picture Nominees is:

Before Sunset
Collateral
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
The Incredibles
Sideways

And the Oscar goes to...

The Incredibles

Thank you and good night!
