

2011 Movie Draft

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

In just a few short days, the Oscars will be upon us again – and that means a lot of excitement. Lord knows that isn't due to the awards telecast, or even the films in contention, very much. All that tizzy must be anticipation for our annual movie draft! After all, we've done it twice before, and if people didn't love it we assume there'd have been an Internet shutdown by now. (Mubarak style!)

As always, we've begun with the 20 actors nominated in the upcoming Academy Awards, and drafted them, a la fantasy sports:

Amy Adams
Christian Bale
Javier Bardem
Annette Bening
Jeff Bridges
Helena Bonham Carter
Jesse Eisenberg
Colin Firth
James Franco
John Hawkes
Nicole Kidman
Jennifer Lawrence
Melissa Leo
Natalie Portman
Jeremy Renner
Mark Ruffalo
Geoffrey Rush
Hailee Steinfeld
Jacki Weaver
Michelle Williams

Our goal with these drafts isn't necessarily to collect armloads of awards, earn truckloads of cash, nor document the founding of Facebook. Our sole aim is to create the most brain-meltingly awesome movie possible given the available talent. Having drafted our cast, we each selected a movie title from the following list – forgotten movie titles which originally appeared in the party game Beyond Balderdash.

Below the Belt
Don't Get Me Started
Flat Top
Honeybaby
Loose Connections
Nocturna
Nothing Underneath
Reflections
The Remarkable Andrew
Rhubarb
Rough Cut
Sensations
Static

Sticky Fingers
Take Two
Walking After Midnight

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, except without Charlie Sheen's carousing and coke-filled briefcases getting in the way (as far as you know)! The results are as follows. (And stay tuned, because we'll be providing you with fake reviews of the five fake movies all week long...)

Round 1, Pick 1: Mike

I had promised to go "Full Weaver" if I received the first pick in the draft, but I suspect I will be able to go do that well into the later rounds. And so, I am taking the Adrian Peterson of fantasy movie drafts in which the only available candidates are actors nominated for an Oscar. **Jeff Bridges**, bitches. The Dude! Rooster Cogburn! Bad Blake! Jack Baker! The president! Muthafuckin TRON! Let's do this.

Jeff Bridges is one of our best actors, one our best liked actors, and an American Master according to our nation's cultural touchstone, PBS. Will he be the befuddled husband and father of 12 girls in *Thirteen Women*? Is he a night school professor with a past in *Nocturna*? Is he participating in an experiment in which he follows every impulse he has for one year...until he meets her in *Acting on Impulse*? An alcoholic futuristic king in *Smash Palace*? Oh, lordy, I can do this all day. I understand if you just want to cancel this year's draft and send me the trophy. Oh wait, I still have it from last year.

Bridges, bitches.

Pick 2: Tenessa

The first pick is all about versatility. You don't want to eagerly choose a favorite. Sure, I'd love to hear Jameson's Nazgul screech as I selected Amy Adams, but in the first round I want the actor who keeps the field wide open. Someone who can play a villain. Someone attractive. Someone who can deliver a fart joke. Someone who can be BFFs with Spiderman. Someone who can CUT OFF HIS OWN DAMN ARM.

James Franco, bitches. You are entering a world of hurt.

Pick 3: Brandon

Christian Bale.

Obviously, I can't speak ill of Mr. Bridges, since I was the one who picked him first last year, though I might take this

moment to quote something about imitation being the most sincere form of flattery. And if James Franco floats your boat, coughschoolgirlcrushcough, well, more power to you.

So I need to beat The Dude, huh? Well, guess I better call in somebody qualified to handle an impossible task. I don't know, how about Batman? You think he's up to the challenge? (Cups a hand to his ear) What's that? You say Christian Bale also played John Connor, who defeats the Terminator? Huh. Pretty impressive, if I do say so myself. (Hand to his ear again) What's that? You say Christian Bale also played a dude who escapes from a Vietnamese prison in *Rescue Dawn*? Well. My my my. I guess I'll just have to take my chances with poor old little Christian Bale. Maybe I'll just phone it in and stick him in *The Remarkable Andrew*. That fucker just wrote itself, and then, because it had so much time on its hands, it went and did a rewrite on your pile of puke movies. Yeah. You're welcome.

Pick 4: Joe

Natalie Portman

I have no plan this year, like I had no plan last year. I had a very specific plan in 2009 and was overwhelmingly pleased with the results, while last year, having no plan, I think I bombed.

Did I learn from my mistakes? I think it's pretty obvious that I did **not**.

But I didn't have Natalie Portman at my disposal last year, either. And after seeing *Black Swan* I'm now convinced that she's absolutely essential to any movie draft. If she's not nominated next year I may have to fake my own death rather than participate in a Movie Draft without her. We'll see; I'll throw a dummy dressed up in my clothing off that bridge when I come to it.

The point is, Natalie Portman is so good that I could cast her as the lead in *Flat Top*, a biopic about former Kid 'n' Play rapper Christopher "Kid" Reid, and she would absolutely nail it.

Now on to Jameson, who'll tell us who he's picking in addition to Amy Adams.

Pick 5: Jameson

There are plenty of solid actors left, but few knockout superstars to compete with a Dude or a Batman. I think my best move is to go for a powerhouse matchup, and since I don't see Paul Rudd and Tom Hanks on the list (nice job, *Academy*!) I'll have to see what I can do...

Nicole Kidman and

Round 2, Pick 6: Jameson

Amy Adams.

Blammo! A pair of total hotties, each triple-nominees, and each arguably among the most critically acclaimed actresses of her generation. (I know we joke a lot that I have a thing for Amy Adams, but she's been nominated three times in six years since Spielberg plucked her out of nowhere; so, maybe I am hung up on her, but at least I'm in good company.) They'll work well as sisters, equally well as rivals, or maybe we could even push it into doppelganger territory (with Kidman dyed red again, of course). Make it a really creepy psychological thriller, and even have a scene where they 69 each other? Nah, America wouldn't go for that.

Granted, I'd really like a fella for them to play against, but I'm hoping one or two will be left when pick 15 rolls around. I'll have to take my chances, and adjust according to his age and general level of hygiene. (On an Eisenberg <-> Rush and Firth <-> Hawkes Scale ... and if you know of a better metric for either, I'd like to hear it!)

With my luck, you fuckers will leave me with Michelle Williams and I'll have to team the three of them up as housewives who solve cold-case murders around the kitchen table after they put the kids to bed in *Walking After Midnight*. Don't make me do it!

Pick 7: Joe

Mark Ruffalo.

What? Mark Ruffalo? With all the heavy hitters left on the board, why reach for a guy like that?

Well, first of all I've no guarantees that he'll be around at #14, and everybody needs a strapping lad at some point (I only mean that from a movie draft standpoint. As far as any of you know).

Second of all, he's the only guy left other than Eisenberg who could play Portman's love interest and not gross people out (technically Jeremy Renner is in that age range, but he's kind of creepy and intense onscreen. If I was remaking *Sleeping With the Enemy* I'd pair him with Portman, but that title isn't on our list), and I wanted to leave the romance option open if I decide to go that route. So it was Ruffalo or Eisenberg, and when I posed the question to my wife she practically reenacted the *When Harry Met Sally* deli scene at the very mention of Ruffalo's name. That was all I needed to hear.

Natalie Portman and Mark Ruffalo; I can pretty much go anywhere from here. Look out, world!

Brandon's up next, although I've essentially already won this

POOP READING

thing so the classy thing would be to just concede now.

JAMESON: *You can indeed go pretty much anywhere with that pairing – for just one example, you could make a version of No Strings Attached that would be preferable over a sharp poke in the eyeball!*

Pick 8: Brandon

Jesse Eisenberg.

Because when you look over the remaining list of actors and wonder "Who best to pair with Christian Bale?" you naturally think Jesse Eisenberg. Zig, meet zag. Who knows where I'll go with this, but you might want to start praying that I don't just decide to do a remake of *Single White Female* called *Reflections*.

JOE: *Look, there's winning a movie draft... and then there's having an Eisenberg/Bale remake of Single White Female in the world, even if I'm not the one responsible for it.*

And if I'm forced to choose? That's an easy one.

JAMESON: *Dammit, if Bale and Eisenberg are remaking a '90s classic, it's not gonna be Single White Female under the title Reflections, it's gonna be Vice Versa, called Take Two. Get it right!*

Pick 9: Tenessa

James Franco? I have James Franco? Wow, this shit is wide open.

Will he be a bounty hunter trying to score one last tag, tailing heist puppeteer Jeremy Renner in *Take Two*?

Or perhaps a May-December romance with Annette Bening, an aging actress struggling with new reminders of her own mortality in *Take Two*?

Surely he'll be the son of well-known politician Geoffrey Rush, a reviled media whore and Oxycontin addict in *Take Two*?

You'd like that, wouldn't you?

No, I've got something special planned. And just like last year when I paired Matt Damon with Woody Harrelson, this second pick solidifies my already-writing-itself film no matter who else I get.

Helena Bonham Carter, bitches. And she ain't in *Take Two*.

Pick 10: Mike

Have I slipped into an alternate universe where my fellow fantasy movie drafters are participating after full frontal lobotomies? I must, because I already had Jeff Bridges. Now, I have **Annette Bening** and

Round 3, Pick 11: Mike

Michelle Williams.

It's as if four voices cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced. Bridges! Bening! Williams! Starring in...whatever the fuck I want and it will be good god damn gold. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Academy, the Hollywood Foreign Press, the Screen Actors' Guild, the MTV Movie Awards, and the poopreading.com fan vote for all these motherfuckin' trophies!

Holla! Bening, Williams, bitches.

JAMESON: *Thank God there is finally a movie I can put on whenever I have an inappropriate erection I need to get rid of quickly.*

MIKE: *But you already have Nicole Kidman in your movie... (and, the Dude doesn't bring the wood for you?)*

JOE: *Lawyered.*

Although, may I say, Mike, this was your chance to "Omarosa" Jacki Weaver; that maneuver derives its name from the Season 1 finale of The Apprentice, when Bill and Kwame, the two finalists, had to choose from a pool of former contestants brought back to aid them in their final task. Bill got the first pick (they didn't say how or why), which meant that Kwame was going to pick last and therefore was sure to end up with Omarosa, one of the world's more loathsome human beings and someone nobody would draft unless forced to (I'm not saying Jacki Weaver is a loathsome human being, mind you).

So I kept saying how Kwame should have picked Omarosa somewhere in the middle, not at the end, in an effort to possibly motivate her by making her think he wanted her on his team, or at least hide the disgust he clearly felt for her. You know, since he was inevitably going to end up with her anyway.

All I'm saying is that I think you'd have gotten a lot more out of Jacki Weaver if you'd have taken her right here, instead of letting her fall to Pick #20. But then I don't want to tell you how to run your movie draft. Omarosa her, don't Omarosa her... suit yourself, amigo.

Pick 12: Tenessa

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I kept thinking, "There's no way Mike will choose Michelle Williams. Why would he choose Michelle Williams? That doesn't even make any sense."

He chose Michelle Williams.

It's okay, though. I talked myself through this scenario so I'd have a rock-solid backup plan. And you know what? My backup plans make your regular plans look like a pile of puke. **Hailee Steinfeld**. (And she's just a kid, so I'm not going to call you bitches this time. But you're totally still bitches.)

Poor Colin Firth, still lying on the table. He must feel like a regular Jacki Weaver. But I think we can all agree that putting Colin Firth in a movie with James Franco is a recipe for box office poison.

JOE: Colin Firth is the Aaron Rodgers of this draft. I think I made that same reference to Kate Winslet in '09 but it applies here as well.

[pause to let Tenessa and Jameson look up Aaron Rodgers...]

Pick 13: Brandon

Jeremy Renner.

I know what you're thinking: "He's already got one intense method actor in Bale! Why would he want two? He's crazy!" "He's got no women! Why would he take another dude? He's crazy!" "He's transcribing the voices in his head! Who does that? He's crazy!"

So perhaps I am crazy... like a fox! Am I going somewhere with this? Oh yes, I am most definitely going somewhere with this. Somewhere that... well, I'm going to keep it under my hat just a little while longer.

In the meantime, for your reading pleasure, here are three movies I *won't* be making:

Static – Bale and Renner are police detective partners who hate each other (there's static between them, hence the title), and while they are working out their issues during sessions with a professional counselor (Eisenberg), they are also racing against the clock to solve a murder case where each is a suspect. Can they clear their own name and finger the other guy, or will they finally learn to work together to save their collective ass? (Asses?)

Loose Connections – Bale and Renner are rival serial killers who hate each other, and Eisenberg is the professional counselor who's working with each of them, unaware of their

true natures... and the fact that he could be the next victim of either. Or both!

Flat Top – Bale and Renner are rival barbers who hate each other, and Eisenberg is the professional counselor who is torn between who gives him the best haircut. But when each barber perfects a new variation on the traditional flat top, all bets are off! Or on!

Pick 14: Joe

No... I'm thinking "*I can't believe Jennifer Lawrence fell to me at Pick 14!!!!*"

And I'm doing a little dance.

It's pretty weird. People in the office are starting to stare.

Jennifer Lawrence.

I almost picked her instead of Ruffalo way back at Pick 7, but I thought there was the tiniest, eensiest chance she'd fall to me at 14.

I don't see this title on the approved list, but I'm just going to call my movie *Ruffalo and the Super Hot Chicks*. And I don't know why, but since I picked him I've been seeing Ruffalo as a college professor. But do I go comedy (*Don't Get Me Started*), indie (*Honeybaby*), drama (*Reflections*), erotic thriller (*Nocturna*)... so many choices. So many options. So many hot chicks!

At some point I think Natalie Portman and Jennifer Lawrence are going to have to make out, too. That line of thinking worked out pretty spectacularly for me back in the '09 draft (Cruz and Hathaway; you're welcome, fellas), and I think we need a little more of that around here.

And who knows; maybe *my* movie will have a professional counselor, too.

Good luck, suckers!

(I'd totally see *Static*, by the way. If you hadn't already said you won't be doing that one, I'd take that title just to cockblock you. Yeah, that's right. I'd be more than happy to win that way, if that's what it takes.)

Pick 15: Jameson

Javier Bardem.

I, too, am amazed to find my first choice still available to me this late in the draft. Between Tenessa (a girl) and Brandon and Joe (two people who obviously want to win a movie draft), I figured there was no chance Bardem would drop to

me at Pick 15.

When he was still available at 14, I felt a glimmer of hope, because I know Joe gets pretty excited about Jennifer Lawrence. (I almost picked her instead of Amy Adams, just to block him at Pick 7, but I realized he'd pick Adams to fill the same role, and I'd be left with a lesser Lawrence whom – comely as she may be – I have no crush on. If anything, that punishes me – and cruelly, I might add!)

So, I'm thrilled to welcome another Oscar winner to my film and a bona fide hunk to round out my cast of lovelies. I could do a lot worse than simply re-making *Vicki Cristina Barcelona* under the title *Loose Connections* (to cite just one example, I could remake *Rule #3* and call it *Sticky Fingers* – yaburn!). Anyway, whether it's the touching love-triangle/character study *The Remarkable Andrew* or the gripping espionage thriller *Static* this cast has demonstrated that they're up for anything, and they'll grab you and never let go.

Stay tuned for Pick 16. As soon as I figure out what the hell kind of movie I'm making, I'll know whether I need a guy or a girl, or John Hawkes.

Round 4, Pick 16: Jameson

(Through the magic of editing, it's less than a second later and Pick 16 is already here! To the astonishment of all, it's: **John Hawkes.**)

I'm taking John Hawkes and he's going to play a time-traveling Edgar Allan Poe. Mainly because I think I should shoot myself in the foot by hammering a time-travel plot into as many movie drafts as possible, but also because I can't believe nobody's cast him in this role already. Come on!

The only question remaining is whether this will be a drama (*Nocturna* in which he teams up with Bardem as Young Lincoln (sorry, Henry Pollard) to save the girls from dark forces) or a comedy (*Don't Get Me Started* in which Poe is forced to run a writing retreat in the Adirondacks for a bunch of talentless suburbanites). I'll decide that later; at least the hard part is over - we know it will be completely unwatchable.

Good luck making a better movie with your picks this year - oh, right, you can't because your movie doesn't have a time-traveling Edgar Allan Poe in it! HA!

(Actually, you know what... Renner, Franco, and Rush could all probably pass with the right makeup and costumes. Could this be the year of the all-Poe movie draft? It's a Poe Arms Race! May the best Poe win! Thank God I got Hawkes when

I did.)

JOE: *Oh, you wanna play the Poe game, do you? You wanna try to wear the Poe pants? You want get into a Poe-ing contest with me?*

It is SO on!

BRANDON: *Don't forget about Jacki Weaver!*

Pick 17: Joe

I'm still reeling a little bit from the Poe thing, I won't lie... but I'm getting to pick who I was going to pick anyway, so everything's cool.

Melissa Leo.

Should I have changed up my plan – if it can be called that – when Colin MF'ing Firth fell all the way to Pick 17? Probably. You don't not take him that low, if you can do it.

But even though I don't know what my movie is yet, I sort of latched onto the idea that either Natalie Portman or Jennifer Lawrence, or maybe both, are going to need a mom. Why I'm convinced of this I don't yet know, but convinced I remain, and Melissa Leo is the right age range to have had either – or both – of them in her prime child-bearing years (sort of like how Mark Ruffalo is a mere three years older than Edward Allan Poe was when he died, while John Hawkes is already older by more than a decade. And getting older by the minute!).

(Poe burn!)

So maybe college professor Ruffalo is getting improperly involved with one of his students and the student's mom is none too pleased... maybe Ruffalo is getting involved with an older woman and her daughter – Ruffalo's student – is none too pleased... maybe two hot coeds are getting involved with each other, Ruffalo is secretly filming it and one of the coeds' mothers is none too pleased; I don't know. Ruffalo's a college professor, that's all I know at this point.

Or maybe an astronaut; I don't know. I've got some thinking to do.

You know what the best part is, though? Over the course of the wait between Jameson's picks I became so convinced that one of my young ladies needed a mom that if Jameson had taken Melissa Leo from me, my next pick – my hand to God – would have been the inimitable Jacki Weaver.

I think I would have been able to hear Wagner's "NooooooooooooOOOOOOOOOOOO!" all the way out here

in California.

Brandon's up next, with Firth, Rush and Weaver still available – hey, Brandon's cast doesn't have any women in it yet, does it? Don't count those Jacki Weaver eggs before they hatch, Mike.

[Jacki Weaver eggs... ew]

BRANDON: *I fear that if I told Christian Bale and Jeremy Renner that they were competing with each other for a role as Poe, they'll both be dead by their own hand within a month. But hey, maybe that's my movie...*

JAMESON: *Ooo, I'd totally watch that movie! Like an Adaptation behind-the-scenes-of-Malkovich kind of thing. Like all the best scenes of Tristram Shandy. Like a bizarro-universe watchable version of the Bewitched movie.*

Pick 18: Brandon

Geoffrey Rush.

When I made my Renner pick, I knew I was pretty much giving up the opportunity to add any women to my cast, and that's fine. I didn't expect Firth to still be here, but, like Joe, I had already made up my mind about what I needed, and Colin just didn't fit the bill. (He's moved beyond Aaron Rodgers now, hasn't he? This is Cole Landry on *Party Down* territory. You're welcome for the gift, Tenessa.)

Here's what I've been sitting on since I took Mr. Bale – this is an excerpt from a [November 2010 Esquire interview with Bale](#):

BALE: And Chris Farley was just phenomenal. *Beverly Hills Ninja* will always remain one of my tops.

ESQUIRE: Now you're lying.

BALE: I have watched that movie. One time I sat down and watched it two nights in a row, and cried with laughter both times. The guy just was a phenomenon, and is missed dearly in my household.

You don't just find something like that and let it go to waste. I'm letting Christian Bale fulfill his dream, and perhaps his destiny: he's going to make his own Chris Farley movie. I'm talking the full Troy McClure/*The Contrabulous Fabtraption of Professor Horatio Hufnagel* here – Bale will produce, direct, and star. And just as he lost 63 pounds for his role in *The Machinist*, he's going to gain 100 to play a Farley type, a sad sack loser who runs a failing karate dojo he inherited from his dead father. Eisenberg will play the smarmy David Spade character, Bale's younger brother who helps run the dojo, but mostly just sits around making wisecracks. Renner will play their enemy, the over-the-top head of a rival dojo

(and yes, we're talking shades of Cobra Kai's John Kreese here) that's trying to put them out of business. And Rush will play the Mr. Miyagi-esque old mentor who reluctantly agrees to help Bale turn things around and defeat Renner.

And it will be called... *Below the Belt*. (Now granted, I pick third for titles, so Jameson or Joe, if you want to be a cock-blocking douche, well, that's a choice you'll have to live with.)

It might be awesome, or it might be a train wreck, but either way, you know people will want to see it. Avalanche of cash, here I come. I can buy the rotting bones of Edgar Allan Poe and prop them up in my breakfast nook. That's right, I'm gonna eat breakfast with Boney Poe every morning. Eggo waffles. Homestyle flavor. That's the way the Poe Train rolls, bitches.

Pick 19: Tenessa

As for my pick, did I not make myself clear? *NO Colin Firth with James Franco. Box. Office. Poison.*

And this, my friends, is the story of how **Jacki Weaver** was not the final pick in the 2011 Poop Reading Movie Draft.

Will she be Hailee's teacher, finally breaking through her learning disability and getting her the test scores she needs to get into music school? Or Helena's sassy mother/sister/friend who moves into her New York City condo after a tumultuous divorce? Or will James reawaken parts of her she thought had died after the accident in 1971*?

Anything could happen when you've got Jacki Weaver, bitches.

GEMELKE OUT!

*Say what you will about our friend Jacki, but she does not look like someone who was born in 1947.

Pick 10: Mike

Someday, when Demetri Martin, who I assume will be the James Lipton of *Inside the Movie Draft* on Bravo7, asks me how I got Bridges, Bening, Williams, and Firth – I will tell the story of how I went "Full Weaver" without ever going Weaver at all. The last pick on the 2011 Fantasy Movie Draft is no Mr. Irrelevant, he's **Colin Aloysius Firth** (look it up). Maybe my movie, *Don't Get Me Started* will be about how I got schooled you slow-witted fonzanoogaos. Ok, don't look it up, his middle name is Andrew.

JOE: *Bridges and Firth? We could do this movie draft for the next 100 years and never bookend the thing like that. That's pretty amazing.*

I can't stop myself now from looking over that titles list and thinking "Which one goes best with a time-traveling Edgar Allan Poe?"

Title Round, Pick 1: Jameson

Oh I never said I was going to treat that *literally*...

I've been drawn to the title *The Remarkable Andrew* from the start. I'm not totally sure what I'm gonna do with it now, but rather than mull it over and drag out the agony, I'll just go ahead and pull the trigger on that so you can get on with cock-blocking Brandon's *Below the Belt* movie.

Don't disappoint me! We all know Fat Bale will be funnier under the title *Rhubarb!*

Pick 2: Joe

I did have my eye on *The Remarkable Andrew*, but, such is life. Don't think I would have picked it, in any case; but I liked it a lot.

As much as I'd love to throw a monkey wrench into Brandon's plans, *Below the Belt* could really only be a karate comedy starring fat Christian Bale and Jeremy Renner as an evil sensei. So I'll leave that one alone.

I haven't settled on a tone for my movie yet but I've kind of ruled out broad slapstick or mainstream romantic comedy (or, rather, my drafting of Natalie Portman and Mark Ruffalo ruled them out for me), so that kind of does away with your *Flat Top* and your *Sticky Fingers* and your *Take Two*.

I gave some thought to Portman as Patsy Cline in *Walking After Midnight*, but that's hardly in keeping with the spirit of the movie draft so I won't go there. Although maybe she travels back in time to fight vampires with Edgar Allan Poe. Maybe next year.

I wasn't expecting *Nocturna* to still be around, to be honest; not with time-traveling Poe in the mix. I do like that one a lot...

You know what? I liked *Honeybaby* from the start. I'm going there. That fits a lot of genres, but it I've always thought it fit perfectly with the "pretentious indy drama that people who read *The New Yorker* go and see but everybody else ignores," which is exactly the kind of movie in which pretty much my entire cast belongs. We'll see; I'd love to throw some thriller elements in there too maybe, but *Honeybaby* is a nice catch-all.

Honeybaby it is.

Which one will Brandon choose? The suspense is killing

me...

Pick 3: Brandon

Below the Belt! Below the Belt! Below the Belt!

I'd like to say right here that I could've made another title work, but no. I'd have been royally screwed. (Royally screwed... hey Mike, I see Colin Firth as a sexually adventurous member of the British monarchy in *Sticky Fingers!* You're welcome.)

Pick 4: Tenessa

Rhubarb! *Rhubarb* is mine!

Rhubarb has been the name of my movie since I first saw it on the list. I figured no dude alive would ever select this title, but I was also pretty sure that Mike wouldn't choose Michelle Williams, and that Colin Firth wouldn't be picked last, and that Brandon wouldn't use Christian Bale to remake a Chris Farley martial arts movie, and that we'd finally make it through a Movie Draft without Jameson sending a photo of junk. (Though, to be fair, a picture of a horse's cock was the only appropriate response to my father's death last year.) Needless to say, this unpredictable mess had me sweating my destined film title.

I will sweat no more forever. *Rhubarb*, bitches! And I have a whole weekend at home without my family, so it's gonna be gooooooooood.

Pick 5: Mike

I have no plan. No plan at all. When that's the case you either go crowd pleasing title like *Walking After Midnight* or sounds-artsy-but-is-entertaining-too-title like *Nocturna*.

Nocturna it is. The game is afoot, bitches.

JOE: Before this thing began I toyed with the idea of casting Colin Firth as an aging, turn-of-the-century bare-knuckle brawler in a period piece which, of course, would have been called Rhubarb (one of the definitions of which is "a quarrel or squabble"). The fights would have been called "rhubarbs" in the slang of the period (whether they were actually called that back then or not).

But once I saw Natalie Portman waiting for me at Pick #4 that plan went out the window; I didn't really see a place for her in Rhubarb.

The Films

Below the Belt – Brandon

Starring Christian Bale, Jesse Eisenberg, Jeremy Renner, and Geoffrey Rush (Produced and directed by Bale)

Francis "Fritz" Carley (Bale, who gained 100 pounds for the role) is a fat, clumsy, sad sack who runs a failing karate dojo he inherited from his dead father. Fritz's father was a local legend, a black belt and sensei; Fritz is a "disputed" orange belt who can only teach beginners, and has renamed the dojo "Kicks Are for Kids." Fritz spends most of his instruction time getting kicked in the shins, knees, and balls, much to the enjoyment of his smarmy younger brother, Dade (Eisenberg), who sits around making wisecracks.

Fritz wishes their dojo was as successful as the Double Dragon Dojo run by his rival Brent Bauer (Renner), who thinks Fritz is a joke (he calls him Chow Yun-Fatso). Bauer is an intense, over-the-top bully, and he and his students will often march into Fritz's dojo to terrorize his students and break stuff. Bauer always challenges Fritz to a sparring match, and Fritz, much to his shame, always backs down. This has led to the defection of many of Fritz's students, and he realizes that pretty soon the dojo will go under.

One night, as he's falling asleep, Fritz is visited by the ghosts of his dead parents, Tommy (fat Bale in old age makeup) and Beverly (fat Bale in drag), as well as his fat Uncle Foley (fat Bale in a fat suit, speaking with a Scottish accent). They urge him not to let the dojo go out of business, and Tommy instructs Fritz to track down the man who turned him into a karate master: Blackie Shepherd (Rush).

Fritz finds Blackie living in a hobo village under a bridge. He wants no part of helping Fritz, and chases him off, screaming "what your father and I did wasn't karate!" Fritz and Dade are at the end of their rope; they are discussing closing the dojo when Blackie appears, saying "Your father almost closed this dojo once... until I helped him discover his key to victory." Turns out his key to victory was simply kicking his opponents in the balls, or "below the belt." It's illegal, but as Blackie points out, Fritz's father wasn't trying to win tournaments, he was trying to attract customers, and as the legend of his triumphs over other black belts grew, so did his business.

Fritz is left with a tough choice: fight dirty, or lose the dojo. He sets up a match with Bauer, and hundreds of karate students show up to watch. The two begin fighting, and Bauer is beating Fritz badly. At one point he knocks Fritz to the ground, and Fritz sees the ghosts again. His father says "Do it." His mother says "Do it." His fat Uncle Foley screams "Bust him in the bollocks, boy!" So Fritz strikes a pose, waits for his opening, and then plants his foot right in Bauer's nutsack. Bauer doubles over, drops to his knees, and coughs up... his own balls! Dade laughs and snarks "What's the matter, Brent? Feeling a little testes?" Bauer flees in shame, and the crowd cheers for Fritz. They rush in and lift

him up, but his weight becomes too much and he falls on them, crushing several students. Fritz looks at the camera, shrugs, and laughs.

Honeybaby – Joe

Starring Natalie Portman, Mark Ruffalo, Jennifer Lawrence, and Melissa Leo

Chris DeLucca (Mark Ruffalo) is an English professor at a large university. He's giving a lecture on "Hamlet," specifically the extent of Hamlet's madness and his relationship with the apparition of his murdered father. The students seem interested (one in particular); he shares knowing glances with Heidi Bailey (Jennifer Lawrence), a blonde in the front row. After class the students file out of the room, all except Heidi. Chris sits down next to her. "Hey, Honeybaby," he says. "Don't call me that," she replies. "I hate when you call me that." She clearly doesn't mean it. They kiss...

Chris, in a therapist's office... Dr. Rhonda Weismann (Melissa Leo), who's been treating Chris for a few weeks, wastes no time getting to the point: "Are you still seeing her?" Chris confirms that he is. Dr. Weismann expresses concern that an otherwise level-headed, seemingly sane man like Chris could sit there and tell her that he's seeing Heidi... when they both know that Heidi died twenty years ago. Through extremely deft and not at all heavy-handed exposition we come to learn that Chris and "Honeybaby" were college sweethearts who were truly, madly, deeply in love. One night he was driving her home from a party and they got into a car wreck; she was killed, he was hurt but recovered.

So call it guilt, call it denial, call it schizophrenia, but Chris has been seeing Honeybaby regularly these past twenty years. Chris tells Dr. Weismann he's fully aware how that makes him sound; "If I wasn't me, I'd think I was crazy." But after two decades, a half-dozen therapists, and a dump truck full of pharmaceuticals, Honeybaby is still around. Therefore Chris has concluded that she is, for lack of a better term, "real." Dr. Weismann begrudgingly agrees with him that apart from one (pretty major) issue he's the absolute picture of mental health.

By and by Chris meets a young medical student, Elisa (Natalie Portman), on campus. Things develop somewhat slowly as both are a bit closed off; she lost her father when she was 11 and he, of course, lost the love of his life in his early 20s. But each kind of fills a void in the other, so the attraction is strong.

It progresses to the meet-the-parents stage, and that's when we – along with Chris – come to realize that Elisa is Dr. Weismann's daughter (Dr. Weismann and Elisa have different last names because the doctor remarried, for those nitpickers who would wonder).

As Chris and Elisa get closer and closer it sets up quite a dilemma for Dr. Weismann; doctor-patient confidentiality forbids her from discussing Chris's "condition" with Elisa, yet how close is she willing to let her daughter get to a guy who's clearly delusional? Then again, if his delusions don't manifest themselves in any harmful way whatsoever, what do they matter? And dare she entertain the crazy notion that – as Chris maintains, since he sees himself as completely sane yet is convinced of her existence – Honeybaby is "real?" After all, the better she gets to know Chris, the less crazy he seems...

Honeybaby is ultimately a rumination on life, love, existence, reality and fantasy, pain and healing. It's thin on plot but the full script would be a doozy and the actors would really sell it. It would work, ultimately. And I know we've seen "Ruffalo in love with a ghost" before (*Just Like Heaven*, 2005), but this time it'll be different. Just trust me.

Nocturna – Mike

Starring Jeff Bridges, Annette Bening, Colin Firth, and Michelle Williams

We open as Danny Mays (Bridges) walks out of prison. "Movin' from your wife's hotel to your wife's house, huh?" the wardens chides him. We see a photo on the jailhouse wall of Chief Elizabeth Mays (Bening); it's a front page spread in the *Chicago Tribune* about the first female police chief in Windy City history. "We'll see," Mays says.

We see quickly. A moving truck is at the Mays home and a focused, clipped-speaking Chief Mays is ordering movers around with both haste and precision. The marriage is over. Danny and Liz's daughter Rebecca (Williams) watches from the upstairs window. She won't talk to Danny since he killed her boyfriend Liam Spencer, "involuntary manslaughter," 10 years ago.

We flash back to 1991, the Persian Gulf War. Major Danny Mays is captured by Iraqi forces. His excitement at the explosions outside signaling his rescue quickly turn sour when he sees who his knight on a white horse is; Kensington Spencer of the Royal Air Force (Firth). Spencer rescues Danny on the condition that Danny hype up the story of the rescue and convince top U.S. brass to have Spencer come to the U.S. and tour the country with Danny, telling their story to keep public support for the war high. "The Knights of Nocturna" tour (Nocturna – the mission that rescued Mays) lands the two men on the cover of *Newsweek*; America loves that the men became neighbors.

Back in 2011, we see Danny's sad montage of starting over. Shitty apartment, bad dates, phone calls to Rebecca that go unanswered, birthday gifts to Rebecca and Liz that are sent back unopened. He ends up going to work for a company that delivers take-out to the asshole elite. It's a shitty job, but at least the pay is terrible. We aren't quite sure if he's a good

guy down on his luck or an evil man waiting to strike again.

One night a call comes in and he groans. He's bringing a bag full of ginger prawns and noodles to the estate of Kensington Spencer. Spencer engages Mays in some emotional protestations over Spencer's dead son before creaking the door open to reveal that Rebecca is his dinner companion, a Rebecca way too suggestively dressed to be simply calling on the father of her dead boyfriend.

Montage of Mays exercising, cleaning old military gear, and we flash back to the Gulf. Spencer leads crazy late-night sex parties, violent and abusive ones, parties that Mays stops, saving some Kuwaiti women in the process. We flash to 2001, when Mays overhears Spencer telling his son that Rebecca is to be their first American victim. Mays hides everything from his wife and kills Liam. She catches him in the act and arrests him.

Will Danny stop Kensington from killing his daughter? Will Elizabeth finally piece it all together? Did Elizabeth always know the truth? Is a reunited Mays couple the only thing that can stop Spencer?

The Remarkable Andrew – Jameson

Starring Amy Adams, John Hawkes, Javier Bardem, and Nicole Kidman

Amy Adams plays Claire Jeffries, a young FBI profiler fresh out of Quantico. She takes an assignment at the Baltimore field office where they are tracking a particularly vicious serial killer. She's excited to tackle a challenging case, and happy to be in Baltimore, where she'll be close to her sister Noelle (Nicole Kidman) and brother-in-law Edgardo (Javier Bardem). At work, she soon finds herself shadowed by a journalist who's been writing about the case - in fact, she grows suspicious when he begins showing up at crime scenes ahead of the bureau. Checking into him, she learns he's not with any local paper, so she questions him. He introduces himself as Andrew Perry (John Hawkes), a local author, and admits he's not studying the case for a news story but as inspiration for his work as a writer of detective fiction. He shares some additional leads and some deductions he's made in the case and she decides to bring him on as a consultant - if he's not the most brilliant detective mind she's ever met, then he's the prime suspect. Either way, best to keep him close.

They quickly develop a rapport and begin constructing a detailed profile of their suspect. Her analytical approach is well complemented by his intuitive methodology: approaching the case like one of his stories and reasoning out how the characters might behave. Plus, she enjoys his eccentric mannerisms and quirky turns of phrase. But their bond is shaken when the killer takes his next victim: Noelle. Claire's trust in Andrew falters, which forces him to reveal something about his identity. He isn't the killer; he is actually

Edgar Allan Poe, and he has traveled from 1849 due to a bizarre temporal anomaly. He hopes this will restore her trust and together they will catch the bastard who killed her sister, but instead it terrifies her and she reports him to her superiors who demand a full psychiatric evaluation.

Wanting a fair assessment of Andrew's mental state, and not knowing whom to trust, Claire refers him to Edgardo, her brother-in-law, a psychiatrist. Edgardo spends hours with him, and he and Claire compare notes about Andrew - but find no holes in his story. Either this is the most complete pathology Edgardo has ever encountered, or he actually is a time-traveling Edgar Allan Poe. Meanwhile, Andrew has been calling Claire at night, desperate to talk. He insists he's got a new break in the case, but she's not returning his calls.

Finally, one stormy night while Claire and Edgardo are discussing their notes over dinner, Andrew blurts it out on her answering machine: over the hours he's spent in interviews with Edgardo, he's determined that the psychiatrist fits their killer's profile perfectly. Awkward pause. Suspicious glance. Edgardo lunges at her with a steak knife.

Lightning flashes. The power goes out. The front door slams open. TIME-TRAVELING EDGAR ALLAN POE TO THE RESCUE.

Rhubarb – Tenessa

Starring James Franco, Helena Bonham Carter, Hailee Steinfeld, and Jacki Weaver

When Chris Butcher (James Franco) runs out of gas on a little-traveled road in North Carolina, that's it. End of the road. No money, no prospects, and no life trajectory.

Chris is a college dropout who left Kansas State without much of a plan. His parents cut him off months ago. For lack of any better ideas, he has decided to drive to the Atlantic Ocean.

It is unseasonably warm as he walks to the nearest town. The sign reads "Danwood," and the only business of note is something called "Gertie's Goods." The door rings a handmade chime as he pushes in and finds himself in a combination cafe/general store.

"Love, could you help me with this?" A woman who is clearly Gertie (Helena Bonham Carter) hands him a clean dishpan and a large knife while she slips into some gardening shoes and a floppy hat. He stares dubiously. "Well? Lunch is on me. I desperately need a hand. Come along, then."

Speechless, Chris follows her out the back door. His eyes are met with rows upon rows of floppy leaves. "What is that? Tobacco?"

"Tobacco! Hardly. It's rhubarb. Haven't you seen rhubarb before?"

"Um, yeah, just never more than one . . . bush thingie of it."

"Well, dear, these bush thingies are producing a bumper crop. And that means I'm finally getting the hell out of here."

As he helps with the harvest, Chris learns that Gertie came to Danwood as a foreign exchange student. Before she knew it, she was in love and pregnant halfway around the world. "My parents didn't want me when I left Sussex. They sure as shit didn't want me back with a baby." She stayed.

As if on cue, Maggie (Hailee Steinfeld) saunters out to the rhubarb field. "Sorry I'm late."

Maggie instantly takes a shine to Chris as she follows him inside. She sits across from him and peppers him with teenager questions as he scarfs down his cheeseburger and fries. She quickly calls him out on the fact that he has no plan whatsoever. "You should stay here! My ma's crazy to think she's going to jam all that rhubarb in time for the farmer's market in Raleigh. Stay and help."

He doesn't have a better offer. He goes home with the women and meets Gertie's mother-in-law, Rose (Jacki Weaver). Like Gertie and Maggie, Rose almost immediately trusts Chris as a confidant. She explains how her son was killed in a freak accident when Maggie was only two years old.

Gertie thinks Rose blames her for his death, but Chris reads between the lines when she says, "You know, rhubarb is not native to North Carolina. It's a wonder to see it survive. That's why it's so valuable. We're lucky to have it."

Rose doesn't know Gertie's leaving town. Gertie doesn't know Rose is dying. Neither of them knows Maggie missed her period. Somehow Chris knows all of this but has no idea how he got dragged into it.

Who will move on? Who will stay put? And what is Chris really running from? It's hard to say, but they can all learn something from Rose's observation about rhubarb: with enough sugar, even the bitterest transplants turn sweet.

(Reviews of these five films can be found here: [*Below the Belt*](#); [*Honeybaby*](#); [*Nocturna*](#); [*The Remarkable Andrew*](#); [*Rhubarb*](#).)
