

## Oscar Best Picture Nominees - Films Previously Reviewed

Written by {ga=mitch}

Tuesday, February 22 2011 6:30 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 23 2011 7:28 PM

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The Oscar presentations are this Sunday, and as is our tradition here at TheClevelandFan.com, we use the week running up to the Sunday telecast to take a closer look at the contenders for Best Picture, culminating with the always popular Oscar Predictions column Sunday morning (I only wish my predictions concerning sporting teams were as good as the ones I make for Oscar).

This year, I'm choosing not to re-run the reviews that I've already published. They're on the Movies page, and not hard to find. But what I will do is start out my Best Picture Nominees articles with a summarization of those five, as well as a link for those of you who don't want to dig through the archives. And then starting tomorrow running through Saturday, I'll post full reviews on four of the other ten films that are up for the award.

For you math majors, it's pretty obvious that  $5 + 4 \neq 10$ . Yes, there is a movie that I will be skipping conducting a full review...which I'll talk about at the end of this article.

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2010 was indeed a very strange year for movies. Right until the last few months of the year, it was one of the worst I had ever seen; lame remakes and bad sequels galore, with nary a glimmer of quality to be seen, other than in the form of two of the nominees: "Inception" and "Toy Story 3". But once Autumn arrived, so did the quality movies. Enough so that I truly think all ten of these films deserve their nominations...as opposed to last year when there were three of them that didn't belong.

In fact, a case could be made that there were several films left off the list that were far superior to the bottom 5 of last year's nominees (and for the record, the bottom 5 of 2009's nominees were "Precious", "A Serious Man", "The Blind Side", "District 9", and "An Education"). "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo", "The Town", "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1", and "The Ghost Writer" are all, in my opinion, better movies than the 2009 list I gave...but I have no problem with them not making the list for 2010.

So bravo to all of the nominees; even if the award is a runaway race between "The Social Network" and "The King's Speech". No real chance for any of the other films to sneak in and pull an upset like we saw last year with "The Hurt Locker" or in 2005 with "Crash" (and will some critics please get over the fact that "Brokeback Mountain" didn't win best picture; it sucked. No, "Crash" was not the best picture that year...that would be "Munich"...but it was still better than "Brokeback Mountain").

But enough pontificating for the moment: On with the flashback. The italicized portions are lifted from the full reviews.

### [Toy Story 3](#)

The first one out of the gates, and the Box Office Champion of 2010 with \$415 million domestically, it is the third animated film ever nominated for Best Picture ("Beauty and the Beast" and "Up").

*"I never ceased to be amazed at how they do it at Pixar. Year after year after year they keep putting out the best animated features of a generation. But why restrict it to just animation? Simply put, the storytellers at Pixar are some of the best writers in the entire entertainment business."*

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*“This is, by far, the deepest and most insightful of the [Toy Story] series. The toys have been living their lives shut up in Andy’s toy chest for years; there is little need for a 17 year old for plastic dinosaurs, pull string cowboys, or slinky dogs. The toys are restless, even if they do still get out and about whenever no human I around. They’d love to be played with, but there is a sad sense of reality creeping into them. Andy no longer needs them. What will happen to them? Storage up in the attic until perhaps Andy has kids of his own? Donated? Or...their biggest fear...thrown away?”*

Upon Further Review – I’ve bounce all around on this one as well. Part of me feels that no matter how great it was, it’s still an animation, and not worthy. But then I watch it again, or even just think about what I saw, and I see the true beauty of this film, and how it applies to us all.

*“How could anyone over the age of 30 not identify with these toys? They may be made of plastic, but they still dread the unknown, and like any human, fear not being needed and no longer being important in anyone’s eyes”.*

The more I look at it; that’s the point that really sticks to me in this film. “The fear of not being needed”. And then you have the ending. I still won’t talk about it, guarding against spoiling anything for those yet to see it, but...

*“...the 3D version does offer one big advantage...no one will be able to see the little bit of mist in your eyes when you’re wearing those stupid glasses”.*

The first 10 minutes of “Up” and the last 10 minutes of “Toy Story 3”: If you don’t have a lump in your throats watching both of these; congratulations! You’re a Vulcan.

### [Inception](#)

*“the visuals are stunning. But they are only compliments to the real star of the film, which is the incredibly complex script. [Director Christopher] Nolan delivers the most intelligent script I have*

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*seen in years, perhaps even smarter than "The Departed". You must stay focused to keep up, but you will be rewarded if you do."*

Upon Further Review – "Inception" has slipped several spots upon a second viewing, but it still deserves the accolades for no other reason than having the balls to be this original. It was also aided by what I thought was excellent casting and acting, although that assertion has been debated by many, especially on the boards. That's fine...but I contend that Leonardo DiCaprio did a great job with the character, and I really liked Ellen Page playing something other than a teenager. Tough roles, but they did them well, even if the "stand outs" were Joseph Gordon-Levitt as DiCaprio's right hand man Arthur, and Tom Hardy as the forgerer.

*"We have been spoon fed so much mindless entertainment in the last several months, so much so that my brain felt as if perhaps it needed to shake off the rust to stay with this film."*

I watched this before "The Social Network", "The King's Speech", or "Black Swan" was released. While I still love the concept and the script, it may be hard to truly say it was more intelligent than those other three. But it still holds up well.

### [The Social Network](#)

I started my review of this film talking about expectations. In particular, this film had gotten SO much positive press for weeks before being released to the public, that I was convinced that it just couldn't be that good.

I was wrong.

*"All in all, this is a movie that I want to see again soon. It simply works on every level; funny, moving, and immensely interesting both as a depiction of how the Phenomenon that is Facebook came into existence, as well as a human interest story of the people involved, the entire culture's ravenous appetite for what they created, and the ramifications of "too much, too soon" for young men not even of legal drinking age when they got the whole thing started".*

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This film did not slip at all for me upon a second and third viewing. And as much as Aaron Sorkin deserves the lion's share of credit for his amazing script, the acting in this film is top notch all the way down the line.

*"I previously thought of Jesse Eisenberg as a slightly older version of Michael Cera...but in "The Social Network", Eisenberg is excellent as the extremely complex Zuckerberg, creating an absolutely riveting character who you don't know if you should root for or root against."*

But it wasn't just Eisenberg. Andrew Garfield (the next Spider-Man) as Mark's best friend Eduardo Saverin, Armie Hammer playing identical twins Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss and Justin Freaking Timberlake as Napster founder Sean Parker all amazed.

The film is a snapshot of a Period when the information age went thermonuclear. And if it loses out to "The King's Speech" for Best Picture, I feel that it will be considered the more memorable film 20 years from now.

### [True Grit](#)

Another four star film...I was giving out the highest grades like I was an Auburn University communications professor tutoring the football team.

For so long, the outside focus on this film was about comparing it to the original John Wayne version...something I obviously couldn't ignore in the review.

*"Try as I might, I couldn't quite shake The Duke from my thoughts as I watched it...the film was almost disconcerting; it seemed so original and fresh, but also so familiar"*

The bottom line was that the Coen Brothers were fans of the original Charles Portis novel, and

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they based their characters on that. In the first film, there was 22 year old Kim Darby playing the role of a 14 year old...and having an implied flirtation/romance with the Texas Ranger LeBeouf. Rooster Cogburn was just another case of John Wayne playing John Wayne (sorry, Traditionalists; it's true), and a popular Country-Western singer with little acting ability as the sidekick.

The three main characters here are amazing; especially young Hailee Steinfeld in her breakout role as Mattie Ross. She may be up for "Best Supporting Actress", but her character is the primary character in this film; not Rooster Cogburn. Even so, Jeff Bridges did a fantastic job bringing his version of Cogburn to life, and didn't once try to emulate the Duke. Then there was Matt Damon, totally de-glamoured as the slight pudgy, vain, untrustworthy LaBeouf, a brave performance from someone usually just playing action heroes and pretty-boys.

*"To me, the film had a very similar feel to Clint Eastwood's masterpiece 'Unforgiven'. There was no romanticizing anything. These were harsh times and a harsh land; so the people in them needed to adapt to the conditions if they were to survive. No real debate happens between Right and Wrong."*

*"I kept looking for the Coen Brothers to make some modification in order to add in their usual touches of strangeness; either in the characters' behavior or in the script itself. But that never came about. ...It's not your usual Western. It's not your usual Coen Brothers' movie. It's not your usual remake."*

### [The Fighter](#)

So this was the one out of these five that didn't get 4 stars...only 3 ½ . I had problems with the fight sequences being a bit boring and predictable as well as an issue with some of the secondary characters.

But what makes this movie worth watching is the overall story, and the performances of the four lead actors, starting with Christian Bale as crack addict Dicky Eklund, the half brother and trainer of Mickey Ward, the central character.

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*"Bale's portrayal of this man is just incredible. Once again, as with "The Mechanic", Bale has physically transformed himself into an emaciated shell of his former self. He truly does look like someone who has been a serious drug addict for years... He is an absolutely loathsome individual...but Bale still manages to portray him in a sympathetic manner to the point that you are rooting for him in spite of yourself.*

The two women in Micky's life also shine; Amy Adams as Charlene, Micky's girlfriend. It is quite a different role for uber-perky and cute Amy Adams, and she handles the beer swilling working glass girl with aplomb. Then there is Micky's mother, played in true Lady McBeth loathsomeness by Melissa Leo. Momma Alice might be the most disgusting human being I've seen on film this year.

Which left Mark Wahlburgh in a tough role as the quiet center of all of these ongoing storms:

*"Micky just seemed to be an introverted sap; lacking the backbone to stand up for himself. But the more I saw and the more I thought about it, the more impressed I was by Wahlberg's portrayal. Here was a man stuck in the worst possible position; knowing deep down inside that his family was ruining him, but unable to shake his foundation beliefs that 'family comes first' and [that] he must always try to take care of them."*

It was a great film to watch for the human dynamics, but tended to bog down when it got to the action scenes, quite strange for a "sports film". Worst to me was the fact that they had to end it in "The Big Fight", something that is just so damn overdone in sports movies.

### 127 Hours

No review for this film.

I have heard that it's great, and that James Franco was simply incredible as Aron Ralston. It's also directed by Danny Boyle, one of my favorite directors.

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So why haven't I seen this? Because it's not yet out on DVD, and if I watch it at the theater, I'll throw up.

We know that this is a true story about a man trapped alone for 127 hours with his arm stuck under a boulder. We know that the only way he escaped was by breaking his own arm and then cutting it off with a dull knife.

This sequence is shown in the film...and there is no way for me to fast forward through it, nor avoid the sound effects. It is said that this scene is very realistic, and one of the most disturbing scenes ever filmed (mostly because you know that this DID happen to the real life Ralston).

Sorry...I have a weak stomach. I'll catch it later when I have full control of the remote.