

# THE CampChuck REVIEWER

*A nonprofit subsidiary of CampChuck*

TWENTY EIGHTH ANNUAL EDITION

<http://www.startlets.com>

February 18, 2007

Editor, critic, layout, distribution, and general factotum ...



## Meryl Streep Wears Boxer Shorts

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### The 79<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS Nominations

Oscar Night: Sunday, February 25

#### Best Picture

*Babel*

*The Departed*

*Letters from Iwo Jima*

*Little Miss Sunshine*

*The Queen*

*United 93*

#### Best Director

Alejandro

Gonzalez Inarritu

Martin Scorsese

Clint Eastwood

Stephen Frears

Paul Greenglass

#### Best Director only:

#### Best Actor

Leonardo DiCaprio *Blood Diamond*

Ryan Gosling *Half Nelson*

Peter O'Toole *Venus*

Will Smith *The Pursuit of Happyness*

Forest Whitaker *The Last King of Scotland*

#### Best Actress

Penelope Cruz *Volver*

Judi Dench *Notes on a Scandal*

Helen Mirren *The Queen*

Meryl Streep *The Devil Wears Prada*

Kate Winslet *Little Children*

#### Best Supporting Actor

Alan Arkin *Little Miss Sunshine*

Jackie Earle Haley *Little Children*

Djimon Hounsou *Blood Diamond*

Eddie Murphy *Dreamgirls*

Mark Wahlberg *The Departed*

#### Best Supporting Actress

Adriana Barraza *Babel*

Cate Blanchett *Notes on a Scandal*

Abigail Breslin *Little Miss Sunshine*

Jennifer Hudson *Dreamgirls*

Rinko Kikuchi *Babel*

(Underlined nominees equal CampChuck predictions)

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## Of Reviews and Festivals

CampChuck clings to visions of triviality. Twenty-eight years of Oscar newsletters may help to confirm or refute these inclinations. Since moving to Nevada City, California, a bit of vision creep has complicated CampChuck's simple Oscar newsletter devotion.

At [www.startlets.com](http://www.startlets.com), you can find links to more than three dozens movie and movie related reviews. The links connect to [www.theunion.com](http://www.theunion.com), the online version of Nevada County's daily newspaper. One or two published reviews per month, on average, fits well into the CampChuck ethic of "How to avoid your potential."

Nonetheless, it is fun seeing these reviews in print and online in The Union's Thursday entertainment section, "The Prospector." It's fun to bump into, "Oh, you write those movie reviews" or "I actually pay attention to your reviews" or "When's your next review?"

It's fun to have growing involvement with Nevada City's two film festivals. More than a dozen of those published reviews showcase the Magic Theatre's Nevada City Film Festival (grown up quite a bit in the last two years) and the Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival (the largest festival of its kind in the nation). It's a special treat that the movie reviewing has provided opportunity to preview films before the festivals.

## Best Supporting Actor

Mark, fuggeddaboutit. Just feel good that you're part of Martin Scorsese's latest testosterone romp. You were very good at something "The Departed" already had plenty of.

Djimon Hounsou has built up substantial rage credentials, but in his roles, it's typically a sensitive, caring man backed against some painfully unfair wall (a slave in "Amistad"; an aids victim in "In America") Nominated in "Blood Diamond," Hounsou plays a man stripped from his family during violent and exploitive civil war.

Once again, Hounsou delivers striking emotional range, meanwhile standing up well next to the ever impressive Leonardo DiCaprio. Somehow "Blood Diamond" falls into a kind of crack between effective socio-political sensitivity and action thriller. Maybe it's the exploitive artificiality of the diamond industry or forcing a love story onto the DiCaprio character. Good movie. Another good Hounsou credential.

As much fun as Alan Arkin adds to "Little Miss Sunshine," it's not a particularly challenging or special characterization. Was his character critical to the peculiar genuineness of this surprise hit film? Yes. Is it a wasted Oscar slot? Yes.

Actually, the winner was not even nominated. In "The Queen," Michael Sheen plays Prime Minister Tony Blair and assures the dynamics of this film's intelligence. Of the nominees, Jackie Earle Haley is too obscure to win, so Eddie Murphy, count your famous blessings.

## Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

What's this penguin thing? Best Documentary of 2005 for "March of the Penguins." "Happy Feet" is going to win Best Animated Feature for 2006. Something's fishy.

Adam Dons, Tuxedo, Tennessee

Dear Adam,

Hardly a trend. Write me again when a penguin figures in Best Actor or Best Picture.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Man, the Inconvenient Truth is that Al Gore is lame. That's proof enough for me that Global Warming is bunk.

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

You didn't see the film, did you? Gore doesn't especially reduce his anti-charisma factor in the way he makes himself so prominent in the film "An Inconvenient Truth," but his professorial case is impressive. It's a shame that a knee-jerk reaction against Gore would keep some people from educating themselves better about facing this issue and facing it intelligently. For such a sobering subject, it's a fairly entertaining film.

Ed.

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Email: [jaffee@startlets.com](mailto:jaffee@startlets.com)  
(that's two "t's" in startlets).

Dear Editor,

It's just a fashion question, but what do you think of the revealing gowns at the Oscars?

Grace Prodder, Van Nuys, CA

Dear Grace,

Often, allure increases because of what is *not* showing, but I can deal with revealing. One possible rule of thumb seems frequently ignored. If adhesive tape is required, it's probably a stylistic forced-fit.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

You took an eight week vacation last year? Wow. Did you see, like, a hundred films in those two months?

Tisha Homestead, Tulsa, OK

Dear Tisha,

I saw more than 60 films in theaters in 2006. I saw only one during those eight weeks of travel. "Wordplay," a fun film about serious crossword puzzling, deserved a slot amongst the heavy duty Best Documentary nominees. Those eight weeks, including Wyoming and Oregon, Spain and Italy, were devoted mostly to outdoor adventure and to special connections other than film.

Ed.



## Reflections off the Moon

Last year, I shared in this space a stance that needs re-emphasizing: We need a well-led moon-shot-style national commitment to energy independence, and more fully, sustainability in general. John F. Kennedy led a 10-year galvanized commitment that got us to the moon. An analogous commitment to energy independence is more than inspiring possible. It is an engine of economic robustness that can lead the world in a way that war mongering cannot. Our current horizon holds tragic consequences as sure as sunrise. Beyond that horizon, there is balance that can thrive despite such consequences.

One reason that CampChuck supports the Rocky Mountain Institute so enthusiastically is that they pursue a non-partisan quest for sustainable economic practice. Here is a quote from what RMI calls its politics: "...entering, in a friendly and open spirit, into the midst of even bitter controversy. Handling conflict with integrity, respect, and sincerity, we've found, can often turn it into an opportunity for mutual learning, trust-building, and resolution."

CampChuck continues as it has **since 1992, matching every subscription dollar for dollar**. All subscriptions -- almost \$24,000 plus CampChuck's 100% match of \$24,000 -- have funneled through CampChuck to RMI and Food Banks. Whether you subscribe at the official \$5 level or the average participation of \$30, think sustainable economic practice and the golden rule. And think access to CampChuck's newsletters.

There is no such thing as a moonless night

The full moon does not reflect the Earth

It is the empty moon that best reflects our plight

Only in darkness can we know what the Sun is worth

### Food Bank of Nevada County

CampChuck continues its encouragement of the fundamental human sharing embodied by the "Food Banking" concept. Since CampChuck now resides in Nevada County, CA, please make checks payable to "Food Bank of Nevada County." Of course, if your inclination is to continue with a check to "Second Harvest Food Bank," you are still riding the CampChuck spirit.

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### CampChuck Predictions (as also indicated by underlined nominees on page one)

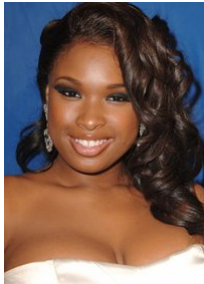
Martin Scorsese will win Best Director because this highly respected filmmaker has been nominated five times before and never won. "The Queen" will win for being the sturdiest, most tightly executed film in a competitive field. Helen Mirren's title role has Oscar written all over it. Forest Whitaker's power and charm will beat O'Toole's late-in-life bid and DiCaprio's intensity. "Dreamgirls" affords a dream role for Jennifer Hudson and an Oscar swiping showcase for Eddie Murphy.

<b>Picture and Director:</b>	<i>The Queen</i>	Martin Scorsese <i>The Departed</i>
<b>Actress and Actor:</b>	Helen Mirren <i>The Queen</i>	Forest Whitaker <i>The Last King of Scotland</i>
<b>Supporting Actress &amp; Actor:</b>	Jennifer Hudson <i>Dreamgirls</i>	Eddie Murphy <i>Dreamgirls</i>

## Best Supporting Actress

Rags to riches. That's still a main menu item in America. This year, Hollywood rings up a double sale with the continuing story of Jennifer Hudson.

The story first splashed on TV's "American Idol" where Jennifer's huge talent fell off the finalist round -- not without some controversy. The reality show of Jennifer's life will reach more celebrated heights when she takes home the Oscar for her supporting role in "Dreamgirls."



The award grabbing double dose is built on the perfect casting of Hudson as a dynamite singer whose early success is undone by the cold realities of the dream machine. The comeback of her character pales compared to her still-young comeback as a real world (well, entertainment world) star. It will be interesting to see where the career of this natural acting talent will run.

Who knows if Oscars should be more about the acting than the media chemistry? In "Notes on a Scandal," the acting matters more than the music-driven muscle of "Dreamgirls." "Dreamgirls" is nominated 3 times for Best Song with a goose egg for Best Picture because its pulsing entertainment is more about the singing and starlight than the acting.

Cate Blanchett, supporting Judi Dench, is all about the acting. Blanchett nails the compelling complexity of poor judgment and sympathetic personality in a family woman wrung through a

nightmare. Even if Blanchett hadn't already won an Oscar in one of her two previous nominations, this purer acting triumph probably wouldn't win over the ch ching of Hudson's more irresistible story.

The other nominees quickly fade as contenders. Abigail Breslin is more recognizable as a young girl perfectly cast than a precocious actress skillfully scoring in "Little Miss Sunshine." Endearing for her wide-eyed, bespectacled enthusiasm and clearly chosen for her chubby cuteness, Breslin is key to the offbeat charm of "Little Miss Sunshine." Still, when you compare her with Anna Paquin or Tatum O'Neil being nominated as child actors alongside adult actors, Breslin doesn't quite rise above cute.

"Babel" is a compelling acting cauldron. Supporting actresses Adriana Barraza and Rinko Kikuchi star in entirely separate segments of Babel's set of harrowing stories. Because of this divided film structure and because Barraza and Kikuchi are nominated from the same film, their Oscar limelight shines only as honored nominees.

Barraza plays an illegal alien and loving nanny for a well-off American family. She is caught in a nightmare of immigrant reality and American chauvinism. Kikuchi plays a teen filled with disproportionate angst about her virginity and the compounding angst of being a deaf mute whose mother has recently died. She is caught in a deeply personal struggle with who she might survive to be. These are powerful performances, just not Oscar winners.

## Best Supporting Actor

The linchpin of "Little Children" is Jackie Earle Haley's role. His performance captures the best spirit of the supporting actor category. It's a challenging role for both the actor and the audience. Without him, the film doesn't work. Haley portrays a sexual deviant in a film where the lead players are merely adulterers.

Eddie Murphy, on the other hand, is just one of the talented ensemble of players in the musical sweep of "Dreamgirls." Yes, he's impressive but not because the film leans on his part in it. He's more like an added attraction. The Oscar Eddie Murphy will receive is because of his high flying, low ebbing, and ultimately mainstreaming career.



Jennifer Hudson, a different kind of big Hollywood story, joins Eddie Murphy in the feel good entertainment of the year (if you don't regard the actual behavior of all the characters). Murphy does transform familiar Eddie Murphy shtick into praise-worthy acting. His character showcases enough performing ups and downs, womanizing ups and downs, and druggy ups and downs to make for a meaty supporting role.

Whereas "Dreamgirls" is smartly suited to bouncing all its ensemble players off one another, Mark Wahlberg, in "The Departed," seems more like angry wallpaper behind the A-team intensity of Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, and Jack Nicholson.

(continued on page 2)

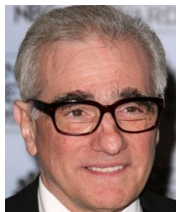
## Best Picture / Best Director

It's a difficult year for declaring a front-runner in the race for the Motion Picture Academy's Best Picture.

The easiest ring to grab is "The Departed," but not because this ultra violent, cops and mobsters flick is one of Martin Scorsese's better films. It's because Scorsese is the most respected director working today who has not won Best Director. He's been nominated five times before.

His keener treatments of violence in "Raging Bull" and "Goodfellas" didn't win. His range solidifies the film world's respect for him. "The Aviator," a lavish bio-pic, and "The Last Temptation of Christ," a controversial passion, didn't win. He's guided actors to Oscars in "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore" and "The Color of Money." He's added class to concert films with "The Last Waltz" and to homage films with "No Direction Home: Bob Dylan." On and on.

The list of Scorsese's accomplishments is long and Oscar-worthy, but "The Departed" is too long and not Oscar-worthy as a one picture deal. The single biggest flaw in filmmaking is that more is better. Too much violence numbs, or worse, simply titillates. Although the tension and personality of "The Departed" works impressively, this underworld drama acquires a distracting buzz from hammering its nail over and over and over. They shouldn't give an Oscar, even to a Martin Scorsese, if he makes a two and a half hour movie that should have been a two hour movie. They shouldn't -- but they will -- award Scorsese as Best Director without allowing "The Departed" Best Picture.



The clearest brilliance on the list of nominees is "Babel." Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu fast breaks around the world in three interlaced stories. The wife of an American couple is accidentally shot while on a bus tour in the Middle East. A devoted nanny crosses the Mexican border with the two American children in her care, and illegal immigration enters an all-too-real Twilight Zone. A Japanese teen struggles with her budding sexuality. Unlike the other two stories, the palpable tension is almost entirely internal. The torque builds from her being a deaf mute making the teen age journey and from the recent death of her mother.

Why is this third story in the same film with the other two stories? It's as if Inarritu didn't have the patience to save the third story for a separate film.

Two parents occupy story one in the Middle East. Their two children occupy story two in the US and Mexico. The crisis on one continent catalyzes the crisis on another continent. Most of all, the two stories of culture clashes have much to say about the disproportionate presumption of priority that Americans deserve in the world.

Only artificial details tie the third story to the other two. It's as if God tapped this towering gem of a film and toppled it to less realized heights. If "Babel" wins any Oscars, it will be because voters ignored the fundamentally distracted filmmaking decision because they were so impressed with the globally rich impact of these stories.

The center of gravity among the list of nominees belongs to Clint Eastwood. Like Scorsese, Eastwood occupies the short list of the most respected directors working today. Unlike Scorsese, Eastwood has already won Best Picture and Best Director -- twice -- for "Million Dollar Baby" and "Unforgiven." Last year, Eastwood released two Oscar nominated films. "Flags of Our Fathers" contends for Academy Awards in both Sound Mixing and Sound Editing.

Such credentials might be the very thing that holds "Letters from Iwo Jima" to a higher standard. This American director's choice, to make a Japanese language film from a Japanese (ultimately universal) perspective of America's favorite war, almost meets that higher standard. "Letters" succeeds best when focusing on the station of the individual in war -- be it the general or the least soldier. "Letters" succeeds in its introspection about the cost of war. Both of Eastwood's 2006 films about World War II bog down somewhat in portraying the size and trudge of war. Check out "Saving Private Ryan." It succeeds more masterfully, even though it's a longer film.

If Eastwood wins again, it will be pure respect for a 76 year old icon who is still willing and able to traverse bold, fresh cinematic ground.

(continued on page 6)



## Best Picture / Best Director



When the voting dust settles, “The Queen” will take home the Best Picture honor. The sturdiest film amongst the nominees, this political drama treats history as we are often compelled to treat it: stories of royal families and suchlike powerful celebrities.

“The Queen” is safe movie making compared with all the other nominees, and yet it perfectly houses an extremely delicate piece of history. The story is as big as the shattered fairy tale of Princess Diana and the surprising relevance of Britain’s 1000 year-old monarchy. The movie balances on Prime Minister Tony Blair’s part – on his keen political savvy mixed with boyishness, wonder, and respect. Michael Sheen, as Blair, assures the chemistry of this film.

“The Queen” works because Queen Elizabeth II is a surprisingly interesting person. That is, she is a surprisingly ordinary person, with a remarkable hold on an extraordinary obligation. “The Queen” works because Helen Mirren plays her. It boosts Best Picture chances that Mirren is the most predictable Oscar winner this year. Throw in the classy aura that British films somehow cast over Oscar territory and “The Queen” will patch together a win from heavily split voting.

Too small and quirky to take home Gold, it is a big win that an offbeat comedy like “Little Miss Sunshine” received a Best Picture nomination. Olive screams with delight at the chance to compete in the Little Miss Sunshine pageant. Her heroin-snorting grandpa coaches her. He tells her brother,

who has refused to speak for months, that heroin is stupid to do when you’re young but makes sense when you’re old. Her suicidal uncle simply can’t be left alone. Her father is a self-deluding optimist. Her mom copes. They all have to push-start the VW bus if they’re going to make it to the contest. Not incidentally, Olive is so *not* the kind of pretty and talented girl that plays well on the pageant circuit.

Only a well-tuned spirit of originality and an Oscar-caliber screenplay could turn their dysfunctional family road trip into a Best Picture candidate.

Paul Greenglass deserves to contend for Gold, but it is coup enough that he received a Best Director nomination for “United 93.”

“United 93” bleeds with tension. First, it lets you squirm with the knowledge that 9/11/2001 is about to be recreated before your eyes. Then, it straps you claustrophobically into one aspect of this fateful day - the hijacking of a commercial jetliner - while paralyzingly tying in the hijacking of three other commercial jets. However big you think the events of this day are for you or for the USA or for the world, this is laser sharp storytelling with the kind of penetrating power that such a beam can carry.

At least as compelling as the deadly tragedy unfolding is the all-too-mundane infrastructure forced to try to understand and act. “Keep on working,” a commander entreats from one of many control-challenged air control centers. This film barely permits a moment to consider the weight and breadth of that statement.

### Top Ten

1. *United 93*: First rate choices in concept and execution, transcends the subject’s pitfalls.
2. Documentaries: such as *Who Killed the Electric Car*, *Why We Fight*, *Wordplay*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and *Jesus Camp* greatly enhances our movie options.
3. *The Last King of Scotland*: An intimate pairing about the seductive charm of a monstrous dictator.
4. *Notes on a Scandal*: Oh so creepy Judi Dench manipulates a fallen, vulnerable Cate Blanchett.
5. *The Queen*: Sturdy modern British tale of royalty and politics and underlying humanity.
6. *Letters from Iwo Jima*: Clint Eastwood still traversing bold, fresh cinematic ground.
7. *Babel*: Two brilliant stories of culture clash; a 3rd brilliant story of teen angst.
8. *Venus*: Unique vitality humor, poignancy, and charm; not easily pigeonholed.
9. *Little Miss Sunshine*: Quirky fun in a marvelous script about a dysfunctional family road trip.
10. *Devil Wears Prada*: Character rich situation comedy fun, yes, about the world of high fashion.

## Best Actor

Peter O'Toole is only 75 years old. He looks older. Nearly a quarter century after receiving his 7<sup>th</sup> Oscar nomination, Peter O'Toole could continue being the most frequently Oscar nominated actor never to have won an Academy Award. Actually, the Academy bestowed an honorary award in 2003 in gratitude for his memorable work in film. Could that be enough to take the pressure off giving him the Oscar for nomination #8 in "Venus"? O'Toole plays an extremely senior version of the rakishness for which he is famous. He plays an extremely senior version of a talent over which he still has superb command.

His character boasts to a woman a half century younger than he, that he is a little famous. Though he still gets some work as an actor, it is sadly clear that, however he lived his famous life, he did not arrange for a dotage with money. But this film also makes it clear that he lived a life of pleasure – having it, giving it, slapping it around.

This old man literally has to slap himself beyond the sad fact that he is an old man alive. He does so for the pleasure he still knows how to generate.

He has a relationship with that woman a half century younger than he, but even after seeing the movie, you will find no simple way to stereotype it. He still has a relationship with the wife he abandoned more than forty years earlier. After seeing O'Toole on screen with Vanessa Redgrave, you see what a disservice it would be to feel sad for these old actors.

On top of the sentimental regard for O'Toole, this performance might seem a lock for an Academy Award. Yet, "Venus," for all its humor, poignancy, and charm, eludes categorization. O'Toole is so fluid in this role, the reaction may be, "Oh, give the damn statue to someone with more fuss ahead of him than behind him."

Forest Whitaker as "The Last King of Scotland" deserves to dislodge any buzz of sentiment for Peter O'Toole. Whitaker's weighty, brilliant portrayal of Idi Amin, the former Ugandan dictator, has Oscar written all over it. His depiction of the seductive charms of



this monstrous leader delivers that history-like thing that movies do so affectingly.

Though unfairly, "The Last King of Scotland" makes "Venus" seem like a dismissible little film. Next to the "little bit famous" wisdom that O'Toole delivers, Forest Whitaker seems so much larger than life. Oscar likes this.

The megastar intensity of Leonardo DiCaprio will have to wait. It's not Leonardo DiCaprio's fault that "Blood Diamond" is a tad too much of a button pushing movie. The film turns cinematic conscience on yet another unconscionable African hotspot – civil war and the exploitive diamond industry in Sierra Leone. However, "Blood Diamond" leans more toward being an action picture than an issue picture, plus it forces a love story on the mercenary heart of DiCaprio's character. It's not DiCaprio's fault that two more auspicious performances compete with him in the same year from two more creatively genuine films.

"The Pursuit of Happyness" is another effective Hollywood offering that feels a bit too much like button pushing, at least, too much to contend for winning Will Smith an Oscar. While DiCaprio boils hot, Will Smith boils cool. He beams his natural talent on a peculiar feel-good script. He portrays the true story of a down-on-his-luck dad who perseveres past each hard knock. There's way too much adversity in this character's way, even for a formula Hollywood film, but Smith carries the prospect of a happy ending neatly throughout.

"Half Nelson" is not so much a story as it is a case study. Ryan Gosling plays a white teacher in a black school. He's losing round two of being a coke addict. There's something genuine, even good, about him, but it's not enough. It's not enough, even if you embrace "there but for the grace of God." Ryan Gosling plays the drama low key. This works, but this film doesn't size up to a compelling Oscar nomination for an actor nobody knows. There's also a friendship between this lost soul and one of his junior high students. You've never seen a bonded pair like this in the movies. Nonetheless, it's tough to ask most people to study this case.

## Best Actress

Stand aside for a couple of Dames. Such are the titles, in the United Kingdom, bestowed on Dame Helen Mirren and Dame Judi Dench. The other three nominees for Best Actress are clear also-rans – even Meryl Streep.

If the United States proffered such titles, surely Meryl Streep would be the Damest of the Dames. Streep's 14<sup>th</sup> Academy Award nomination comes with a perfect rendering in "The Devil Wears Prada." As the icy tyrant commanding a powerful fashion magazine, she sets the tone two ways.

First, Streep's character is so annoyingly on top of her game, she fuels the need to gawk at the ludicrous world of fashion portrayed. More to the acting point, she skillfully assures that the story dynamics are driven by the other big roles in this thoroughly entertaining film. Perhaps these are the exact characteristics that deserve the Oscar statue.

No, Oscar will go to Helen Mirren, playing "The Queen" of the United Kingdom, not merely the queen of the fashion world. The Oscar spotlight will click into place through a symbolic figure on the world stage – a symbolic figure of world history really.



Besides looking utterly regal in posture and demeanor, Mirren also generates the gravity of a hollowing monarchy that still must carry a kingdom full of expectations. You experience a queen of intense grace and remarkable ordinariness. Add Mirren's stature as a veteran of stage, screen, and television, and you have the surest bet in all the Oscar categories.

Judi Dench enjoys at least as much stature as Mirren on stage, screen, and TV, and is 10 years older than Mirren. For "Notes on a Scandal" Dench has her sixth Oscar nomination, including a Supporting Actress win for playing Queen Elizabeth I in "Shakespeare in Love."

Mirren will see some boost for having two previous Oscar nominations without winning. However, it's

the prominence and stature of the character that throws the most Oscar winning weight.

Judi Dench plays the most deliciously realized role of the nominees. She laces unparalleled creepiness into the tactics of a constipated, manipulative school teacher and supposed friend, who writes all her judgmental observations into decades worth of diaries. Regardless, voters will make less of the juicier chemistry in "Notes on a Scandal" because it all takes place in a more mundane story.

It almost proves the point about the apples-and-oranges subjectivity of acting prizes, although in fairness, the royal family, with Helen Mirren as "The Queen," successfully tilts our heads toward the rich and mighty for our favorite theatrical doses of humanness.

Two other capable actresses grace the list of nominees this year with zero chance of winning.

In the Spanish language film, "Volver" (To Return), Penelope Cruz speaks in her native tongue. Perhaps this creates a comfortable quality zone for everybody including Cruz. After the lights come on, though, the nomination is for experiencing better than we expected from a sexy commodity. Unlike Eddie Murphy's rise above expectations this year, Cruz doesn't have enough history or shtick to strike Gold. Director Pedro Almodovar might have done better for Cruz if "Volver" had more of the edge he delivered in films like "All about My Mother" or "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown."

Kate Winslet tucks a fifth Oscar nomination into her 31-year old life. In her case, a certain lack of glamour makes her film choices all about the acting. In "Little Children," a wife and mother escapes into an affair, as people do. Her character's life, transgression included, is ordinary in a solid, sensual, movie way. It's almost like a supporting role for the less palatable transgressions that others commit in this story. Kate Winslet's first Oscar win will come when she goes back to more daring roles, although as a whole, "Little Children" is a more daring film than most people are prepared to like.