

# THE CampChuck REVIEWER

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*Charles N. Jaffee*

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



## Meryl Streep Shortlisted for Vice President

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### The 88th ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS Nominations

Oscar Night: Sunday, Feb. 28

#### Best Picture

*The Big Short*

*Bridge of Spies*

*Brooklyn*

*Mad Max: Fury Road*

*The Martian*

*The Revenant*

*Room*

*Spotlight*

#### Best Director

Adam McKay

George Miller

Alejandro González Iñárritu

Lenny Abrahamson

Tom McCarthy

#### Best Actor

Bryan Cranston

Matt Damon

Leonardo DiCaprio

Michael Fassbender

Eddie Redmayne

*Trumbo*

*The Martian*

*The Revenant*

*Steve Jobs*

*The Danish Girl*

#### Best Actress

Cate Blanchett

Brie Larson

Jennifer Lawrence

Charlotte Rampling

Saoirse Ronan

*Carol*

*Room*

*Joy*

*45 Years*

*Brooklyn*

#### Best Supporting Actor

Christian Bale

Thomas Hardy

Mark Ruffalo

Mark Rylance

Sylvester Stallone

*The Big Short*

*The Revenant*

*Spotlight*

*Bridge of Spies*

*Creed*

#### Best Supporting Actress

Jennifer Jason Leigh

Rooney Mara

Rachel McAdams

Alicia Vikander

Kate Winslet

*The Hateful Eight*

*Carol*

*Spotlight*

*The Danish Girl*

*Steve Jobs*

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## CampChuck Reveals the Process

This year, I spill the beans. In year 37 of CampChuck publishing (before Oscar night) who and what will win the major Oscars, I'm going to let you into an inner CampChuck gearbox. It isn't because it's a milestone year like 40. It isn't a foreshadowing of calling it quits as the general factotum for perennial Oscar predictions.

It's "The Revenant," which looks like it will win Best Picture and Best Director at the 88<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards. This annoys me. More about "The Revenant" elsewhere.

It took me several years before I began raising my below-average predictive percentage. After 15 years, I was vulnerably peeking above mediocre.

It helped when I intentionally started decoupling my predictive self from my feelings about whom and what I wanted to win. Yes, it was motivating when, since year one, everybody-and-a-half repeatedly asked about or referred to how many I got right.

In the middle years, I streaked impressively for 5 years, followed almost immediately by a streak as below-average as I ever was. So, I latched on to a guiding filter. At the top of each award category, I reveal the baseline of my prediction process. With some discretionary fiddling, it's the foundation that has yielded an 80% predictive rate in the major categories for 12 years (90% in the last 7).

## Best Supporting Actor

Build a much better opinion of Hardy in interesting little films like “Locke” and “The Drop.”

Being in “Spotlight” could work in Mark Ruffalo’s favor. “Spotlight most deserves Best Picture of the year. If that buzz has wings, his Best Actor sized support could beat a field of fine performances, none of which is an obvious vote grabber. Also, Ruffalo does another version of the offbeat earnestness that keeps earning him respect.

Mark Rylance most deserves Best Supporting Actor. He’s the linchpin in “Bridge of Spies.” To be a bit silly about this silly thing that happens on Oscar night, he could win because he gets to say the year’s best line of dialog and say it several times to good effect.

Imagine this not-too-famous, though three-time Tony Award winning stage actor sitting in the Oscars audience. If asked why he isn’t anxious about his chances of winning, he would be primed to reprise the line: “Would it help?”

Playing a Russian spy, Rylance meets the need for understated acting perfectly. It’s critical to the energy and intelligence of the film’s cold war tension.

Released after the flashy summer season and before Oscar-baiting time around year end, “Bridge of Spies” is a modest procedural film. Will timing drain the better trained, fitter Rylance? After decades of shadow boxing on and



off-screen can Sly win? It’s the 15<sup>th</sup> and final round; Best Supporting Actor goes to Rah, key, Rocky, Rocky Stallone.

## Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

I’d like your thoughts about Oscar boycott talk since – for the second year in a row – all 20 Oscar acting nominees are White. Here’s some numbers I researched.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century --for 15 years-- 15% of the acting Oscars have been won by African Americans. That’s higher than the percentage of Blacks in the US. And 10% of the acting-Oscar nominations have been Blacks. OK, that’s lower than the 13% general population but not a shameful tally. One or more Blacks have been nominated for acting Oscars in 12 of the last 15 years.

Parsell Statappy, Racine, WI

Dear Parsell,

With all due respect to Blacks’ prominence in necessary racism discourse, consider the following boycott brandishing:

Presuming the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a new-age indicator, zero (0) Native American actors have Oscar nominations. In 88 years of Oscar history, there have only been two nominations. (Neither Chief Dan George nor Graham Greene won.)

Granted, Native Americans represent less than 2% of the US population. (Need we mention why?) Where is the White outcry, or for that matter, the Black outcry for that affirmative action in the movie biz?

Ed.

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Email: [jaffee@startlets.com](mailto:jaffee@startlets.com)  
(that’s three “t’s” in startlets).

Dear Editor,

Aren’t movie folks misplaying their indignance about all 20 of the Best Acting nominees being White? Is it really racial bias against Black performances that obviously deserve nominations over White performances? Isn’t it a highly subjective realm anyway and in a standout year of praiseworthy acting?

Gini Chiu, Las Cruces, NM

Dear Gini,

It would have made more sense to boycott that about 95% of the members of both the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and its Board of Governors is White. Better, rail at the business dynamics, especially toward setting up non-white actors to excel and including getting them hired in the first place.

Here’s a better reason to boycott the biggest perennial celebrity event: Profits from mega-dollar hero films aren’t leveraged to avert global climate change and its disproportionate effect on billions of poor people of color.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

I wanna show you, man, I’ve been studying up on your liberal whoop dee do. Corporations are people, right? But not a single corporation has ever been nominated for an acting Oscar. Where’s the rage, bro?

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

Keep on studying.

Ed.

## Dear Hillary ('cause onewayoranother, you're listening),

You probably noticed this is a Presidential election year and that Bernie Sanders is captivating voters – especially younger voters – with ideas that affect the lives of real people, all the people, not the corporations-are-people fiction. Bernie always leads referring to income inequality. Shuffle the deck that's stacked for billionaires and millionaires, not to mention anyone putting on White airs....

If Bernie were one to coin words, he might promote “ofbyfor” into the language, as in we need all the ofbyfor people across America to do more than elect Bernie to represent them in government. “We the People,” the ofbyfor people, must participate throughout elected terms, in a systemic ofbyfor revolution, if we are to serve up government servants that respond beyond the pale of corporate money, Wall Street greedisgood, Pharmansurance sickittoyou, and the Fossilfueetoyouandyourchildrenschildren industrial complex.

Curiously, the accelerating consequences of global climate change may be the defining opportunity that affords ofbyfor citizens to act on all these impossible fronts. Oh, and whoever gets to scramble past the best Rebooblican circus an election cycle ever produced could you at least do us one ofbyfor solid? Could you retire the penny from circulation?

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

Alejandro González Iñárritu deserved Best Director last year for “Birdman.” He doesn't for “The Revenant.” His Directors Guild win promises the closely correlated Best Director Oscar win. Screen Actors Guild (SAG) wins portend Oscars for Leonardo DiCaprio's intensity; Brie Larson's resilience and mother love; and Alicia Vickander's complicated supportiveness. SAG winner Idris Elba (“Beasts of No Nation”) wasn't even nominated for an Oscar. Sentimentality for “Rocky” Stallone will knock out Tony-winner Mark Rylance's bid in “Bridge of Spies.” A buried “Best Cast” SAG stat shines on a Best Picture gold statuette for “Spotlight.”

<b>Picture and Director:</b>	<i>Spotlight</i>	Alejandro González Iñárritu, <i>The Revenant</i>
<b>Actress and Actor:</b>	Brie Larson, <i>Room</i>	Leonardo DiCaprio, <i>The Revenant</i>
<b>Supporting Actress &amp; Actor:</b>	Alicia Vickander, <i>The Danish Girl</i>	Sylvester Stallone, <i>Creed</i>

## Best Supporting Actress

In the last 12 years, CampChuck has leaned heavily on the outcome of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards. The Best Supporting Actress Oscar has mapped to SAG about 90% of the time. SAG winner Alicia Vikander, in “The Danish Girl,” also benefits from what really is a Best Actress role in size and shape.

It doesn't hurt that Vikander would have been a respectable Supporting Actress nominee as the artificially intelligent heartbeat of “Ex Machina.” Such bonus considerations sit beside the main point. Vikander does something more remarkable than the delicate challenge of the title role.

It's Eddie Redmayne who is “The Danish Girl.” He plays a man in the 1920s discovering and pursuing his transgender nature. His character has the peculiar “advantage” of “having” to be that person.

Vikander's character isn't compelled to be supportive, encouraging, resilient, and in the 1920s, understanding as a wife and a friend. Readily evolved humanity shows so well in this performance. So does the devotion against cultural odds to be recognized as an artist, while not resenting her husband's fame (also a painter).

Dealing with puzzlement, hurt, adaptation ... new definitions ... being the wife in this film without being overly dramatic is a sure Oscar bet for Vikander in a very tough group of five nominees.

Rooney Mara also gets a competitive bump for what amounts to a Best Actress sized role in



“Carol.” The problem in an Oscar race is that the sweetness and naivete Mara puts on screen, by comparison, seems lighter weight.

Go figure, she too plays a person with “perverse” proclivities in a time frame so much less mature than the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this film, too, it's more how difficult relationships are; it isn't essentially about what your sexual orientation is. Mara's performance is impressive.

Kate Winslet enlivens the most quintessential support role in the Supporting Actress category. Her character literally plays the “Steve Jobs” support person. Steve Jobs, now there's an easy boss.

As an actress, Winslet must carry on between standing up to him and giving in to him, and no doubt unrequited love for him. This is another Oscar worthy performance that can't win.

Jennifer Jason Leigh plays a Wild West murderer being brought to justice in Quentin Tarantino's latest all-for-fun violence fest. She's one of “The Hateful Eight” and at least as tough as the seven men.

Her raw characterization thrusts her into wildcard contention for Best Supporting Actress. Hey, Christoph Waltz won two Supporting Oscars being a bad guy for Tarantino.

Only Rachel McAdams seems like a marginalized nominee. She's effective supporting the compelling drive and substance of “Spotlight.” Essentially, though, she solidifies the feeling that it's the ensemble acting, not any individual contribution that assures the story of journalistic teamwork and committed concern.

## Best Supporting Actor

Since the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards began in 1994, its Supporting Actor winner has correlated *least* with who wins the corresponding Oscar category. It's only a little over 60%, though it's been 75% right-on for the last 12 years.

CampChuck might have continued to lean on this substantial relationship, but SAG winner Idris Elba (“Beasts of No Nation” was not even nominated for a Best Supporting Oscar. This is pretty rare but it happens.

Sylvester Stallone is the sentimental favorite -- tip of the hat to the quintessential underdog. Yo, Rocky. Call it acting out of the paper bags he's been starring in for 40 years. Yo, Sly, you done good, and this 7th “Rocky” film called “Creed” is the best film of the franchise (even though the first Rocky is forever the most representative and memorable).

Christian Bale, doesn't really show better than the other four nominees, but he's got this near-crazy, lovable thing that's hard to deny. “The Big Short” delivers a well-balanced ensemble that will sidestep Oscar. Playing a data-crunching genius, Bale juices the foundation for delivering this exposé about the capital of money grubbing slime – Wall Street.

Thomas Hardy's character, ooh, he's bad. Talk about juicing the picture. His badness feeds the limitless well of vengeance that drives Leonardo DiCaprio as “The Revenant.” Actually, as movie bad guys go, Hardy's a bit indistinct. He's also unmemorable in the title role of “Mad Max.”

(continued on page 2)

## Best Picture / Best Director

Alejandro González Iñárritu will win this year's Best Director Oscar for his film "The Revenant." Why? He won the Directors Guild of America award (DGA). This correlates 90% with a Best Director Oscar win. That drives the pick.



Indeed, the match runs 94%, discounting the 3 times that the DGA winner was not even one of the 5 Oscar nominees for Best Director. (Ben Affleck, "Argo," 2012; Ron Howard, "Apollo 13," 1995; Steven Spielberg, "The Color Purple," 1985)

Using the DGA winner for Oscar's Best Director every time, CampChuck has gotten it right 11 of the last 12 years – aka autopilot. The miss happened because DGA winner Ben Affleck was not even nominated for a chance at Oscar Gold. CampChuck expertly (rationally) guessed Spielberg would win for "Lincoln." Ang Lee won for "The Life of Pi."

For the 2003 Oscars, CampChuck went with DGA winner Rob Marshall for "Chicago" and was wrong as was the DGA. Roman Polanski won for "The Pianist." "Chicago" (as CampChuck checked) won the Academy Award for Best Picture).

The Best Picture Oscar matches the DGA about 85%. There's no better, simple predictor. The slightly lower correlation and some leaked-in CampChuck preferences have yielded only 7 correct Best Picture picks in the last 12 years. Twice, the DGA bump failed: "12 Years a Slave" in 2013 not "Gravity" or CampChuck's pick "American Hustle"; "Crash" in 2005 not "Brokeback Mountain."

Two other times, CampChuck incorrectly brushed aside the DGA bump: "Social Network" (2010) was better and more ambitious compared with "The King's Speech"; "The Queen" (2006) felt more like a Best Picture standard bearer than "The Departed."

This year, there's a loophole in CampChuck's predictive core that 85% of DGA winners win the Best Picture Oscar. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) has a "Best Cast" award. It isn't that "Spotlight" won SAG's Best Cast—weak correlation. It's that the only time the Best Picture Oscar didn't go to a film where the cast wasn't even nominated was 21 years ago. No Best Cast nom for "The Revenant," yay; CampChuck is jumping stats and predicting "Spotlight" for the top Oscar.

I wish "The Revenant" and Mr. Iñárritu lose on Oscar night (prediction percentages be damned). Its story is not particularly fresh, no matter how intense. A resourceful man endures impossible suffering and obstacles to avenge the murder of his wife and son. Yes, racist treatment of Native Americans in pioneer times is a side bet feature, as is the patent humanity of these encroached upon people.

Lacking in character arc and storytelling facets – unless you count imaginative, unrelenting, graphic violence – "The Revenant" doesn't deserve to be a Best Picture nomination, much less a win.

Iñárritu should be applauded for last year's Oscar winning "Birdman" with its storytelling innovations and challenges so well implemented. Praise as well Iñárritu's rendering of beautiful, big landscapes and harsh conditions in his ambitious commitment to "The Revenant." Sorry to say though, the film making just feels more taxing than special.

Kudos for making "The Martian" more realistic than "The Revenant." Yes, Matt Damon surviving alone on Mars was easier suspension of disbelief than Leonardo DiCaprio functioning so vigorously after a bear mauling and other burdens of frontier winter.

The nerd fest of "The Martian" sustained interest and fun throughout as it sustained life in outer space. Only the climax devolved to the comic-book-like techno-extremes that the Best Director winner, Alfonso Cuarón, laced through "Gravity" (2013)

My favorite of the eight films nominated for Best Picture is "Room." This story of a mother lovingly raising her son is difficult to watch in a way that's well worth watching. It's so unlike the Hollywood on steroids intensity of "The Revenant."

In "Room," a 5 year old boy has never set foot outside the shed into which his father has imprisoned him and his mom. How the two make it a life well endured, how they escape, and what it feels like to live outside that room, makes a kind of movie intensity, challenge and truth-framing that isn't made often enough. This small film is so much larger than the epic "The Revenant."

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## Best Picture / Best Director

“Spotlight” rates higher than my favorite film “Room.” Content scope raises the degree of difficulty. The systemic cover up of the widespread abuse of children within the Catholic Church demands insightful drilling and sensitivity. Such is more challenging than the harrowing story of one abused woman and child – not dismissing what seethes inside and around the story of “Room.”

Part and parcel to the significance of “Spotlight,” it also focuses on journalistic commitment in a world where the estate of journalism, especially print journalism, has been much undermined. Excellently rendered, “Spotlight” helps to keep scrutiny of our institutions from fading too much into background.

“The Big Short” may not be as important a film as “Inside Job” (Best Documentary Oscar, 2011), but maybe it is. “Inside Job” rivets the size and horror of the biggest financial meltdown since The Depression. “The Big Short” covers the same ground while entertaining us with star power and storytelling juice and getting 10 times as many people to see it.

Only slightly less tricky to do right than “Spotlight,” “The Big Short” is also important film making. Real people live beneath the artful complexity and brazen exploitation of big business scheming. We’re actually all complicit. Anyway, let’s hope film makers keep making serious entertainments like “The Big Short.”

An ordinary Steven Spielberg film is better than most other films out there. “Bridge of Spies” adds well to the portfolio of the greatest living film director.

Laying out the heightened tensions of the early 1960s cold war, this Spielberg thriller employs calm, intelligence, and diligence. An insurance lawyer negotiates a political trade, cultivates opportunities between enemies. The history lesson is instructive.

The only place to relax in this year’s crop of Best Picture nominees is “Brooklyn.” Yes, it has something to say about leaving one’s homeland to find home in another culture. Yes, it has something to say about being your own person, finding your own way. Mostly, it’s a low key romance between a down to big-wide earth, radiant Irish woman and an against-stereotype, unassuming, considerate, Italian American man. It’s a nice character driven film.

Besides Oscar noms for Best Picture and Best Director, “Mad Max: Fury Road” was rated half again higher than the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest ranking film (from weighted scoring of a few hundred top ten lists). The CampChuck Reviewer top ten list was not consulted. Horsepower roars thru post-apocalypse. Chases rev on and on. Jamming more doesn’t add up to better. Sustainability and women’s empowerment messages (combined) register 3.2 on the Richter scale. Character chemistry is as dry as the desert sets.

Only 7 Directors Guild Award winners didn't win Best Director Oscars ("NN" means Not even Nominated)			Only 14 directors since 1941 have won Best Director Oscars but not Best Picture		Oscar Best Picture
2013		←yes		Alfonso Cuaron for "Gravity"	no→ "12 Years a Slave"
2012	Ben Affleck for " <u>Argo</u> " (NN)	BP→	no→	Ang Lee for "The Life of Pi" (CampChuck picked Spielberg, "Lincoln")	no→ " <u>Argo</u> " (+SAG)
2005		←yes		Ang Lee for "Brokeback Mountain"	no→ "Crash"
2002	Rob Marshall, " <u>Chicago</u> " (CampChuck went with this DGA winner)	BP→	no→	Roman Polanski for "The Pianist"	no→ " <u>Chicago</u> " (+SAG)
2000	Ang Lee "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"		no→	Steven Soderbergh for "Traffic"	no→ "Gladiator"
1998		←yes		Steven Spielberg for "Saving Private Ryan"	no→ "Shakespeare in Love"
1995	Ron Howard for "Apollo 13" (NN)		no→	Mel Gibson for " <b>Braveheart</b> " yes→ (CampChuck picked right with no DGA bump)	" <b>Braveheart</b> "
1989		←yes		Oliver Stone for "Born on the Fourth of July"	no→ "Driving Miss Daisy"
1985	Steven Spielberg for "The Color Purple" (NN)		no→	Sydney Pollack for " <b>Out of Africa</b> " yes→	" <b>Out of Africa</b> "
1981		←yes		Warren Beatty for "Reds"	no→ "Chariots of Fire"
1972	Francis Ford Coppola, " <u>The Godfather</u> "	BP→	no→	Bob Fosse for "Cabaret"	no→ " <u>The Godfather</u> "
1968	Anthony Harvey, "The Lion in Winter"		no→	Carol Reed won for " <b>Oliver!</b> " yes→	" <b>Oliver!</b> "
1967		←yes		Mike Nichols for "The Graduate"	no→ "In the Heat of the Night"
1956		←yes		George Stevens for "Giant"	no→ "Around the World in 80 Days"
1952		←yes		John Ford for "The Quiet Man"	no→ "The Greatest Show on Earth"
1951		←yes		George Stevens for "A Place in the Sun"	no→ "An American in Paris"
1949	Robert Rossen, " <u>All the King's Men</u> " (differed only cause of timing of new award)	BP→	no→	Joseph L. Mankiewicz for "A Letter to Three Wives"	no→ " <u>All the King's Men</u> "

## Best Actor

### The Process? (typically) the SAG Winner

Leonardo DiCaprio will win this year's Best Actor Oscar for his film "The Revenant." Why? Because he won this year's Screen Actors Guild (SAG) award, which correlates more than 90% since 2004 with a Best Actor Oscar win. Not incidentally, he won the British Academy Award & a Golden Globe.

The nuance of Eddie Redmayne's Oscar-worthy performance in "The Danish Girl" is what will keep him from winning his second Oscar in two years. He was a sure winner channeling Stephen Hawking in "The Theory of Everything." The physical extreme of portraying Hawking's onset and decades-long handicap magnified a very human story about an iconic scientist.

Besides the DiCaprio factor, winning back to back acting Oscars is rarefied territory. (Tom Hanks and way back to early Spencer Tracy; career-capping Katharine Hepburn and way back Luise Rainer). Playing "The Danish Girl," Redmayne couldn't lean on the obvious physical cues of Hawking's crippling disease. He had to – and did – capture nuances of transgender nature. It was a time (1920s) when such a thing had barely been identified and any such manifestations were literally labeled insanity.

The wholly internal drivers for Redmayne's role land a masterful result, but it's a softer landing in a small movie, and he'll get shunted aside by a more sweeping acting intensity. Leonardo DiCaprio's title role as "The Revenant" fumes back from death and feeds on deadly obstacles.



Speaking relatively few words, DiCaprio's vengeful character claws his way through a big screen landscape. Put away the nuance scorecard. Oscar and DiCaprio have a penchant for bold strokes. It's part of the reason that this is his 5th Academy nominated role. First glance, you'd never peg DiCaprio as a larger than life figure, but he exceeds expectations pretty much every time.

I'd rather bury "The Revenant" in 2004 and pull "The Aviator" into the current competition. (Jaimie Foxx as "Ray" deserved the win, but DiCaprio's rich evocation of Howard Hughes in "The Aviator" would represent Oscar better.)

Registering mild disinclination for a DiCaprio win, consider Bryan Cranston at least as close to seeming gypped as Eddie Redmayne. Cranston's momentum dwarfs DiCaprio's wannabe vector. Bryan has four (4!) lead actor Emmies from the series "Breaking Bad," then a Tony in his Broadway debut playing President LBJ.

In "Trumbo" Cranston does great service showing the tribulation, perspicacity, and vindication of screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, the Hollywood lightning rod of the McCarthy era. Blacklisted when the US was witch-hunting communists, Trumbo hid under "fronted" identities, but won Oscars in 1954 ("Roman Holiday") and 1957 ("The Brave One").

Cranston scratches the itch of how a uniquely gifted, undaunted individual navigates such an era. For Oscar tapping, maybe the film feels a bit more instructive than involving, but Cranston shines.

Michael Fassbender is fantastic as Steve Jobs in the film "Steve Jobs." He depicts a techno-modern genius that doesn't resonate as cinematic hero, antihero, or anywhere in between really. Jobs is more fascinating than interesting, and Fassbender harvests that fruit well. He's milked as much personal flavor as this most influential business monarch is going to yield. It's a nomination worthy challenge but not an Oscar winning one.

You've gotta go to Mars to get a wholly fictional role nominated for Best Actor. Matt Damon does yeoman work in a playful nerdy science fiction. It focuses almost entirely on one stranded astronaut. As "The Martian" Damon plies his personable, guy-next-door qualities and ever apparent intelligence toward catching the next flight home. Matt doesn't outshine any of his fellow nominees, but if I had to be stranded with any of them, I'd pick Matt Damon.

### CampChuck Top Ten

Besides the 5 films at the right that get attention as Best Picture nominees, I like the delving and fresh biopic "Love & Mercy"; the character driven "Danish Girl"; the weird, ingenious "Anomalisa"; the keen distillation of "A War."

1. Documentaries●
2. Spotlight
3. Room
4. The Big Short
5. Love & Mercy
6. The Danish Girl
7. Bridge of Spies
8. The Martian
9. Anomalisa
10. A War

(● more about "documentaries" on page 8)

## Best Actress

### The Process? (typically) the SAG Winner

Brie Larson will win Best Actress Oscar for her film “The Room.” Why? Because she won this year’s Screen Actors Guild (SAG) award, which correlates over 80% since 2004 with a Best Actress Oscar win. Not incidentally, Larson’s performance also won the British Academy Award and a Golden Globe.

Brie Larson’s Oscar winning advantage is resonance. Her role is a nurturing mom surviving an all too believable nightmare. She touches a chord not many people bought tickets to hear.



The reason, probably, is that “Room” concentrates on how a woman endures, day to month to year, locked in a shed. It gives almost no time to the kidnapper and rapist who imprisoned her. “Room” focuses on how this woman stays sane and sustains something like thriving for her son, who she is raising in the confines of that shed. Larson’s life force in this film is plain yet transcendent.

A half-baked plan results in an escape, which gives us an opportunity to see how Larson’s character fares in a normal environment after seven years of perverse captivity. Her character gets to express more complicated facets of being alive in the world. It’s a dogged adjustment that helps assure an Oscar winning turn for Brie Larson.

If Oscar fished in shallower water, voters would surely come up with Saoirse Ronan (pronounced sir-shuh) This isn’t quite fair because “Brooklyn” is a substantive film about a young Irish woman leaving home and trying to shape her own life in America.

Ronan is soulful and down to earth, radiant and darling. It’s a rich, unpretentious performance that successfully mixes Hollywood contrivance with realistic romance. Such plusses maybe boost her chance past Cate Blanchett’s bid, but won’t penetrate Larson’s more evocative triumph.

Cate Blanchett exudes a certain captivating charm in the title role of “Carol.” Blanchett is good at a brand of individualism that makes it difficult to judge too quickly. Is her character (through the lens of the 1950s) being too self-centered, irresponsible? Is she taking advantage of a naïve young woman with engaging potential?

The part is subtler than director Todd Haynes’s previous exploration of a 1950s affair in “Far from Heaven.” Blanchett nails it but perhaps there’s not enough to hammer out an Oscar.

The only nominee with the odds totally stacked against her is Charlotte Rampling. The Best Actress category is not typically kind to seniors. In 87 years of Oscars, only two Best Actresses were older than Charlotte Rampling’s 70 years. (Jessica Tandy, 80; Katharine Hepburn, 74; the next oldest Best Actresses: Marie Dressler & Meryl Streep, 63 & 62; and the only Best Actor over 70, Henry Fonda at 76)

Charlotte Rampling’s film, “45 Years,” takes a movie snapshot of a couple who have been married for those 45 years. The plot device of a pre-marriage secret intentionally causes only modest dramatic flourish. The understated unraveling earns respect, not Oscars, even though Rampling proves wholly worthy of so much camera attention.

At age 25, Jennifer Lawrence has nabbed her fourth Oscar nomination with the title role of “Joy.” It’s her most ordinary performance. Kudos, though; she’s put notably different flavor and tone in each Oscar turn, not to mention the billion dollar box office of four “Hunger Games” flicks.

“American Hustle” was her most fun. For “Silver Linings Playbook” she earned her Oscar well. “Winter’s Bone is the heavy duty best of them all. With strength atop vulnerability always in the mix, there’s an unstoppable quality about Lawrence. Though she pokes above the script’s limitations, “Joy” feels like her most formulaic rendition.

(continued from page 7)

### CampChuck Top Ten: Why is “Documentaries” listed as CampChuck #1?

Always check out documentaries for underappreciated film making. All 5 Oscar-nominated docu-features this year offer impressive explorations: “Amy” (troubled singer, Winehouse, who killed herself, age 27); “Cartel Land” (regular people caught up with & against drug trade); “The Look of Silence” (talking about 50 year old murders with the unrepentant murderers); What Happened, Miss Simone” (singer, Civil Rights activist, Nina Simone); Winter on Fire (2013-14 violent revolution in Ukraine). Plus not-nominated documentaries such as “Where to Invade Next” (Michael Moore); “Listen to Me, Marlon (Brando); Janis: Little Girl Blue (Joplin).