

THE CampChuck REVIEWER

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



Streep Guarantees 4th Oscar Win Before 2030

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The 95th ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS NOMINATIONS

Oscar Night: Sunday, March 12

Best Picture

Best Director

All Quiet on the Western Front

Avatar: The Way of Water

The Banshees of Inisherin Martin McDonagh

Elvis

Everything Everywhere All at Once

Daniel Scheinert & Daniel Kwan

The Fabelmans

Steven Spielberg

Tar

Todd Field

Top Gun: Maverick

Triangle of Sadness

Ruben Ostlund

Women Talking

Best Actor

Austin Butler

Elvis

Colin Farrell

The Banshees of Inisherin

Brendan Fraser

The Whale

Paul Mescal

Aftersun

Bill Nighy

Living

Best Actress

Cate Blanchett

Tar

Ana de Armas

Blonde

Andrea Riseborough

To Leslie

Michelle Williams

The Fabelmans

Michelle Yeoh *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

Best Supporting Actor

Brendan Gleeson *The Banshees of Inisherin*

Brian Tyree Henry *Causeway*

Judd Hirsch *The Fabelmans*

Barry Keoghan *The Banshees of Inisherin*

Ke Huy Quan *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

Best Supporting Actress

Angela Bassett *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*

Hong Chau *The Whale*

Kerry Condon *The Banshees of Inisherin*

Jamie Lee Curtis *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

Stephanie Hsu *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

(Underlined nominees equal CampChuck predictions)

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The Foundation Already Exists

I lit on the film “2040: Join the Regeneration” on the last page of a Paul Hawken book called “Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation.” The film’s director, Damon Gameau, wrote the “Afterward” to the Hawken book.

CampChuck sees LOTS of movies, lots of kinds of movies. That includes lots of documentaries related to climate change. In recent years, many movies leverage optimism and currently existing, practical tactics. The film “2040: Join the Regeneration” reached me rather tangentially, not from my Wild & Scenic (Environmental) Film Festival devotions. This “2040” is one of those optimistic, practical/tactical films that warrants a recommendation.

More so, the Hawken book, “Regeneration.” This is more than an awareness raiser. It’s a foundational book. It isn’t incidental that the word “Regeneration” is in the film title and the book title.

One reason the book is such a foundational read is that it overviews how the world ... how nature ... is already geared to incorporate a human commitment to addressing climate change. Regenerating the soil, for instance, may sound like a small tactic. It’s huge, not only for the food that sustains us. Healthy soil sustains better water dynamics. Food and water! How fundamental can you get? And on an overarching level that addresses climate change ... carbon. Healthy soil

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Best Supporting Actor

Sometimes a part is too big to be called a supporting role. As such, it's an Oscar strategy, for instance, to group Brendan Gleeson ("The Banshees of Inisherin") with the Supporting Actors. The film's about two longtime friends. Gleeson, the senior of the two, doesn't feel like a subordinate role.

Such dynamics aside, Gleeson does play a supporting role in the story's core tension. Colin Farrell's character is the one figuring out what to make of himself being cast out of a kindred friendship.

Gleeson adds so much to the uncluttered ins and outs of the film. He's colorful in an understated way. He's a cut above in a not especially noticeable way.

Barry Keoghan, in the same film, is the right-sized, truer fit for a Best Supporting Oscar. He's a reflecting side-character in this rural island town. He's a counterpoint friendship, a lesser friendship, compared to the Gleeson and Farrell characters.

In a still humble turn, Keoghan plays a more outgoing presence, a needier type. Oscar voters might say, Gleeson, he's so fundamental to the story. They might also say, Keoghan, he so enriches what's on display in this story. A good case could be made for voters

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Email: jaffee@startlets.com (that's three "t"s in startlets).

Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

My favorite romantic comedy movie is "Moonstruck." It is so ... funny ... so romantic Everyone is so good in it.

JJ Jillian, Joshua Tree, CA

Dear JJ,

I don't think I could name a romantic comedy I like more than "Moonstruck." The film's greatness includes, shall I say, the non-standard attractiveness of Cher and Nicholas Cage, plus a perfect array of supporting characters.

It got me wondering what other films belong at the top of the romantic comedy stack: "Broadcast News"? "When Harry Met Sally"? "Shakespeare in Love"? "As Good as it Gets"?

Ed.

Dear Editor,

You know how they make movies starring, like, 10 big actors? They should make a movie with 100 big actors. None of them have more than a few lines. Your Meryl Streep buys an apple at a fruit stand. Brad Pitt hails a taxi. Jodie Foster bumps into Sally Field walking along. They trade a couple niceties. The whole movie is like that. There's not really a story; just 100 big actors. Great idea, right?

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

I think you should go to bed. When you wake up, I bet you'll have a pretty nice script.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

How are you and your cancer?

Seh-King Stahtus, Atlanta, GA

Dear Seh-King,

I keep feeling fine; keep getting favorable quarterly scans. I tip my hat to quite a few people who've endured suffering way worse than I have. I wish them well.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

I turn on the TV. I'm just going to watch a few minutes while I eat. There's a movie on. It's half way through. I watch. I watch to the end. There's another movie on right after. I watch to the end.

Ayn Cantelpit, Frankfurt, KY

Dear Ayn,

The question isn't are you addicted. OK, the question is are you addicted. What was your question?

Ed.

Dear Editor,

I know you're the Oscar guy, but what's with the Screen Actors Guild category for Best Cast in a Motion Picture.

Viola Merylcate, Queens, NY

Dear Viola,

The exact name is "Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture." The SAG awards are just about acting. It's like their Best Picture award but not really. Optimizing an ensemble of a fine bunch of actors is a standout film achievement,

Ed.

Regeneration: The Foundation Already Exists

means carbon in the ground sustaining the infrastructure of life, not in the air making climate change worse.

The book “Regeneration” walks through one component of our natural foundation after the next after the next. It outlines what humans already know how to do with agriculture, with forests, with other organic resources such as grasslands, wetlands, animals It addresses big built human environments -- cities ... industries. Humans already know how to do better by such things.

We are already primed to handle our most profound existential threat. Don’t shrug at climate change awareness. Don’t shrug at climate change action. Find knowledge; find encouragement in books, movies, wherever. Support people and organizations that address climate change. Support community and politics and policies that address climate change.

Let me calm down from rant mode ... how ... by mentioning an offbeat movie, a documentary”: “Who Are the Marcuses?” This well-layered film showcases a couple, living modestly, who gave \$400 million to a program in Israel. The program works toward addressing water supply problems in the desert Middle East – not just in Israel. It works toward addressing Middle East peace through a fundamental, shared common ground. The story about the Marcuses threads amidst a great story about the water & peace particulars.

OK, you don’t have millions. At whatever level, we can all give to and support practical/tactical ways to turn our only earth ship around.

CampChuck continues as it has **since 1992, matching every subscription dollar for dollar**. All subscriptions – over \$44,000 plus CampChuck’s 100% match of \$44,000 -- 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.

Some book titles worth a look besides “Regeneration”:

“Beyond Outrage” by Robert Reich

“Deep Economy” by Bill McGibben

“Saving Us” by Katharine Hayhoe

“Water in Plain Sight” by Judith D. Schwartz

“We Are the Weather” by Jonathan Safran Foer

And another movie title besides “2040: Join the Regeneration”

“Together We Grow”

Please, send “subscription” donations via CampChuck at 16669 Patricia Way, Grass Valley, CA 95949

make checks payable to...

Rocky Mountain Institute

This nonprofit helps individuals and communities and businesses and governments to make money, yes, make money, by being smart about the environment. By research and science, by education and negotiation, by example, the Rocky Mountain Institute helps us ... and the U.S. ... and the world “us” to make long term economic sense by making long term environmental sense.

Note:

Different than other years that CampChuck has been encouraging subscription/donations, I’m only listing Rocky Mountain Institute as a place to show your support.

Yes, I will still honor checks made payable to the “Food Bank of Nevada County.” The pressing need shouts to lend a helping hand to the hungry – to the “food insecure” (how’s that for modern terminology). Yes, I will still honor checks made payable to “Futures Without Violence.” Although, curiously, this issue/organization has not drawn your CampChuck attention nearly so much as the other two, in recent years it has been a commanding subject deserving activist support.

The existential crisis of Climate Change threatens our lives, our complacency, our children, like no other affliction. In the shadow of pandemic & war, consider upgrading behavior and commitment big time.

Best Supporting Actor

(continued from page 2)

splitting votes for Gleeson and Keoghan, and opening it up (pleeeeee don't happen) opening it up for Ke Huy Quan to win.



Sorry to say, Quan will ride the baffling buzz to “Everything Everywhere All at Once” Oscars. He has a prominent part, but EEAAO offers a bigger cinematic house to contain it. A Supporting Actor nomination makes sense, but not a win.

As well, Quan has his Asian actor card played AND he's in a comeback opportunity after many years since his promising child-actor start. He's good, but another example common in this year's nominations: he's well used but it's not a standout acting gig.

The other two nominees don't register much in the competition. Judd Hirsch, in “The Fabelmans,” plays a very noticeable little part in the family dynamic. His character may have meant a lot in young Steven Spielberg's life, but it feels too much like a piece of the script they just didn't want to leave out. Yes, Hirsch deserves a special mention in the credits. No, he doesn't deserve an Oscar.

That leaves Brian Tyree Henry (Who?) in “Causeway” (“Causeway”? Did people actually see “Causeway”?) It feels like a TV movie. It's actually a decent film about a recovering military veteran (Jennifer Lawrence), trying to return to her life. Henry supports well as her new friend, but it's a “so what” performance in a “yeah, I get it” part.

Best Supporting Actress

Pleeeeee, no Oscars for “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (EEAAO). Except Jamie Lee Curtis. The whole movie slaps every which way but sensible. Meanwhile, Curtis anchors the story with her oddball characterization.



Once you wave off the sci-fi froth from EEAAO, this film is about a family in need of an accountant. Jamie Lee Curtis, in all her frumpy, ineffectively controlling splendor, is an accountant. She's a kick. Quiet the Oscar buzz for EEAAO. No Oscars ... except Best Supporting Actress Gold to Jamie Lee Curtis.

From a more sober perspective, Kerry Condon in “The Banshees of Inisherin” may be the better Oscar choice. Her characterization focuses the theme of “nice” that helps make this film such a fresh all-around choice. That's the essence of a supporting role.

While Condon and Barry Keoghan do heartening work supporting the feeling for rural island life, the central dynamic of two friends can find its way more readily. In a somewhat rough film depiction of a nice world, Colin Farrell's character refers to his sister (Condon's character) as the nicest person.

Stephanie Hsu may help siphon votes from Jamie Lee Curtis, since both are nominated for Best Supporting Actress from the same film. Like Michelle Yeoh, EEAAO's lead actress, Hsu is used well to advance the

screwball story, but she's not particularly fanning any Oscar-worthy flames.

Besides Curtis and Condon, there's one other major contender. Angela Bassett in “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever.” She stands a deserving chance to win Gold.

Black Panther, both the 1st & the 2nd, are visual wows. For a superhero blockbuster, it's got passable substance. The characters and culture of the story inject oomph that's bigger than mere action. Angela Bassett contributes to all this well – a strong supporting role.

The Academy has endured and reacted to criticisms in recent years about not enough awards going to non-whites. However true the criticism is, this filter could be the voting boost Bassett needs.

More than characters in other films who might be pegged with merely being used well, Bassett's screen chemistry stirs other characters and sears into the audience psyche.

Hong Chau in “The Whale” suffers this “merely used well” evaluation. She is quite good in her supporting role. Indeed, as a caregiver to her whale of a friend, she literally plays a supporting role. To the script's credit her vital support is offered at modest pitch.

Black Panther is a proud Black blockbuster. EEAAO happens to tell a story about an Asian family. Jamie Lee, white and anti-cool plays an Oscar winning hand.

Best Picture, Best Director

Twice, I saw “Everything Everywhere All at Once.” I tried to regard, to discover, why in hell it got eleven (11!) Oscar nominations AND won the Directors Guild Award AND won the Screen Actors



Guild Best Cast. I tried to get a handle on the buzz that will turn into Best Picture and Best Director Oscars for “The Daniels,” as co-directors/co-screenwriters Daniel Kwan & Daniel Scheinert are known.

This film annoyed me more the second time. Yes, it’s creative and imaginative and bold and different from other films. More notably its story is both too random and not random enough. It hustles a parallel-universes worldview, nuanced and radicalized dimensions, connected and disjoint lifelines.

Of course, the film had to focus its storytelling on precious few story tracks and story entanglements. “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (EEAaO) is a mosh that manages not to be a mess. Not incidentally, it’s 20% too long. Pleeese, no Oscars.

Better to consider “The Fabelmans” and its director Steven Spielberg. This film is not an outrageous misstep for Oscar as EEAaO is. It’s simply a good Spielberg film, a lesser Spielberg film. This entertainment works best as a chance to watch Spielberg showcasing his childhood. It’s fun watching his love of movies and movie making take root in his pre-teen and teen years. It’s fun to watch the family dynamics and suburban culture that housed Spielberg’s development.

Better to consider “Elvis” and its director Baz Luhrmann. Luhrmann’s brash entertainment style pays off well. However, its heavy essence bogs it down short of Oscar punch.

Elvis Presley, in this film, isn’t really likeable. Root for him, yes. Blame his fate on his manager, Colonel Parker, fair enough. However, Elvis all too intentionally rode the train provided for him. The film points out that Elvis and the Colonel are two sides of the same coin. Tom Hanks nailed playing the exploitative Colonel, while holding a feeling of caricature at bay. Distractingly, the film seems to be more about Parker than Elvis.

Better to consider “Tar” and its director Todd Field. Unlike “Elvis,” there’s clarity about not liking the main character, played by Cate Blanchett. What “to root for” isn’t about her character, it’s about her comeuppance. It doesn’t step on itself as “Elvis” does, but it’s less of an Oscar contender than “Elvis.” Why? Cate Blanchett. The film is Blanchett, Blanchett, Blanchett, ripe for a Best Actor Oscar. The picture and the director nominations have no foothold for Oscar.

Better to mention “Top Gun: Maverick,” although its Best Picture chances get undermined by no Best Director nomination for Joseph Kosinski. It’s worth a quick Oscar titter that “Top Gun” is merely a blockbuster action film (as in billion-dollar territory). “Top Gun: Maveick” is a solid, even above average, big Hollywood movie and not just a money grabbing sequel to the first “Top Gun” sonic boom. It ages its Tom Cruise military jet fest well.

The other blockbuster movie on the Best Picture list (also in billion-dollar territory) deserves more award category respect than “Top Gun: Maverick.” “Avatar: The Way of Water” also succeeds emphatically as more than just a sequel. More of a director’s picture than “Top Gun,” Avatar’s Cameron also failed to get a Best Director nomination. Though afflicted by “more is better” tendencies, including a clutter of storytelling and special effects, “Avatar” does a lavish job of presenting its fantasy effects and other worldly culture.

The only Oscar nominated Best Picture that seems less nomination worthy than EEAaO is “Triangle of Sadness” and its nominated director, Ruben Ostlund. It’s clever. It sustains an interesting look and feel (including a radical switch from its luxury cruise setting). All in all, “Triangle of Sadness” feels too much like movie making. The contrivance doesn’t engage you in a story that feels real. (Even EEAaO, with its outlandish, science-fictiony lifelines, doesn’t feel contrived.)

“Women Talking” rates its Best Screenplay Oscar nomination more than its Best Picture nomination. Sarah Polley, the un-nominated director, wrote the screenplay. Like EEAaO, “Women Talking” relies on spreading its impression across an ensemble cast.

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Best Picture, Best Director

However, in “Women Talking” you feel the participation of each community member as critical to the story of women discussing what to do about the awful culture of abuse they’ve endured. In EEAAO, actors seem manipulated well to the cinematic purpose, unlike the stellar acting delivering an impact on heart and mind in “Women Talking.”

What film should win Best Picture and Best Director? Two films on the nominated list most deserve the Oscar stamp: “The Banshees of Inisherin” and director Martin McDonagh fill the bill for an intimate, small film in an open cinematic setting. “All Quiet on the Western Front” carries the power that epic films bring to Oscar voting.

“All Quiet...” suffers the disadvantage of no Best Director nomination for Edward Berger. (Picture & Director Oscars usually happen for the same picture.) “All Quiet...” also suffers the complication of being nominated in the Best Foreign Language film category. Likely, it will win this category with the boost of its recognition in the Best Picture category. OR divided votes across two categories will trip the film in both categories.

But how good is “All Quiet on the Western Front”? Very good; excellent. It’s stark. It weighs an engrossing ton, not from epic bombast, but from epic drudgery & carrying on & the pallor of dispensable souls. It’s strong anti-war stuff, and unlike the version made close to 100 years ago, it’s told from the German point of view.

“The Banshees of Inisherin” enjoys the advantage of Martin McDonagh’s nomination for Best Director and Best Picture. Highest honors can land on small films.

Without being an arty film, “Banshees” mixes the countryside and its rural people, its seemingly uncomplicated humanity and adds a small existential dilemma. Not much happens in the lives of this film. Well, it seems a lot to them. The “big” turn in the plot is tiny by movie-making standards, but it hacks humanity and philosophy together into rich storytelling.

The acting in “The Banshees of Inisherin” is top notch and well distributed. The look and feel carries

the modest human tone compellingly. Its small, mundane magic should win top Oscar honors. Should ... Alas ...

“Everything Everywhere All at Once” ... Aarrrrrrgh. EEAAO will grab both Best Picture and Best Director.



Why EEAAO? Look at the world. What’s going on domestically, globally? Reality ain’t playing out too well. Maybe the lead voting sentiment just needs this kind of alternative reality where people can make things turn out for the better.

At the Santa Barbara Film Festival

A neat bonus this Oscar year ... vacationing in southern CA chanced upon the Santa Barbara Film Festival. Besides films, we enjoyed a panel of Oscar-nominated screenwriters talking about their films, about the ins and outs of their screenwriting.

Nine of this year’s ten Oscar-nominated screenplay writers (original and adapted) spoke. Six of the nine also directed the film, including 4 of the 5 Oscar-nominated directors. Tony Kushner -- not a director -- co-wrote “The Fabelmans” with Oscar-nominated director, Steven Spielberg. Kushner pretty much said that he wrote for, not with Spielberg. Kushner also said that screenwriting terrifies him.

A wide range of film types was represented. And all these people felt like fairly regular folks.

Who spoke, besides Tony Kushner?

Writers & directors (nominated in both categories): Martin McDonagh, “The Banshees of Inisherin”; Todd Field, “Tar”; Daniel Scheinert, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” (His partner, Daniel Kwan, wasn’t on the panel.)

Writers & directors (nominated only for writing): Ruben Ostlund, “Triangle of Sadness”; Sarah Polley, “Women Talking”; Rian Johnson, “Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery”

Writers only: Kazuo Ishiguro, “Living”; Lesley Paterson, “All Quiet on the Western Front” (with 2 co-writers not on the panel).

Ostlund said he described the film he would make so often that it felt like he’d already written the script. The two Daniels said they meshed their one micro, the other macro ways of developing a script. Ishiguro leaned on the many books he’s written to find a way through writing a screenplay. Polley shaped lots of her script from the actors’ inputs. McDonagh found script help from what his characters didn’t say. All nine shared quite a bit. What a film festival treat for our entertainment and enlightenment.

Best Actress

Sometimes it's nice when actors get nominated just so their film can receive some attention. Sometimes it's nice to hear good things about little known actresses. Ana de Armas in "Blonde" and Andrea Riseborough in "To Leslie" both draw us in with very different characterizations.

The "Blonde" that de Armas plays is Marilyn Monroe. De Armas rises to the challenge of playing one of the most iconic movie stars ever. She steers clear of caricature and employs a perfectly tuned flavor of impersonation. She radiates the not quite explainable magic that was Marilyn Monroe, including the vulnerability that was the mark of this actress, this celebrity, this human being.

Although a worthy Oscar contender, the voting will credit her just a little bit less because she is incarnating Marilyn. Voters won't fully appreciate the difficult character rendering.

Riseborough's character is as much a nobody as Marilyn Monroe was a somebody. This character wallows in the dysfunctional, alcoholic life she is cultivating. The story unfolds a very unlikely path to a better life. Riseborough delivers a wonderful balance of a person who does not rate our sympathy but also a person we want to see beating the odds she's stacked against herself.

Although a worthy Oscar contender, the voting will pass over her as lacking the breakthrough appeal to honor what seems to be a very busy actress.

Michelle Williams fits the world of "The Fabelmans" playing the outgoing, somewhat odd, but obviously loving mother. The Steven Spielberg character is clearly a child getting his nature and nurture from both parents. While the fit strengthens the film, it feels more like a supporting performance than a Best Actress performance. Williams is an apt factor in pointing out that this is a good Spielberg film, not a great one.

The contest for Best Actress Oscar really involves only two of the nominees: Cate Blanchett in "Tar" and Michelle Yeoh in "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

Cate Blanchett orbits in the same acting stratosphere as Meryl Streep. (OK, maybe not the same

but in analogously rarefied air). Blanchett continues stretching through a variety of roles. In "Tar," she plays an orchestra conductor, a very driven, exacting woman. The portrayal is accented by the demands of proving herself in a man's world. Blanchett commands the complexity of playing a person whose excellence drinks the same juice that causes behavior that undermines her.

This role should win her third Oscar ("The Aviator," 2004, and "Blue Jasmine," 2013). Should ... however ... there's the "Everything Everywhere All at Once" factor.

For some reason, some peculiar physics has put a gravitational field around "Everything Everywhere All at Once" that will pull multiple Oscars from the competition. Best Actress will go to Michelle Yeoh.



Yeoh performs very effectively, although it's fairer to say she is very well used in the pinball wizardry that is "Everything Everywhere All at Once." Yes, she inhabits well the character of a down-to-earth family woman and small business owner, but mostly she mugs a cinematically charged mixture of science fiction dimensions, martial arts gyrations, and screwball machinations.

Usually, younger actresses win at the Oscars. In this case, Yeoh will be seen as a veteran actress whose been underappreciated and who puts an appealing face on underappreciated Asian actors.

21st Wild & Scenic Film Festival Awards:

Festival info at wildandscenicfilmfestival.org

(Here are the 2023 award-winning films.)

"Breaking Trail"	honorable mention
"The Elephant & the Termite"	best kid's film
"Elevated"	best in theme (commUNITY)
"Free to Run"	spirit of activism
"From My Window"	jury award
"The Long Rider"	people's choice
"The Mud on Their Hands"	best short short
"Nowhere to Go but Everywhere"	honorable mention
"Path of the Panther"	best of fest
"Range Rider"	jury award
"The Rock Pool Waltz"	best kid's film, honorable mention
"This Is Beth"	most inspiring adventure

Best Actor

Paul Mescal, a throwaway Oscar nominee, plays a dad in “Aftersun.” We observe the resort vacation he takes with his 11-year-old daughter. Nothing much happens, including irrelevant use of the resort location--Turkey.

Father and daughter get along well. The film barely helps you realize that each has issues. Paul Mescal probably deserves some credit for investing ... what ... some mundane charm into a forgettable film.

Dismissing Austin Butler is way more difficult. He plays the title character “Elvis.” The question surrounding his performance is whether he put enough Elvis Presley into it or distractingly too much or both.

The answer: Butler did a fine job rendering a vulnerable, meant-to-be megastar who may not entirely rate our sympathy. His characterization wears an icky factor, more icky than Tom Hanks playing his manager/promoter. It’s this not quite likeable tone of “Elvis” that will keep Austin Butler from winning an Oscar as the mega-famous Elvis.

Bill Nighy, in “Living,” plays a character who is interesting because he is so UNinteresting. Nighy enlivens a rigidly bland British bureaucrat, including the modest transcendence that accents his life.

Nighy’s excellence is cute, enough to grant this elder actor an Oscar nomination but not cute enough to win. Similarly, his film, “Living,” deserves attention for its well-crafted story and modestly framed message ... just not too much attention.

Serious Best Actor Oscar contention hovers over Colin Farrell and Brendan Fraser.

In “The Whale,” Fraser plays a grossly overweight man. He is a smart man, not smart enough to avoid or correct his condition. He’s a teacher, whose Zoom students don’t know what he looks like. He’s a father, who hadn’t seen his teen daughter in years.

Fraser transcends the gimmick that grounds the story. The story blossoms into a warmly human set of interactions. The trick to the portrayal and film is that it stays modest. Whether interacting with his caretaker, his daughter, his students, or the one “intruder” into his homebound life, Fraser’s character manages a kind of dignity in his neediness.

Oscar inclines to award such novelty acting challenges as Fraser playing “The Whale.” That sentiment will team with encouragement for what amounts to a comeback opportunity after years of personal difficulties.

Colin Farrell in “The Banshees of Inisherin” has no artifice to lean on for his Oscar bid. He plays a rather ordinary fella. The dramatic hook: His character’s hurt and confusion at being told by his longtime friend that he doesn’t want to be friends anymore.

Making that little bit of a movie idea into a rich, personal story, now that’s a fresh place to shine the Oscar spotlight. Farrell embeds himself into his simple, rural character (on an Irish island). He doesn’t have any added texture to his life like his friend’s love of music. Farrell immerses himself into being and finding “nice” in people, plain old likability. Being there for people: Farrell has made that into an Oscar-worthy role ... except Fraser will win, not Farrell.



The Awards Season Path

Around the awards season, it’s a kick to try to see all the Oscar nominated films in the six major categories covered in this newsletter. Best Screenplay is another category that belongs on THE standard bearing list. To ride the loving ride more fully, you might try to see all the nominated foreign language films and all the animated features and all the documentaries. You can add dimension when you try to see all the nominated movie shorts. There’s live action shorts, animated shorts, and documentary shorts. (This year’s best are the documentary shorts.) News flash: Award season is prime time to travel this path, but hey, assemble your list and watch all year.

It isn’t about especially liking all these movies. It’s about letting the list expose you to more movies, to a bigger range of movies. It’s about allowing surprise or disappointment or qualified appreciation to wash over you. And it isn’t just about being Oscar primed. The Screen Actors Guild awards and the Golden Globes awards and the Directors Guild not only guides you through the overlap, it adds a few more titles. There’s also the Independent Spirit Awards I’m just sayin’. Are you watching too many sitcoms, too many crime and lawyer and medical TV shows, reality TV shows.... I’m just sayin’.