

# Will 'Rings' lord over the Oscars?



## The 5 Oscar moments that should happen

1. "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" goes home empty handed. It's not that I don't like the films. I just don't love them. Better movies have won in the past and will win in the future. And let's face it: "Star Wars" will always be the best fantasy film in Hollywood history.
2. "Capturing the Friedmans" wins Best Documentary. I loved this film more than almost all of the fictional films I saw last year. "Fog of War," however, is the political documentary Oscar usually goes for, and will most likely win. Still, I'm hoping there's a place in Oscar's heart for a convicted child molester and his family.
3. Keisha Castle-Hughes wins Best Actress for "Whale Rider." I never had a performance affect me as emotionally as this 13-year-old girl's performance did. The girl is amazing. If she did win her career would be over, but "Whale Rider" will always be in my heart.
4. Roy Disney takes home an Oscar for the animated short "Destino." This Oscar is more than just another thing Disney can wave in front of Michael Eisner's face. It's a tribute to both Disney's Uncle Walt and Salvador Dalí, the men who started production almost 60 years ago. Unfortunately, it is against a Pixar short, and computer-animated goats are just cute.
5. Host Billy Crystal suddenly falls ill and is replaced with Steve Martin. This will never happen, but Martin's job last year as host was the best I've in the past decade. Here's hoping.

preview by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
managing editor

The guild awards are piling up. The fans are getting anxious. And I'll bet Peter Jackson is sweating a little bit right now, too.

"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" is looking more like a sure win for every award the Academy can send its way Sunday at the 76th Annual Academy Awards, which airs at 8 p.m. on WJET-TV.

The question remains, will the fantasy film be a "Titanic"-like steamroller, or will the Academy maintain the share-the-wealth attitude it has had over the last three years? Only the ballot counters know today. But being the self-proclaimed Oscar pundit I am, I have a feeling it's going to be a bumpy night.

### Best Picture

"The Return of the King" has every Oscar precursor a film could need. It even grabbed the elusive Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Ensemble, the one trophy that even "Titanic" didn't take home in its run for the Oscar. Still, the only Best Picture winner in Academy history that has any adventure elements close to "King" is the tedious "Around the World in 80 Days." With "Mystic River" approaching the \$80 million mark and "Lost in Translation" becoming a home video hit, "The Return of

the King" could see its trophy chances fly away. Of course, the same people who loved "River," love "Translation," possibly splitting the vote. Maybe I'm overthinking it, but this one still looks like a three-horse race.

Prediction: "Mystic River"  
Close Second: "The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King"

### Best Director

Peter Jackson hasn't proven he's more than a B-movie director, but the biggest B-movie of them all should give the king of the fantasy film genre his long overdue Oscar. Of course, Sofia Coppola has the Focus factor on her side. Focus Features has delivered the trophy to their director nominee in three of the past four years. And her last name doesn't hurt either. The daughter of Francis Ford Coppola may spoil Jackson's night. That is if the Academy knows where the real gold is.

Prediction: Peter Jackson, "The Lord of the Rings: the Return of the King"  
Close Second: Sofia Coppola, "Lost in Translation"

### Best Actor

With even the Screen Actors Guild leaving Sean Penn behind, Bill Murray should be able to place an Oscar for Best Actor in between his Emmy and Golden Globe on Monday morning. Murray has

given the right speeches and done all the politicking needed to take this well-deserved Oscar home. And Murray has Focus Features on his side, as well. Despite Johnny Depp's surprise win at the Screen Actors Guild, Murray and Penn are still going to be the ones duking it out for the Oscar. Look for Murray to be the one with his hand raised in the end.

Prediction: Bill Murray, "Lost in Translation"  
Close Second: Sean Penn, "Mystic River"

### Best Actress

One word: "Monster." This Oscar is Charlize Theron's. There just isn't any one else even close. Sorry Diane. Sorry Keisha. It's Theron's night to shine.

Prediction: Charlize Theron, "Monster"  
Slam Dunk

### Best Supporting Actor

Tim Robbins is probably racing to the stage as we speak, because this category is almost a clear cut as Best Actress. "Mystic River" should lose the Best Actor trophy and take the Supporting Oscar that usually accompanies a Best Picture winner. Because he is as overdue as any actor nominated in any category, Robbins should take home an Oscar he deserves this year, or any year. Sure, Alec Baldwin's star power may

pose a threat, but let's not forget, there's a messy custody hearing going on involving the star. The Academy doesn't associate itself with controversy. (Remember Russell Crowe's loss for "A Beautiful Mind.")

Prediction: Tim Robbins, "Mystic River"  
Close Second: Alec Baldwin, "The Cooler"

### Best Supporting Actress

She might not deserve it for "Cold Mountain," but Renee Zellweger has been on the verge for too long to not grab this Oscar. Sure, she walked through the role, but hell, it's Renee, and she should have won last year as a lead. This year she stole every scene from last year's Best Actress winner Nicole Kidman, and did I mention it's Renee? Only the "House of Sand and Fog" actress, Shohreh Aghdashloo, could ruin Zellweger's evening. Aghdashloo, an Iranian-born actress, has the "embattled wife" advantage, which resulted in Oscars in this category for both Marcia Gay Harden and Jennifer Connelly. And it would be historic for an Iranian actress to win this Oscar. Unfortunately, she's going up against Renee.

Prediction: Renee Zellweger, "Cold Mountain"  
Close Second: Shohreh Aghdashloo, "House of Sand and Fog"

## Graphic 'Passion' portrays Gibson's gospel

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
managing editor

"The Passion of the Christ" is a mesmerizing work of cinematic artistry, unlike anything Mel Gibson has ever put his name on. It's brutal and tragic, but heartfelt and, as you may guess from the title, passionate. As a filmmaker, Gibson is at the top of his form, though his amateurish techniques have yet to make him a master. In this film, however, what Gibson lacks in technique he makes up for with intense imagery and utter devotion to the source.

"The Passion" is an account of the last hours of Christ as Gibson adapted from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We first see Jesus (James Caviezel) praying in a garden, a man afraid of his commitment to God and the people for which he will sacrifice his life. This is the only time Jesus is shown as being slightly insecure, not because he won't do it, but because his will is so strong it frightens him as a man. Satan lurks in the background, telling him the burden is too great, but Jesus literally stomps out the voice and readies himself for his impending capture.

Soldiers, along with Jesus' betrayer Judas (Luca Lionello), come to the garden, and after small skirmish involving other Apostles, Jesus is taken to the Temple in Jerusalem to face the high priests. Here, the hard-line high priests are portrayed as unyielding protectors of their religion, willing to allow the abuse of a blasphemer in order to protect what they hold sacred. They have the attitudes of Inquisition-era Church officials, so of course, they demand the heretic to be killed.

When the priests take Jesus to Pontius Pilate (Hristo Naumov Shopov) and demand the ultimate punishment, Pilate attempts to shift responsibility to King Herod, but to no avail. Pilate, whose wife, Claudia, warned him of the possible repercussions for punishment, leaves it to the Jews to decide if the so-called blasphemer is to die.

We know what they chose and from that moment viewers are confronted with gruesome images of torture and the eventual crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Gibson's portrayal of the torture is perhaps the most violent and cringe-inducing scene in modern cinema. The brutal battle scenes from his previous endeavor, "Braveheart," are timid in comparison. Flesh is ripped from Jesus' body and blood is splattered in a messy pattern around the whipping post and on the savage Roman centurions. The violence is at times gratuitous, even manipulative, but Gibson makes no excuses for it. (Though, some of the same people who will praise this movie would reprimand any other film for its nearly pornographic use of violence.)

There's no style to the violence, nor is there much in the rest of the film, short of a lot of unnecessary slow motion. Gibson, however, takes his storytelling to a new level and challenges the viewer with dark imagery. Judas' spiral into madness after taking the blood money is emphasized with the manifestation of his psychological monsters and the distortion of children's faces. When he hangs himself, Judas takes the rope from the rotting corpse of a long-dead mule, an image that is simplistic, but effective nonetheless.

A straightforward plot would have hindered the film, but Gibson and his screenwriting partner Benedict Fitzgerald added flashbacks to emphasize Christ as a both a friend and a son. In one flashback, Jesus playfully splashes his mother, Mary,



James Caviezel (first from the right) is Jesus in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ."

(played by Maia Morgenstern) with water as he comes in to eat. Morgenstern is from that scene set up to be the only outstanding cast member, one whose anguish comes from something personal. The Apostles never seem concerned as friends and the converts Jesus meets on his path to death are taken by the Messiah's sacrifice and strength. Morgenstern plays Mary more as a mother than as a believer, and her human emotion adds to the film's spiritual core.

Spirituality aside, "The Passion of the Christ" is a new Biblical film for a new century, and Gibson may just be on the verge of a De Mille-sized career in the genre. It's a grand achievement that deserves at least one Oscar for Morgenstern's heartbreaking performance. True, the film is far from perfect, but it's a clear example of Gibson's ability to apply his directorial talents to something more powerful than simple action.

☆☆☆ 1/2  
out of 4 stars

"The Passion of the Christ," directed by Mel Gibson and starring James Caviezel, is currently showing at Tinseltown.

## The Jarvis File

### Silencing a legend:

Howard Stern, America's "shock jock," has been taken off the air indefinitely. Clear Channel Communications received Stern's interview Tuesday with Rick Solomon, the other half of the Paris Hilton sex video.

The interview consisted of Stern asking Solomon about his sexual lifestyle and about certain areas of the body. When a listener called in to ask Solomon questions, he used profanity and racial slurs. Stern hung up on him immediately. However, that wasn't enough.

Stern has been pulled from the 75 different markets he was broadcasted on by Infinity Radio, which is owned by Viacom.

Stern has not been available for a comment since he was taken off of the air.

### I do:

Rosie O'Donnell announced on ABC's "Good Morning America" that she planned to travel to San Francisco, CA where today she married her long-time girlfriend, Kelli Carpenter.

O'Donnell plans followed in the foot steps of more than 3,300 other same sex marriages have taken place since Feb. 12.

O'Donnell's actions come after the statements that President Bush feels that same-sex marriages should be banned. O'Donnell called the presidents actions "the most vile and hated statements ever spoken by a sitting president."

### Clashing of two stories:

Martin Lawrence is being sued for assault, battery and intentional infliction of emotional distress. The charges are brought on after Lawrence allegedly hit Jennifer Palmer in the jaw after she invited him to a party at the Playboy Mansion. Palmer is suing Lawrence for \$25,000. Witnesses said that Lawrence was quite intoxicated, while Lawrence has witnesses saying that Palmer was intoxicated.

## Arts & Entertainment Highlights

### Top 40 Singles

1. "Yeah!" - Usher featuring Lil Jon & Ludacris
2. "The Way You Move" - Outkast featuring Sleepy Brown
3. "Toxic" - Britney Spears
4. "Hey Ya!" - Outkast
5. "With You" - Jessica Simpson
6. "Someday" - Nickelback
7. "My Immortal" - Evanescence
8. "Slow Jamz" - Twista feat. Kanye West & Jamie Foxx
9. "F\*ck It (I Don't Want You Back)" - Eamon
10. "It's My Life" - No Doubt

\*\*According to Billboard.com\*\*

### Album Releases on Tuesday

Hootie and The Blowfish - "The Best of"

Jessica Simpson - "In This Skin" (re-released)

### New Movie Releases

- "The Passion of the Christ" - Director Mel Gibson
- "Club Dread" - Bill Paxton
- "Twisted" - Ashley Judd, Samuel L. Jackson
- "Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights" - Diego Luna, Romola Garai

### DVD Releases on Tuesday

- "School of Rock"
- "Good Boy!"
- "Peyton Place"
- "The Prisoner"
- "In This World"