

# Readers forecast the Oscar's

BY KEN DUSOLD  
Reviewer

The Kodak Theater in Hollywood, Calif., is ready to serve as the setting for the 82nd Academy Awards. Steve Martin and Alec Baldwin — the hosts — have their jokes memorized, and the votes are being counted.

Below are 10 of the 24 Oscar categories. The readers' prediction in each category was attained through a Web poll conducted on the Index Web site.

The Academy Awards will air at 7 p.m. March 7 on ABC.

## Best Actor

**Readers' Pick:** Morgan Freeman, "Invictus"

**Ken's Pick:** Jeff Bridges, "Crazy Heart"

Bridges' portrayal of an aging, broken-down country musician seeking salvation in the arms of a curious journalist (Maggie Gyllenhaal) earned him the Golden Globe, the Screen Actors Guild Award and Critic's Choice Award. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences voters have nominated Bridges four other times, but this would be his first win, and it would be well-deserved.

## Best Supporting Actor

**RP and KP:** Christoph Waltz, "Inglourious Bastards"

Austrian-born Waltz has spent

most of his life appearing on German television shows. Quentin Tarantino's Nazi flick is Waltz's debut in an American-made film — and what a debut it was. In the last few years, the Academy has loved awarding foreign-born nominees with an Oscar, and Waltz is the perfect answer to this year's predominantly American field of candidates.

## Best Actress

**RP and KP:** Meryl Streep, "Julie & Julia"

This is the toughest category to predict this year. Streep has set a record with her 16th Oscar nomination. She has won twice — the last time being 27 years ago. Her performance as the famous TV chef Julia Child was dead-on and exhibited the wonderful essence of one of the 20th century's most enjoyable figures. Overdue for another Oscar, Streep might have just enough of an advantage over her biggest competition, Sandra Bullock, to win.

## Best Supporting Actress

**RP and KP:** Mo'Nique, "Precious: Based on the Novel 'Push' by Sapphire"

The comedienne's dramatic chops came out of nowhere this year to astound and impress critics and audiences. Having won the Golden Globe, the British

Academy of Film and Television Arts Award and the SAG Award, her chances for a win are excellent.

## Best Director

**RP:** Kathryn Bigelow, "The Hurt Locker"

**KP:** James Cameron, "Avatar"

Why the Academy loves him, I do not know — they just do. With this being his first film as director since "Titanic," a directing Oscar might be his consolation prize for losing Best Picture to his ex-wife Kathryn Bigelow for her film, "The Hurt Locker."

## Best Animated Film

**RP and KP:** "Up"

When it comes to animation, no one touches Pixar in storylines, CGI and box-office success. Since this category was created in 2001, a Pixar film has taken home the Oscar four times. "Up" is also the only animated film nominated for Best Picture this year.

## Best Original Song

**RP and KP:** "The Weary Kind (Theme

from Crazy Heart)," "Crazy Heart"

Ryan Bingham's theme for "Crazy Heart" is a wonderful country music song complimenting both Bridges and the film's story perfectly. It garnered the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song and does not have much competition in this category. It stands out as an exceptional piece of music.

## Best Original Screenplay

**RP and KP:** "Up"

This category is going to be close with "The Hurt Locker," sporting an invocative and powerful script and Pixar's newest heart-warmer delighting audiences of all ages. In the end, I see "The Hurt Locker" as an adapted screenplay (based on incidents from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), camouflaged as original. The scale then tips toward

"Up" for its truly original story.

## Best Adapted Screenplay

**RP:** "District 9"

**KP:** "Up in the Air"

Jason Reitman and Sheldon Turner have written an interesting and intricate depiction about corporate life, love and goals. The two already have won numerous awards for their screenplay, including the Writer's Guild of America Award. With possible competition from "An Education," Reitman and Turner should have acceptance speeches prepared just in case.

## Best Picture

**RP:** "Up"

**KP:** "The Hurt Locker"

"Up" might actually be the best film of 2009, but the Academy is unlikely to choose an animated picture. This is the first time in more than 60 years that there are 10 nominees in this category. The voting system is different from the old "winner-takes-most-votes" routine — now it is more like a caucus. "Avatar" won the Golden Globe and "The Hurt Locker" won the BAFTA Award. Although several members of the Academy belong to the BAFTA too, none vote for the Golden Globe Awards, so "The Hurt Locker" seems to be the front-runner going into the Oscar weekend.



# Promising concept grows stale



ALEX CARLSON  
Reviewer

This generation of games deserves an open-ended jetpack game. Soaring through the skies and taking out enemies seems like a perfect idea for a video game.

Sadly, "Dark Void" isn't the jetpack game for the ages. A short, tedious and uninspired shooter, "Dark Void" is best left on store shelves.

"Dark Void" follows Will Grey, a World War II pilot whose trip is interrupted by a dimensional rift in the Bermuda Triangle. After arriving in an alternate universe called the Void, Grey encounters a hostile group of locals called the Watchers who want to travel to Grey's time and escape The Void. It's up to Grey and a group of resistance fighters to stop the Watchers.

The storyline in "Dark Void" is so riddled with clichés that it makes the entire experience extremely difficult to enjoy. Sci-fi mov-

ies already have used the alternate universe, evil aliens and resistance group ideas, and "Dark Void" doesn't do much to revitalize these tried-and-true plotlines. It's a boring story that overstays its welcome from start to finish.

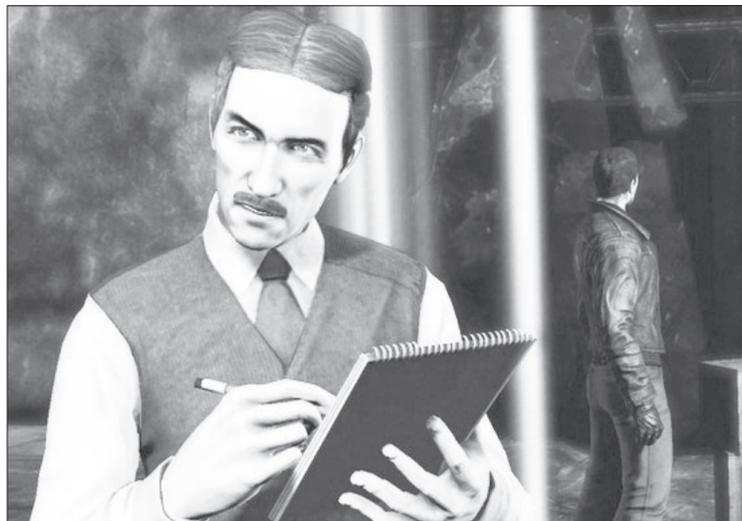
The most prominent gameplay element in "Dark Void" is the jetpack, and to the game's credit, it makes for a wild ride. Using the jetpack, the player can hover and shoot enemies from a stationary position. The more daring can blast off and enter dogfights while flying around the map. Shooting down enemy UFOs and giant mechanical lizards from the sky is a liberating feeling, making for some great encounters. However, if you get bored with simple jetpack shooting, abilities like hijacking enemy crafts or using an anti-air cannon offer some nice diversity.

Once the player lands on the ground, however, "Dark Void" really starts dragging its feet. The gameplay is just too basic and derivative to make a real impact. The cover-based shooting gameplay takes plenty of trappings from the "Gears of War" series, offering typical moves like taking cover behind a barrier or shooting blindly from the hiding place. The game does add a new element to the "Gears"

gameplay, offering vertical cover scenarios where the player is able to climb or descend a cliff or crevice. This is an inventive approach to cover-based gameplay that hopefully will be a part of similar titles.

Despite this twist on the gameplay, the remainder of the on-foot missions are uninspired. The shooting is practically pointless thanks to regenerating health and a significantly overpowered melee attack. Enemies don't change their tactics often and mostly come in the same robotic forms throughout the game. The player also can upgrade weapons, but these are narrowed and simple. Unlike other shooters where you can upgrade specific components like capacity, strength or reload time, "Dark Void" lets the player simply upgrade each of the weapons only twice. These slim offerings are what really hurt an otherwise ambitious game. Considering that you can complete the campaign in just a few hours, that's really all you get.

Like its gameplay, the presentation in "Dark Void" is best when the player is flying with the jetpack. The sun glare and motion blur are impressive, especially when in the middle of a dogfight.



Photos courtesy of gamespot.com  
Gamers who purchase Dark Void will be left perplexed by the mundane gameplay. Despite a good idea to incorporate jetpacks, the game disappoints.

Sadly, the on-foot missions are cluttered and uninviting. The levels are mostly gray and mechanical, with the weapon effects mostly being bright blue bursts of energy. Recycled enemies and an irritatingly slow frame rate make the on-foot battles tedious.

The sound track isn't bad, with some cinematic scores and visceral sound effects.

The voice acting, however, is as soulless as the characters themselves. Be prepared to suffer through stale dialogue and flat secondary appearances. Not even a Nikola Tesla cameo can save "Dark Void" from its boring and derivative nature.

The jetpack concept in "Dark Void" is ambitious and fun to play, but everything else is a boring and slow

mess. Tedious on-foot missions, a lack of diversity in both the enemies and weapons and a forgettable storyline all make "Dark Void" a rental at best. The vertical cover scenarios and aerial dogfights are unique, but everything else in the game is bland. "Dark Void" gets off the ground OK, but it doesn't take long for this jetpack game to crash and burn.

# Alkaline Trio revisits original sound



BY COREY BOMMEL  
Reviewer

## Alkaline Trio

Sometimes bands decide it's a good idea to go back to their roots. They try to forgo all of their musical evolution and record a throwback album. However, it's not always easy to pull away from current musical progression.

This was the case for the Midwestern threesome Alkaline Trio when they approached their latest album release. After six albums, the band decided to record a more punk-fueled album akin to their earlier releases. "This Addiction" is the first album on their new record label and the band's seventh overall.

For the recording of this album, the band returned to the past in more ways than one. They went to the same studio in Chicago where they recorded their first two albums, including their debut album "Goddammit." They also enlisted the help of producer Matt Allison, who produced the band's first three albums. It's obvious they wanted to try to make music like they did in the 1990s, but the



Photos courtesy of last.fm  
From left: Drummer Derek Grant, lead singer and guitarist Matt Skiba and co-vocalist and bassist Dan Andriano of Alkaline Trio recently put out their seventh album, "This Addiction."

music comes out sounding more polished than their earlier work.

The album's content is heavily influenced by events in the band members' lives from the last year, most notably a divorce. They also use drug addiction heavily as a metaphor for love and relationships throughout the album. Some songs lyrically hit home, although others are somewhat lackluster. Guitarist Matt Skiba's vocals vary from song to song, while bassist Dan Andriano is at top form on the three songs in which he performs the vocals.

Musically, the album is indeed a return to the punk rock roots of the band's earlier years. The songs are stripped down with very few interruptions from the

core trio. They do have a horn interlude on "Lead Poisoning" and use synths on a handful of tracks, but these moments don't interrupt the album's flow. Heavy production prevents this album from having the innocence of a young band and keeps it from being a true retro album.

There are several notable tracks on "This Addiction." "The American Scream" is likely to be the biggest hit, as it's the most dynamic song on the album. It draws its influence from a soldier who returns home from Afghanistan and commits suicide. "Lead Poisoning" really stands out with its brass interludes on top of punk vibes. Album closer "Fine" exhibits Andriano at his finest and ends

the album on a great note.

"This Addiction" is not a full look back and not quite a step forward, but it stands out as an exceptional album for Alkaline Trio.

## Shout Out Louds

Swedish indie rockers Shout Out Louds started gaining notoriety after their debut album in 2003. For their third release, "Work," they opted to change their style and head in a more simple direction.

Shout utilized producer Phil Ek, notable for his work with Fleet Foxes, Band of Horses and The Shins. Together they stripped down the band's previous style to create a simpler album. Piano replaced synths, most guitar work

is now acoustic, strings and horns are used sparingly and the drums are simple and clear. The overall tempo is slower, and the songs sound more meticulously planned and less hectic.

This change takes away the elements that made the band popular in the first place. Gone are the chaotic arrangements, the desperate vocals of Adam Olenius and the overall drama of the band.

What is left very well could have been an overly boring album, but the Shout Out Louds do their best to keep it interesting. Listeners get a band trying to be overly epic and dramatic with a calm attitude. The album rarely delivers a hard-hitting, memorable moment, but there are a few interesting pieces.

"Paper Moon" begins slowly with Olenius moaning over strings and gritty guitar and eventually builds up slightly, yet predictably. Many songs use an overabundance of repeated lyrics, becoming monotonous very quickly. The second track and second single "Fall Hard" is the top track on the album. It is catchy and has a quicker pace than many of the songs. It hits the emotional points it aims for and should stand out as one of the only tracks strong enough to stand alone.

Although "Work" is not a bad album, it is not a memorable one. Fans of the Shout Out Louds will keep this one playing, but many listeners will give up quickly.