

# péter's picks & pans



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Greatest Films

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Movie-STAR

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Award Finder

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In 2004, the Oscars will be awarded at the end of February, much earlier than usual, so for this January/February issue of *ONLINE*, I chose databases related to the Academy Awards. After all, chances are that there will be increased demand for information about movies, movie stars, and Oscar trivia. I have been a long-time fan of the awesome Internet Movie Database and the All Movie Guide (which are widely linked to or licensed by third parties). These are still my top choices when I want to find movie-related information. However, they are very well known, and I want to pick and pan sources specifically focused on the Academy Awards.

When it comes down to the tidbits and trivia of Oscar-related information, my pick is Tim Dirks' impressive Greatest Films site. When it's a "just the facts ma'am" type of ready-reference information, then my pick is Movie-STAR. My pan in the movie databases category is the Award Finder database from TV Guide, which provides a massive amount of misinformation across the board about the nominees and winners of Academy Awards. It is the perfect example of gut-wrenchingly sloppy programming and a "trainspotting" attitude.

What about the most authentic source, the Official Academy Awards Database [[www.oscars.org/awardsdatabase/index.html](http://www.oscars.org/awardsdatabase/index.html)]? It is neither pick nor pan. It is OK, but I thought its release after last year's Oscars was not only a day late, but was and still is a dollar short, as I've discussed elsewhere [[www.gale-group.com/free\\_esources/reference/peter](http://www.gale-group.com/free_esources/reference/peter)].



## the picks

### GREATEST FILMS

Greatest Films [[www.greatestfilms.org](http://www.greatestfilms.org)] is *the* dream trivia database about the Oscars' history. Tim Dirks, who really knows movies, understands extremely well how static, one-dimensional lists can be reorganized to present more meaningful lists with multiple access points. In addition to the multifaceted statistics, he also provides detailed and insightful (although sometimes too long) essays and the informed insider's facts (and OK, gossip) about the nominated and award-winning artists and movies, enhanced by many snippets from the scripts to illustrate his points.

What makes this source particularly interesting is its set of unusual statistics and lists, such as the lists of nominated films that did not win a single Oscar, or performances which were not even nominated in spite of their outstanding nature, such as Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*, or James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. These lists are enhanced by value-added information that can help to put into perspective their value or at least popularity, such as the marks indicating that the movie is among the pictures Tom Dirks considers to be the best 100 (and which, by the way, has a 67 percent overlap with the American Film

Institute's controversial list of the Top 100 movies). Beyond Oscar trivia, the site has many other interesting lists about movies.

### MOVIE-STAR

If the spelling of the name Movie-STAR looks odd, but still familiar to you, your intuition is functioning at its peak. Movie-STAR is a database used by Cuadra Associates, Inc. to demonstrate its powerful Cuadra STAR software [www.cuadra.com/demos/moviestar.html]. This software is the brainchild of Carlos Cuadra, whom many of you remember as being one of the key figures of the online information revolution since the early 1970s. He licensed the content of the CineBooks file, extracted the records that had Oscar-related information, and made a very good database out of it.

In addition to being an excellent software demonstration, it is also a perfect tool to look up facts about Oscar nominees and winners in every category or information you would not find in popular almanacs that—understandably—limit themselves to the top categories. It is swift, utterly intuitive, and practical for ready reference.

Movie-STAR also shows how competent and careful programmers can handle unusual data structures, finding a good solution. For example, we take it for granted that Oscars were always given for movies released in the previous year—Oscars given in Spring 2003 were for movies released in 2002 and are referred to as the 2002 Oscars. However, in the first 6 years of the Academy Award presentations, the year of the award was defined as a split year. For example, the 3rd Academy Award presentation in 1931 gave awards to movies released in 1929/1930, while the 4th Oscar ceremony honored the movies released in 1930/31. When you are searching for the 1930 Oscar winners (and/or nominees) Movie-STAR smartly and clearly lists the awards for both of the 3rd and 4th Oscars, with unmistakable labeling of the years. The only problem I found in the software, which is not critical here but could be in "serious" bibliographic databases, is the mishandling of accented characters, which are converted into a question mark symbol.

• Although the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® has awarded many deserving honors to its nominees over the years (**Academy Awards® Winners** from 1927/8 to the present), many other Great Films have been entirely overlooked, receiving **not even a single** Academy Nomination. Other Great Films received Academy Awards® Nominations but **failed** to win a single award. The same can be said for various great acting performances that were snubbed or passed over.

**Please note:** Oscar omissions and losses are also described for each year in the complete Oscar history found on this site.

- **Academy Awards®-Nominated Great Films**  
That Didn't Win a Single Oscar®
- **Great Films That Weren't Nominated**  
For A Single Academy® Award
- **'Best Pictures' Not Nominated for Best Picture**
- **Great Acting Performances That Weren't Nominated**  
For Academy Awards®
- **Great Actors, Great Actresses, and Great Directors**  
Who Have Not Won Actor, Actress, and Best Director Academy Awards®

**Note:** Films that have been selected as the *100 Greatest Films* are identified by a yellow star ★

*Interesting list of un-Oscared movies.*

Also, while the names of some of the awards changed throughout the years (along with the rules), a good controlled vocabulary (authority file) takes care of such name changes and

intelligently collocates all the Best Picture and Best Soundtrack awards even if they had a variety of names throughout the 75 years history of the Oscars. Of course, everything is

Winner?	Year	Category	Film Title	Nominee(s)
★	1929-1930	Best Actor	Disraeli	George Arliss
★	1929-1930	Best Actress	The Divorcée	Norma Shearer
★	1929-1930	Best Art Direction	The King of Jazz	Herman Rosse
★	1929-1930	Best Cinematography	With Byrd at the South Pole	Joseph T. Rucker, Willard Van Der Veer
★	1929-1930	Best Director	All Quiet on the Western Front	Lewis Milestone
★	1929-1930	Best Picture	All Quiet on the Western Front	
★	1929-1930	Best Screenplay	The Big House	Frances Marion
★	1929-1930	Best Sound	The Big House	Douglas Shearer
★	1929-1930	Best Sound Recording	(No specific film)	Paramount Studio Sound Department
★	1930-1931	Best Actor	A Free Soul	Lionel Barrymore
★	1930-1931	Best Actress	Min and Bill	Marie Dressler
★	1930-1931	Best Adapted Screenplay	Cimarron	Howard Estabrook
★	1930-1931	Best Art Direction	Cimarron	Max Ree
★	1930-1931	Best Cinematography	Tabu	Floyd Crosby
★	1930-1931	Best Director	Skippy	Norman Taurog
★	1930-1931	Best Original Screenplay	The Dawn Patrol	John Monk Saunders
★	1930-1931	Best Picture	Cimarron	

*Intelligent solution for split-year Oscars.*

hotlinked: Click on an actor, actress, director, or cinematographer to find out what other Oscar nominations and awards they may have received in their lifetime.

If you believe that creating such a database is child's play for the just out of high school wunderkinds to whom "Bogart" means selfishly smoking a marijuana joint and who think movie history started with *Terminator III*, just read my pan about the Award Finder database of TV Guide below.



the pan

#### TV GUIDE AWARD FINDER

TV Guide has a decent Web site, but the programmers of its Award Finder [www.tvguide.com/features/oscar/] database royally messed up the award information across all the categories and for most years, showing what damage can happen when ignorance meets incompetence and indifference.

You see ominous signs when you look at the awards of the first few Oscar years. You may believe that Janet Gaynor won two Best Actress awards for 1927 and shared another for 1928 with Louise Dresser, who, by the way, never won an Oscar. *Casablanca* and *Mrs. Minniver* seem to share the 1942 Best Picture Award, and there is no award for 1943. *Casablanca* actually won the 1943 award in 1944 for artistic and political reasons.

The above is just the tip of the iceberg. If you want to see the extent of the mess, display the winners together with the nominees in any category, or just try to find all the Oscar winning scores—then run for cover. Actually, you can't do that. As I submitted this manuscript and checked the site one more time for possible corrections by TV Guide, I realized that the Award Finder database had been unceremoniously dumped (retaining only the CineBooks Movie Guide). It was a wise

### Best Picture

*winners in boldface*

- 1931 CIMARRON
- 1932 GRAND HOTEL
- 1933 CAVALCADE
- 1934 IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT
- 1935 MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY
- 1936 GREAT ZIEGFELD, THE
- 1937 LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA, THE
- 1938 YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
- 1939 GOING WITH THE WIND
- 1940 REBECCA
- 1941 HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY
- 1942 CASABLANCA  
MRS. MINNIVER
- 1944 GOING MY WAY

▶ *Royally messed up Best Actress Awards.*

### AwardFinder

OSCAR™ NOMINEES AND WINNERS

### Best Actress

*winners in boldface*

- 1927 **Janet Gaynor** (SUNRISE)  
**Janet Gaynor** (7TH HEAVEN)
- 1928 **Louise Dresser** (SHIP COMES IN, A)  
**Janet Gaynor** (STREET ANGEL)
- 1929 **Mary Pickford** (COQUETTE)
- 1930 **Norma Shearer** (DIVORCEE, THE)  
**Marie Dressler** (MIN AND BILL)
- 1931 **Helen Hayes** (SIN OF MADELON CLAUDET, THE)
- 1933 **Katharine Hepburn** (MORNING GLORY)
- 1934 **Claudette Colbert** (IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT)
- 1936 **Bette Davis** (DAGEROUS)  
**Luise Rainer** (GREAT ZIEGFELD, THE)
- 1937 **Luise Rainer** (GOOD EARTH, THE)
- 1938 **Bette Davis** (JEZEBEL)

◀ *Missing and Misdated Best Picture Award Winners.*

choice, removing a rotten apple from the basket.

Given the lessons still to be learned from this now defunct database, I think this pan has value because it is still a good reminder of what a difference the software can make on the same content and how incompetent software people can turn good content into a mess. It serves as a reminder as to how important it is to check several sources when doing research, especially if something is obviously fishy. Since you can no

longer view the really bad implementation at TV Guide's own Award Finder site, I've placed an annotated gallery of screen shots of the mess that was made of Cinebooks by TV Guide's programmers on my own Web site [www2.hawaii.edu/~jacso/extra].

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