

## Featured in The Nerd League

### By Katie Knecht

Golden Globe nominations were released last month, a slew of them going to *Manchester By the Sea* (five, to be exact). The one that has the most weight, in my opinion, is Casey Affleck's nomination as Best Actor in a Drama Motion Picture, and definitively confirms, based on science, that Casey Affleck > Ben Affleck.

Yes, Ben has been in the film world for longer, had more starring roles, even produced *Manchester*, and we 90s children will never forget how he was betrayed in *Pearl Harbor*. But Casey has proven his abilities in *Gone Baby Gone* and *The Assassination of Jesse James By the Coward Robert Ford*, and now he solidifies his acting chops in this two-plus-hour film.

*Manchester By the Sea*, so named because of its location in a small coastal town in New England, is a convergence of several sad tales, with Affleck's portrayal as a perfect portrait of grief. When Lee Chandler, Affleck's character, gets the news that his brother has died, he returns to his hometown to deal with the ever-awkward logistics of funerals and his brother's high-school-aged son. The audience can see that Chandler is reserved, guarded, and even rude in his day-to-day interactions, but we don't know why until he returns home. As more and more of Chandler's past with his ex Randi, expertly played by Michelle Williams (though I don't know why they had to give her that haircut), the beginning of the film takes on a new dimension. It's a film that can be watched repeatedly with more gleaned each time.

To that end, it's important to note that this is not a plot-driven, action-ridden movie. It's a slow retrospective on grief of all kinds—at the loss of family, friends, and community. I'm a fan of these procedural, aesthetic looks into normal life (see [“Why the Slow Burn of Bloodline Is Worth It”](#)). You have been warned.

Affleck has the rare ability to be on screen but not take up too much attention. He can fade into the background while being the camera's focus. Affleck's character has become a shell of who he used to be, and that is incredibly clear in the minutia of his inflections and empty stares. Perhaps it's because of his [self-proclaimed discomfort with celebrity life](#) that he does not come off as overacting. Perhaps it's easiest to be “the other Affleck” and continually surprise people with his talent.

What saves *Manchester* from being plain depressing is the humor sprinkled throughout the script, played out with beautiful comedic timing. This is particularly well done in Affleck's scenes with Lucas Hedges, who plays his teenage nephew. The humor is at times dark, but it is real, and is not afraid to take risks.

In a scene with Michelle Williams, which one could consider the climax of the plot, Affleck encounters her and the two confront the grief between them after some time has passed. They are both raw and real, almost too real for the viewer to watch. Williams has so much to say that it tumbles out of her in disorder. Affleck attempts to tamp down the conversation, to stop her from expressing herself, and his bursts of sadness and incomplete phrases show that he cannot possibly handle what she has to say in that cold, frozen moment in the street.

It's a harrowing film set against a beautiful but desolate backdrop. Affleck's performance will haunt you in its delicacies and I'm confident that by the end, you'll be Team Casey.