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ENTERTAINMENT

Movies: Oscar Preview -- Your Winning Oscar Ballot Is Here!

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If you want to win big at your Oscar party and pick the winners of the Academy Awards, I have one simple piece of advice: don't watch any of the movies. If you watch the movies, you get caught up in what's actually good, what you loved and what you hated, rather than the only question that matters: what will win. It's liking betting on your college sports team. No one wants to bet against their own school. It's a great way to lose money.

Like most people, I don't follow my own advice. So here is my Oscar ballot with all its quirks and personal preferences. I can't guarantee you'll win your betting pool. But if you have watched a lot of the nominees, I can guarantee the Oscars will pick at least one winner that drives you absolutely bonkers. ("How could they possibly...??!!??") Hey, that's half the fun. I put the shorts at the bottom in their own section because most people don't see them and they're really hard to pick this year and worth discussing more fully.

Best Picture -- *Argo*

Best Director -- Steven Spielberg/*Lincoln*

Best Actor -- Daniel Day-Lewis/*Lincoln*

Best Actress -- Emmanuelle Riva/*Amour*

Best Supporting Actor -- Robert De Niro/*Silver Linings Playbook*

Best Supporting Actress -- Anne Hathaway/*Les Misérables*

Best Writing Original Screenplay -- *Django Unchained*/Quentin Tarantino

Best Writing Adapted Screenplay -- *Argo*/Chris Terrio

Best Animated Film -- *Wreck-It Ralph*

Best Foreign Film -- *Amour*

Best Documentary -- *Searching For Sugar Man*

Best Original Score -- *Life Of Pi*/Mychael Danna

Best Original Song -- "Skyfall" from *Skyfall*

Best Sound Editing -- *Life Of Pi*/Eugene Gearty and Philip Stockton

Best Sound Mixing -- *Les Misérables*/Andy Nelson, Mark Paterson and Simon Hayes

Best Production Design -- *Lincoln*/Rick Carter and Jim Erickson

Best Cinematography -- *Life Of Pi*/Claudio Miranda

Best Makeup and Hairstyling -- *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* -- Peter Swords King, Rick Findlater and Tami Lane

Best Costume Design -- *Anna Karenina*/Jacqueline Durran

Best Film Editing -- *Argo*/William Goldenberg

Best Visual Effects -- *Life Of Pi*/Bill Westenhofer, Guillaume Rocheron, Erik-Jan de Boer and Donald R. Elliott

Best Animated Short -- *Fresh Guacamole*

Best Live Action Short -- *Curfew*

Best Documentary Short -- *Open Heart*

BEST PICTURE

Amour

Argo
Beasts Of The Southern Wild
Django Unchained
Les Miserables
Life Of Pi
Lincoln
Silver Linings Playbook
Zero Dark Thirty

If I were voting, I'd pick *Amour*. I'd also be very happy if *Django Unchained* or *Beasts Of The Southern Wild* shocked everyone. (Not gonna happen.) I was decidedly not a fan of *Life Of Pi*, so that's the win that would frustrate and annoy me the most, which is what Oscar truly loves to do. But I'll go with the smart money on this.

The Winner: *Argo*

BEST DIRECTOR

Michael Haneke -- *Amour*
Ang Lee -- *Life Of Pi*
David O. Russell -- *Silver Linings Playbook*
Steven Spielberg -- *Lincoln*
Benh Zeitlin -- *Beasts Of The Southern Wild*

If i were voting, I'd pick Michael Haneke, under the quaint notion that the best film of the year must by definition include the best direction of the year. Haneke is a rigorous filmmaker whose movies I have admired but rarely loved. This is an unexpected late career turn which, while hardly sentimental, is far more open-hearted and emotional than one would expect from Haneke. It's the very reason this movie about an elderly couple facing declining health is not maudlin. For heaven's sake, go see it in a theater. This is not one for popping into your DVD player, pausing while you answer your phone or surf the web and so on. I'd also be delighted if Benh Zeitlin won for *Beasts*, despite that annoying "h" in his name. The three other movies were all strongly admired by voters so anything is possible here. But the smart money is on the one-time front runner *Lincoln*.

The Winner: Steven Spielberg -- *Lincoln*

BEST ACTOR

Bradley Cooper -- *Silver Linings Playbook*
Daniel Day-Lewis -- *Lincoln*
Hugh Jackman -- *Les Miserables*
Joaquin Phoenix -- *The Master*
Denzel Washington -- *Flight*

If I were voting, I'd be tempted to pick Joaquin Phoenix for his unlikable, unknowable, squirrely (in every sense :) turn in *The Master*. But ultimately I'd be ashamed to give it to anyone but Day-Lewis. The Academy feels the same way. Perhaps it's most notable for not feeling like a flashy, big performance. You just spend the movie wondering how they tracked Lincoln down and convinced him to star in this movie.

The Winner: Daniel Day-Lewis -- *Lincoln*

BEST ACTRESS

Jessica Chastain -- *Zero Dark Thirty*
Jennifer Lawrence -- *Silver Linings Playbook*
Emmanuelle Riva -- *Amour*
Quvenzhané Wallis -- *Beasts Of The Southern Wild*
Naomi Watts -- *The Impossible*

The smart money is on Jennifer Lawrence. But having seen *Amour*, I find it difficult to imagine any voter who watches it choosing anyone but Riva. She's an iconic French

actress, she would be the oldest winner in Oscar history, it would acknowledge this great film (and the performance of her co-star Jean-Louis Trintignant, which is just as marvelous) and it's her birthday on Oscar night! As a bonus, it's also one of the most remarkable screen performances you'll ever see. If you wanna play it safe, go for Lawrence, I guess. But there's a real chance for an upset here and you can't go with the obvious choice every single time or you'll just have the same ballot as most everyone else. Sometimes, I'd rather go with my heart and be wrong.

The winner: Emmanuelle Riva -- *Amour*

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

Alan Arkin -- *Argo*

Robert De Niro -- *Silver Linings Playbook*

Philip Seymour Hoffman -- *The Master*

Tommy Lee Jones -- *Lincoln*

Christoph Waltz -- *Django Unchained*

Everyone in this category has won before and you can make a convincing case for why any one of them will triumph (except for Hoffman). I think the smart money is on Tommy Lee Jones, though it's so close to call you might also say prognosticators are leaning towards Christoph Waltz, who is so hilariously good in *Django*. Waltz would certainly get my vote, though I think he belongs in the Best Actor category alongside Jamie Foxx and might go with the equally good Hoffman. But if my bet is right and Riva beats Lawrence for Best Actress, I think voters will want to acknowledge *Silver Linings Playbook* somehow. For me, De Niro has always been the sentimental favorite only Jones has gone so long in not winning) and it's his best performance in a long, long time.

The Winner: Robert De Niro -- *Silver Linings Playbook*

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Amy Adams -- *The Master*

Sally Field -- *Lincoln*

Anne Hathaway -- *Les Misérables*

Helen Hunt -- *The Sessions*

Jacki Weaver -- *Silver Linings Playbook*

The smart money is on Anne Hathaway, of course. She's almost as sure a bet as Daniel Day-Lewis; I'm sure Vegas betting on both of them closed long, long ago. My vote goes for Amy Adams and her very contained, controlling turn in *The Master*. Playing cold really suits her. But not as much as an Oscar will suit Hathaway for shaving her head and belting it out.

The winner: Anne Hathaway -- *Les Misérables*

BEST WRITING -- ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

Amour -- Michael Haneke

Django Unchained -- Quentin Tarantino

Flight -- John Gatins

Moonrise Kingdom -- Wes Anderson and Roman Coppola

Zero Dark Thirty -- Mark Boal

The smart money is on *Django Unchained* with *Moonrise Kingdom* a stalking horse now that *Zero Dark Thirty* is too tainted for liberal Oscar voters to embrace. (That's unfair but true; whatever its faults in capturing the complexity of the official record, *Zero Dark Thirty* is by no means pro-torture and endeavors to capture the moral dilemmas torturing people raise.) I'd be happy if *Amour* or *Moonrise* won; though *Moonrise* is not Anderson's best it's a return to form. But Tarantino's work is sterling and hilarious and bold. Anyone offended by the dialogue in the movie should actually be offended by the dialogue in *Gone With The Wind*, not this tale of a man's revenge against brutal slave owners that uses the

coarse, dehumanizing language of the day.

The Winner: *Django Unchained* -- Quentin Tarantino

BEST WRITING -- ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Argo -- Chris Terrio

Beasts Of The Southern Wild -- Lucy Alibar and Benh Zeitlin

Life Of Pi -- David Magee

Lincoln -- Tony Kushner

Silver Linings Playbook -- David O. Russell

The smart money is on *Argo*, which is fine with me. If I were voting from this lot, I'd choose *Beasts* -- I have no idea how this movie sprang from a stage play and it's so visually striking that it seems the best accomplishment of the group. As for *Lincoln*, I have no problem with the kerfuffle over the voting record of imaginary politicians from Connecticut. But my biggest problem with *Lincoln* was the screenplay, which buried a solid hour of *West Wing*-like political machinations with an unnecessary prologue and tiresome epilogue showing the rest of Lincoln's life, the end of the Civil War and the assassination when the story had ended with the passage of the 13th amendment. I also despised the hagiography of the noble black characters, from the noble soldier to the noble maid, both of whom are far more eloquent in their speechifying than anyone in sight (including Lincoln) and arise to give their speeches at various points in fear that we might otherwise forget what the 13th amendment was about. Worst of all was the White House servant who gets a funny feeling and just has to turn around and take one last long at Lincoln as he heads for the theater. I'll take Samuel L. Jackson's servant in *Django Unchained* any day. *Argo* messes with the historical record far more than *Lincoln* but they're just ignoring Canadians and that apparently is ok. (Sorry, Mom.)

The Winner: *Argo* -- Chris Terrio

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

Brave

Frankenweenie

ParaNorman

The Pirates! Band Of Misfits

Wreck-It Ralph

Frankly, none of these movies deserves the Oscar. *Brave* would be a lock if Pixar's first movie with a female heroine didn't have the unfortunate backstory of Pixar firing its first female director. *Frankenweenie* is an unnecessary expansion of a delightful short but the Academy does love Tim Burton. *ParaNorman* is a pretty good tale and the movie I'd probably vote for, edging out *Brave* just a tad. *The Pirates!* is silly fun but not quite as good as other Aardman movies. The smart money is on *Wreck-It Ralph*. Having just watched it, I'm astonished since it's the weakest of the bunch, mechanical and self-referential. Including references to old video games does not constitute character development. On the assumption that Oscar loves to annoy me...

The Winner: *Wreck-It Ralph*

BEST FOREIGN FILM

Amour

Kon-Tiki

No

A Royal Affair

War Witch

It seems like a lock but the foreign film category is notorious for bizarre choices. You have to watch all five foreign films in order to vote so the fact that *Amour* was such a popular film with voters overall is meaningless. Still, it would be a shocking upset if *Amour* didn't

win.

The Winner: *Amour*

BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

5 Broken Cameras

The Gatekeepers

How To Survive A Plague

The Invisible War

Searching For Sugar Man

The smart money is on *Searching For Sugar Man*. Ironically, *Argo*, *Lincoln* and *Zero Dark Thirty* are fictional films but have received all sorts of flak for their various fiddlings with the truth in order to tell a coherent story. On the other hand, *Searching For Sugar Man* is misleading, disingenuous or if you prefer downright false in its storytelling in order to create a simple sweet story that ignores a more complex truth. But no one seems to care. AND IT'S A DOCUMENTARY!! They're actually SUPPOSED to be accurate. *Searching For Sugar Man* tells the inspiring story of Sixto Rodriguez, an artist who recorded two very good albums in the early 1970s, neither of which made a ripple commercially in the U.S., and then slipped into obscurity. Little did he know that in apartheid South Africa his music became wildly popular and was an inspiration for rebellion among young white South Afrikaners who fought against the establishment. His albums were mainstays, alongside Simon & Garfunkel and other 1970s blockbusters. The rumor in that country was that Rodriguez had committed suicide onstage. So the film tells two stories: the story of an artist who works in construction and volunteers in various social justice projects in Detroit, Michigan. One day he finds himself whisked to South Africa where he's treated like a superstar. The other story is the one of fans who that country who become obsessed with Rodriguez and just want to find out information on him, only to discover the man isn't dead. It's like researching a story on Jimi Hendrix and suddenly finding yourself on the phone with Hendrix. Imagine your astonishment. It's all true. But the movie ignores the fact that Rodriguez was also rediscovered in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Australia, where he toured, recorded a live album and even opened for Midnight Oil. That spoils the Cinderella nature of the film, however, when you learn it happened before. Never mind that finding this out is even more interesting; clearly Rodriguez simply does not have the all-consuming drive for success that drives major artists who achieve popular fame. Further the movie is incredibly slow and plodding. His daughter shows us the website she stumbles on and reads the comment she left saying Rodriguez is her father. Then we see the South African who says he was told someone left a comment and how he read it and then he reads her comment all over again. We know! We just heard it! Every stage is laboriously detailed, which keeps Rodriguez off camera for half the movie, a stunt to maintain the mystery as to whether he's alive or not but which is meaningless since everyone who sees the movie knows that he is. Finally, the interviewing is poor, the many questions not asked mount up (such as how does this figure of rebellion for a certain segment of the country feel about concerts that seem to draw almost exclusively white people? if there's a black face in the audience in those concerts, I didn't see them. How could the film not discuss this wildly relevant issue, especially given his social activism? The entire movie feels like a simple-hearted cheat. It's not trying to be deceptive so much as telling the story as they know it. But that ignores the far more interesting story staring them in the face. My pick would be *How To Survive A Plague* followed very closely by *The Gatekeepers*. Both are on my best of the year list. So guess what...

The winner: *Searching For Sugar Man*

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

Anna Karenina -- Dario Marianelli

Argo -- Alexandre Desplat

Life Of Pi -- Mychael Danna

Lincoln -- John Williams

Skyfall -- Thomas Newman

Uninspired choices. I'd vote for *Skyfall* because it's good and action films rarely get recognized for their scores. But the smart money is on Mychael Danna and *Life Of Pi*, the least interesting work in a while from a good composer.

The Winner: *Life Of Pi* -- Mychael Danna

BEST ORIGINAL SONG

"Before My Time" from *Chasing Ice*

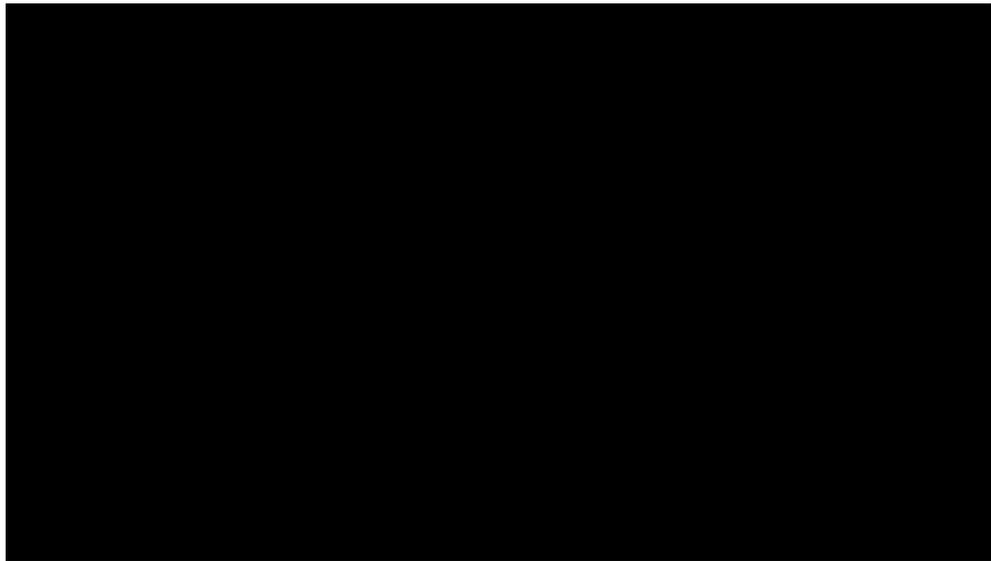
"Everybody Needs A Best Friend" from *Ted*

"Pi's Lullaby" from *Life Of Pi*

"Skyfall" from *Skyfall*

"Suddenly" from *Les Miserables*

The smart money is on "Skyfall" because it's a great James Bond theme song and absolutely deserves it. Plus, it's Adele!



The only remote competition is "Suddenly" from *Les Miserables* but I barely noticed the song and I know the stage musical very, very well. So barring an act of God...

The Winner: "Skyfall" from *Skyfall*

BEST SOUND EDITING

Argo -- Eric Aadahl and Ethan Van der Ryn

Django Unchained -- Wylie Stateman

Life Of Pi -- Eugene Gearty and Philip Stockton

Skyfall -- Per Hallberg and Karen Baker Landers

Zero Dark Thirty -- Paul N.J. Ottosson

The Winner: *Life Of Pi* -- Eugene Gearty and Philip Stockton

BEST SOUND MIXING

Argo -- John Reitz, Gregg Rudloff and Jose Antonio Garcia

Les Miserables -- Andy Nelson, Mark Paterson and Simon Hayes

Life Of Pi -- Ron Bartlett, D.M. Hemphill and Drew Kunin

Lincoln -- Andy Nelson, Gary Rydstrom and Ronald Judkins

Skyfall -- Scott Millan, Greg P. Russell and Stuart Wilson

The Winner: *Les Miserables* -- Andy Nelson, Mark Paterson and Simon Hayes

The smart money is on...well, actually the smart money has no idea. Sound Editing and Sound Mixing are two of the categories people feel completely at sea about, no matter how often the Oscars do a segment showing how it works. However, *Life Of Pi's* success is all about technical achievement, so that movie is going to dominate the tech awards and it will win Sound Editing. However, the people behind *Les Miserables* have done a good job of hyping the fact that they recorded the singing live on the set (something not technically feasible for the most part even a few years ago) and Sound Mixing is the one place where the movie will get recognized other than Anne Hathaway.

BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN

Anna Karenina -- Sarah Greenwood and Katie Spencer
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey -- Dan Hennah, Ra Vincent and Simon Bright
Les Miserables -- Eve Stewart and Anna Lynch-Robinson
Life Of Pi -- David Gropman and Anna Pinnock
Lincoln -- Rick Carter and Jim Erickson

I can talk myself into most anything but *The Hobbit* here. I'll deduct points from *Life Of Pi* because they'll dismiss it as all special effects. That leaves *Lincoln* as the favorite of the period pieces.

The Winner: *Lincoln* -- Rick Carter and Jim Erickson

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY

Anna Karenina -- Seamus McGarvey
Django Unchained -- Robert Richardson
Life Of Pi -- Claudio Miranda
Lincoln -- Janusz Makinski
Skyfall -- Roger Deakins

The smart money is on *Life Of Pi*. Personally, I would have voted for the sterling work of Richardson on *Django Unchained* -- it had fun with all the conventions of the spaghetti westerns and 1970s movies in general, but always put the story and characters ahead of jokey zoom shots and the like. Still, I hated the cotton candy color of *Life Of Pi* so....

The Winner: *Life Of Pi* -- Claudio Miranda

BEST MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING

Hitchcock -- Howard Berger, Peter Montagna and Martin Samuel
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey -- Peter Swords King, Rick Findlater and Tami Lane
Les Miserables -- Lisa Westcott and Julie Darnell

Special effects extravaganzas usually win though there's no love for *The Hobbit* from much of anyone. *Les Miserables* could sneak in here, but I'll still go with the splashy vote for all those furry hobbit feet.

The Winner: *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* -- Peter Swords King, Rick Findlater and Tami Lane

BEST COSTUME DESIGN

Anna Karenina -- Jacqueline Durran
Les Miserables -- Paco Delgado
Lincoln -- Joanna Johnston
Mirror, Mirror -- Eiko Ishioka
Snow White and the Huntsman -- Colleen Atwood

It's a three way race but *Lincoln* and *Les Miserables* were too dark and muddy. The pretty dresses of *Anna Karenina* will win because Hollywood loves glamour.

The Winner: *Anna Karenina* -- Jacqueline Durran

BEST FILM EDITING

Argo -- William Goldenberg

Life Of Pi -- Tom Squyres

Lincoln -- Michael Kahn

Silver Linings Playbook -- Jay Cassidy and Crispin Struthers

Zero Dark Thirty -- Dylan Tichenor and William Goldenberg

There's no obvious choice here but *Argo* is the closest to an action film spectacle, the sort that usually dominates this category.

The Winner: *Argo* -- William Goldenberg

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey -- Joe Letteri, Eric Saindon, David Clayton and R. Christopher White

Life Of Pi -- Bill Westenhofer, Guillaume Rocheron, Erik-Jan de Boer and Donald R. Elliott

Marvel's The Avengers -- Janek Sirrs, Jeff White, Guy Williams and Dan Sudick

Prometheus -- Richard Stammers, Trevor Wood, Charley Henley and Martin Hill

Snow White and the Huntsman -- Cedric Nicolas-Troyan, Philip Brennan, Neil Corbould and Michael Dawson.

The smart money, indeed all the money is on *Life Of Pi*. I couldn't stand the look and special effects of *Life Of Pi* (and the 3-D was, as always, pointless). I'd vote for *Marvel's The Avengers*. But there's little doubt that *Life Of Pi* will win. Another one of the evening's locks.

The Winner: *Life Of Pi* -- Bill Westenhofer, Guillaume Rocheron, Erik-Jan de Boer and Donald R. Elliott

BEST ANIMATED SHORT

Adam And Dog

Fresh Guacamole

Head Over Heels

The Longest Daycare

Paperman

The Winner: *Fresh Guacamole*

BEST LIVE ACTION SHORT

Asad

Buzkashi Boys

Curfew

Death Of A Shadow

Henry

The Winner: *Curfew*

BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT

Inocente

Kings Point

Mondays At Racine

Open Heart

Redemption

The Winner: *Open Heart*

The shorts categories used to be where you could really gain an edge back in the day. They used to be seen only in NYC and LA and if you actually took the time to head to a screening, you could often spot an obvious winner in at least two of the categories. Now the shorts are shown commercially in some major cities, which is great. I'm glad they get more attention. If you're lucky enough to live in a town where they're shown and you are going to bet on the Oscars, by all means head to the screening. Winning two or three categories that other people haven't a clue about is a great advantage.

Here in New York, the shorts are shown commercially. But for the past decade, they've also been screened at the Academy Theatre at the Lighthouse. The Lighthouse is a worthy group that fights vision loss through "prevention, treatment and empowerment." [You can learn more about their good work here.](#) (Can I get a discount on laser surgery? Uh, no.) I've never quite understood why they have a [movie theater there](#), but it's a great space for the New York branch of The Academy Of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. They have monthly screenings of classic Hollywood movies, usually with the director or star or some related talent present for a Q&A afterwards. It's very inexpensive (even if you're not a member) so [if you're in NYC or LA sign up and get their newsletter so you can catch word on future events.](#) They often sell out so you have to act fast.

It's a fun day catching the shorts, though with two and a half to three hours of material to get through, I wish they'd skip all the padding and get to the movies as quickly as possible. This year, the batch of shorts was mostly uninspiring and almost satirical in its button-pushing subject matter (Somali pirates, cancer, Afghanistan -- you name it. If it's a heart-tugging or politically explosive topic, the shorts are certain to go there.

The smart money on the animated shorts is on *Paperman*, I think, because it's had the most attention and posted itself online. But you have to attend screenings of all five shorts to vote so that doesn't really give it an advantage. *The Simpsons* short *The Longest Daycare* was solid but the 3-D was annoying and unnecessary and it felt simply like a very good episode of *The Simpsons*, which is often Emmy worthy but not special enough for this. Some liked the artiness of *Adam And Dog* and others the romance of *Paperman*. When I spoke to people at the screening, everyone had their own theory as to what would win and when -- but ask them what they liked the most and everyone said *Fresh Guacamole*. It's clever, visually innovative and has a nice little kicker at the end; plus it's the shortest of the five. I'm going with my heart on this one, especially since this category has been pretty funky in recent years and gone with the cutting edge picks.

The live action shorts are hard to call as well, with no real standout. The smart money is on *Curfew* and I'm inclined to agree. *Asad* and *Buzkashi Boys* have exotic settings but cancel each other out. *Death Of A Shadow* is a murky, poorly thought out *Twilight Zone* episode. And the old man with dementia in *Henry* can only remind everyone that *Amour* was much much better. that leaves *Curfew*, which has an appealing sweetness amidst black humor and a nice little moment at the end.

I didn't get a chance to catch the documentary shorts -- one big reason is that they're so darn long. Thanks to digital cameras, independent filmmakers aren't hamstrung by the expense of film stock. They can shoot and shoot and shoot to their heart's delight, which means the documentary shorts are increasingly flabby and show no discipline in their editing. Forty minutes is a novella length for movies -- not short enough to be a short and not long enough to be a feature. Tighter is almost always better. Just going on the cleverest title and the most heart-tugging of a group of heart-tugging tales, I'm going with *Open Heart*.

Good luck on your Oscar pool! Let me know which category I'm crazily wrong about and whether you win.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz

