

Road to the Oscars 2013: Best Live Action Short

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Everyone has a prediction in the Best Picture, or the acting awards, but when it comes to the Short Film categories the field becomes much more obscure. These categories can certainly make or break your Oscar poll, and they definitely give you an edge if you guess correctly. "Guessing" is the right word to use, as most people haven't heard much about them, much less seen the actual shorts nominated. Chosen from tons of films from around the world, the Live Action Short field is surely one of the most competitive ones.

These petite cinematic gems must qualify through specific film festivals, or by winning a Student Academy Award, a pretty tough achievement to say the list. After watching all five of these films, I found the common denominator is length, running about 20 minutes each. They deviate from the conception of "the shorter the better"; however, they most definitely will make up a nice feature-length program in theaters. Here are the nominees for the 85th edition, and their Oscar gold possibilities according to this writer's opinion.

Asad – Bryan Buckley and Mino Jarjoura



One of two nominees focused on childhood in war-torn countries, *Asad* tells the story of a Somali kid debating between a sordid future in sea piracy, or an honorable life as a fisherman. A great effort to shine some humanity on the Somali situation that always gets forgotten in the midst of violence. The film serves more as a social statement than an extremely compelling film. Director Bryan Buckley casted only Somali refugees in South Africa, a commendable gesture by all means. Furthermore, since the nomination was announced, Buckley launched a petition for the US and South African governments to allow the young cast to attend the ceremony. Their attendance would be a great reward, as the films feels far from Oscar glory.

Can it win? This category is open ground for anyone. Nonetheless, it seems like if the Academy will honor a socially conscious story of childhood in terrible circumstances, it would be the more accomplished Afghan entry. From 1 to 5, I see *Asad*'s charmingly simple story as a 1. The exposure for the issue is the more probable prize.

Buzkashi Boys – Sam French and Ariel Nasr



This *Kite Runner* influenced short follows two young impoverished Afghan kids in the streets of Kabul. One is the son of a third-generation blacksmith; the other is an orphan who aspires to become a rider in the Afghan version of Polo called Buzkashi. Produced by the non-profit organization The Afghan Film Project, the film is hopeful about the future of the devastated nation even after years of brutal war. Filmed on location, the story thrives on its realism, yet falls into some inevitable clichés. Still, this nominated short has far more chances at winning than some of the others because it will capitalize on the social relevance of its subject.

Can it win? Yes, I would rate its chances as a 3 out of 5. It is evident that the Academy is feeling love for these types of stories. And if they were going to bestow the honor on one of the two, it would be this one. The film has already earned awards for its beautiful cinematography in several festivals, which most likely pushed it to the nomination. Surely a serious contender for the award.

Curfew – Shawn Christensen



The only American entry, and also the only English language one for that matter, is a darkly comedic story of a young man at the brink of suicide who is given purpose by taking care of his young niece. This is a touching tale of how people change with time, and the way a little love can go a long way. Certainly

it's the more familiar, and close-to-home narrative out of the bunch. With witty humor, touching moments, chemistry between the two leads, and a great dance sequence at a bowling alley, *Curfew* is sure to move so hearts. Unfortunately, as much as I enjoyed this film, it probably might be a bit too ordinary to defeat the more worldly opponents.

Can it win? It is a long shot, but it is still not completely off the race. Its possibilities are probably 2 out of 5; yet, it might gain some followers because it is a moving story in the American tradition of melodramas. People like what they know. Having said that, I wouldn't put my hope on this one despite being one of my favorites. Its charm may prove insufficient against the foreign accomplishments in the field.

Death of a Shadow – Tom Van Avermaet and Ellen De Waele



The standout film out of the five provides originality both visually, and in subject matter. This magical realist story centers on a dead soldier who must use a specially devised camera to capture the shadows of 10,000 deceased people, before he can get another chance at spending one hour with his love in the land of the living. Beautifully created, the short resembles the aesthetics of the dark magical worlds of Jean-Pierre Jeunet, combined with a unique story of connection between life and death. There is remarkable production design, fantastical sets, and added to these, there is a touching human story. Undoubtedly, *Death of a Shadow* is the most deserving, and original of the nominees. Its inventiveness, and gorgeous accomplishment it creating an otherworldly atmosphere, should not be ignored by the Academy.

Can it win? Definitely it can, and it should. It stays away from the more conventional stories of the other four nominees, plus it merges war-related imagery with a fantastical world that functions by the art-like quality of the last shadow casted in a person's life. Pretty damn creative I must say. From 1 to 5, I'd venture to say it is a 4. It will be a hard film to dismiss when compared to rest of the nominated shorts.

Henry – Yan England



This film could also be called the shorter-lighter-*Amour* of the year. Just like in the Haneke masterpiece, this short explores love in the deteriorating state of an elderly couple. Henry suffers from Alzheimer's, and is unable to remember vital moments of his life. Using very interactive flashbacks to retell his story, the director choreographs memories with the present in an impressive seamless manner. A really nice piece of filmmaking overall; however, it is more noteworthy for its technical achievement than for an original take on a known subject. *Henry* packs great performances, marvelous skills, but nothing overly daring.

Can it win? Probably not, its chances seem like 2 out of 5 in comparison to the others. With *Amour's* certain win, it seems improbable a similar film in terms of theme might win. On the other hand, some might say that the same attention given to Haneke's film might push this short's appeal. It is a possibility, but an unlikely one I would say.

Who will win: To a certain extent this is an unpredictable category since patterns are much less apparent than in "bigger" categories. Knowing this, I would say the film with the best chance is *Death of a Shadow*, simply because of the extremely well done mixture of originality and cinematic beauty. If the Academy decides to go with a safer choice, the runner-up would be the Afghan children's tale *Buzkashi Boys*, for its outstanding depiction of a hopeful nation in transition. I would go with the *Shadow*.