

## Predicting the 2012 Academy Award Nominees

Written by Mike Schulz

Thursday, 12 January 2012 13:19

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Another year; another set of Mike's sure-to-be-off-the-mark-with-at-least-a-couple-choices-in-just-about-every-category Oscar predictions!

The following are my best guesses for the 2012 Academy Award nominations – subject to change within minutes of publication – which will be announced on the morning of Tuesday, January 24. (The ceremony will be held on the evening of Sunday, February 26.)

### Best Picture

*The Artist*

*The Descendants*

*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

*The Help*

*Hugo*

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*Midnight in Paris*

*Moneyball*

As you've likely heard, in yet *another* desperate attempt to keep the Oscar race "fresh" and "vital," the Academy has decreed that this year will see five to 10 nominees in the Best Picture category, with films needing to secure at least 5 percent of first-place rankings on voters' ballots – or roughly 250 number-one votes – to make the lineup. (Theoretically, this should mean that as many as 20 movies could make the lineup, but let's hope Academy officials don't figure that out, or they'll just change the damned rules again.) With that in mind, I'm banking on seven contenders in this category ... and am a little worried that there might only be six.



*The Artist*, *The Descendants*, and *Midnight in Paris* have all been short-listed by the five most reliable indicators of Best Picture heat: the Producers Guild of America (PGA), Directors Guild of America (DGA), and Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards, the Critics' Choice Awards (CCA), and the Golden Globes. So they're in. *The*

*Help*

is Tate Taylor

missed with the DGA, which wasn't very surprising, and

*Hugo*

wasn't cited for SAG's Best Ensemble prize, which

*also*

wasn't surprising, so they feel safe, too.

*Dragon Tattoo*

is a really late-bloomer, having been excluded from top contention in December's SAG-, CCA-, and

Globe-nomination announcements. But a January surge from the producers' and directors' (and writers' and cinematographers' and art directors' ...) guilds makes it a likely choice. Meanwhile, I should be feeling more confident about the PGA-, CCA-, and Globe-nominated

*Moneyball*

, but the lack of a DGA nod for Bennett Miller stings a bit; I'm going to predict, and

*hope*

, that overall affection for the film – and for the SAG-cited Brad Pitt and Jonah Hill – carries it through.

And that, I think, is where this Best Picture train stops. Once upon a time, I would've thought that given the intense admiration it elicits among die-hard fans, finding 250 voters willing to

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place *The Tree of Life* at the top of their ballots wouldn't be all that difficult. Given the movie's near-complete dissing by the precursors, with the PGA even unable to find room for it among a roster of 10 titles, I may have been wrong about that.

anti-  
*agon Tattoo*

*War Horse* is the  
Dr

,  
a movie that started strong (with PGA, CCA, and Globe nods) but eventually wilted so badly that not only was Steven Spielberg denied DGA recognition, but the movie was also dissed by the writing, art-direction, and cinematography guilds. As for

*Bridesmaids*

, nominated by the PGA, SAG, and Globes, it would've made for an enjoyable 10th inclusion in the past couple of Oscar races but will probably have to remain content with its happily surprising precursor run. With Globe and PGA nominee

*The Ides of March*

the only other mildly conceivable contender here, your Best Picture lineup is no doubt somewhere amidst the aforementioned titles. Many apologies to all of the incredibly patient Harry Potter fans out there; it ain't gonna happen this year, either.



### Best Director

Woody Allen, *Midnight in Paris*

David Fincher, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

Michel Hazanavicius, *The Artist*

Terrence Malick, *The Tree of Life*

Martin Scorsese, *Hugo*

So here's the thing: Given his film's scope, its ambition, the degree to which he pulled it off, and his status as a living legend among directors, I don't see how Malick misses in this category. Even his being ignored by the DGA isn't necessarily a deal-breaker; when the Academy's directors' branch veers from the guild's choices, they nearly always go with the directors of challenging, edgy, oftentimes polarizing works with passionate fan bases but minimal support in other categories. In the last decade alone, Oscar nominees without an accompanying DGA citation include David Lynch for *Mullholland Dr.*, Pedro Almodóvar for *Talk to Her*, Fernando

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Meirelles for

*ity of God*

, Paul Greengrass for

*United 93*

, and Julian Schnabel for

*The Diving Bell & the Butterfly*

, and Malick and

*Tree of Life*

would seem to fit that assemblage to perfection.

C

But here's the *other* thing: Among the five directors who *were* short-listed by the DGA, whose place does he usurp? With his film the current Best Picture front-runner and himself the likely Best Director victor, Hazanavicius seems a done deal. Scorsese will be rewarded for

*Hugo*

's technical brilliance and artful argument for film preservation (way to play to your base,

Marty!), and in case you hadn't noticed, 2011 was Woody's latest comeback year (did you catch that incredible, two-part

*American Masters*

bio on PBS?), so chalk up a seventh Best Director nod for each of them. Fincher's DGA recognition was a tad surprising, but

*Dragon Tattoo*

's increasing precursor strength bodes well for him, as does – I would

*hope* –

the residual guilt felt for his losing last year's Best Director Oscar for

*The Social Network*

.

So my guess is that Malick will instead steal a spot from the DGA's fifth contender, *The Descendants*

' Alexander Payne. I fully concede that this might just be my anti-

*Descendants*

bias talking, as Payne hasn't yet missed a single precursor nod, and his latest outing is

enormously well-regarded. But as he's guaranteed a nomination for the movie's screenplay,

does Payne really need another one here, especially when his direction isn't noticeably stronger

– and, in my humble opinion, is actually a good deal weaker – than Malick's? Plus, let's not

forget the rather shocking omission of

*Inception*

's Christopher Nolan last year; unpredictable dissings happen

*all the time*

in this category. I'm going out on a major limb (pun intended) and saying

*Tree of Life*

over

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*Descendants*

, although I'd love to see

*Moneyball*

's Bennett Miller and

*Drive*

's Nicolas Winding Refn awarded the recognition they deserve and likely won't receive. Oh, and as for the chances of Steven Spielberg? Insert the lame- or wounded-horse metaphor of your choice.



**Best Actor**

George Clooney, *The Descendants*

Leonardo DiCaprio, *J. Edgar*

Jean Dujardin, *The Artist*

Brad Pitt, *Moneyball*

Michael Shannon, *Take Shelter*

I'm hardly one for statistical analysis, even though I am working on it through incessant repeat viewings of *Moneyball*. So let's just say that the percentage of performers who earn SAG, CCA, and Globe nominations and then *don't* go on to earn Oscar nominations is really, really low. (Over the past five years, it's only happened to

*The Departed*

's Leonardo DiCaprio,

*A Mighty Heart*

's Angelina Jolie,

*Lars & the Real Girl*

's Ryan Gosling, and

*Black Swan*

's Mila Kunis.) I consequently feel incredibly secure about predicting citations for Clooney, Dujardin, and Pitt, the latter of whom seems more and more assured of an eventual victory. DiCaprio also nabbed the precursor trifecta, but

*J. Edgar*

's middling reception puts him on shakier ground; I think he'll still make the cut for fine,

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decade-crossing work under occasionally trying circumstances, for his “bravery” in playing a (maybe) gay historical figure, and for delivering so many recent performances – in

*The Departed*, *Revolutionary Road*, *Shutter Island*,

and

*Inception* –

for which he was probably on the bubble for a Best Actor nod but didn't break into the top five.

It's that fifth slot that's a major head-scratcher. SAG nominee Demián Bichir? Quite possibly, though his *A Better Life* turn is a low-key (albeit lovely) performance in a mostly forgotten film.

Globe nominee Ryan Gosling? Maybe, but while he got the nod for

*The*

*Ides of March*

, he might wind up canceling himself out with additional votes for

*Drive*

. Globe nominee Michael Fassbender? He's a critics' darling for his

*Shame*

portrayal, but those who don't care for his NC-17-rated drama positively

detest

it, and Fassbender's lack of a SAG nomination feels pretty telling. Barring a huge, unexpected rally for either

*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*

's Gary Oldman or

*Rampart*

's Woody Harrelson, then, I'm going to throw up my hands and pick Shannon, whose

said-to-be-astonishing work has gone strangely ignored in the precursor stages. It would be odd for anyone without SAG, CCA,

or

Globe nominations to make the cut in the Oscars' acting races, but there are a few examples to back up the possibility. Such as

*Biutiful*

's Javier Bardem. Or

*Crazy Heart*

's

Maggie Gyllenhaal. Or ...

*Revolutionary Road*

's Michael Shannon.

