2016 in Cinema; Third Time's the Charm

The film industry set a new record for domestic box office gross (the revenue from sold tickets in Canada and the United States) at a staggering $11.4 billion. Of that, Buena Vista Pictures (Disney) became the first studio in history to gross over $3 billion in that time, including the top four titles for the year.

Another record set included a higher than usual number of actual tickets sold, and people who went to the theatres to see movies, becoming the highest selling year of the 21st century. Adding in the record setting number of movies released and high number of blockbusters, there's one adjective that continues to stay with me when describing 2016 at the movies. Big.

The last twelve months have been a tumultuous, divisive time across the political, social, and spiritual landscape. I suppose this means we should be less surprised the fashion of escapism at the multiplex is a growing consumer trend and craving from modern audiences. The silver lining, however, has been the (nothing short of spectacular) display of filmmaking that was offered.

Two years ago I spent the year chronicling my tickets and experiences at the movies for the first time, and continued to do so on a more casual scale in 2015. This year, I returned to keeping a full and complete record of my movie-viewing habits and tickets from the films I saw. Like the box office I bought from, this too was a year for my own record books.

I nearly doubled the number of films seen in any previous calendar year, and began researching and viewing movies both more critically and attentively. I also had the great fortune to begin writing film reviews, theatre reviews, and stories about movies for Oakville News, and this has truly begun to focus and direct my observations and preferences.

This (now annual) essay is just as precise and astute as many of my thoughts and musings about movies usually are, but this is also not a professional publication. These are my casual ideas too, and remains an unfiltered testimony of my year in movies. And yes, my predictions and guesses for the Academy Awards on February 26th are also at the end.

So it begins in a similar fashion that 2015 ended; a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…

PART ONE -   A SHORT HISTORY AND RECOUNT OF THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS

After an unofficial year in 2015 without a physical record kept of the movies I saw, I began again in 2016 by fully documenting all visits to the movies. It was somewhat nice to re-start my old habits, and was immediately gratifying. Most of this year was based in Oakville, Ontario (where I live, just outside Toronto), though there were a number of special visits over 2016 too.

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The largest noticeable difference from last year was the number of movies I saw while travelling, or while visiting different places. This used to be planned and avoided to maximize my vacation time, though this year I tried the opposite, and soon made it a point of visiting a movie theatre while in different places. It became something of an experiment to see what movie going and movie watching was like in different cities, parts of the country, and even parts of the world. Some highlights this year included New York City, LA, Orlando and Hawai'i.

I ended up seeing movies in ???? different cities, across three countries in six different states and provinces. There was a surprising diversity in style, price, and attitudes wherever I went, but found the biggest differences mostly between different parts of the United States. In the USA, going to the movies is made much more of a special event than in Canada, but the intensity and pressure of spectacle didn't vary. Upstate New York theatres in Buffalo and Niagara Falls had the same vigour and pizzazz that I experienced at Universal Studios in Hollywood.

My Toronto movie going also continued and intensified this year, most notably in September, beginning with the Toronto International Film Festival, and continuing to now. After TIFF, I began working as the film critic for Oakville News, and soon began attending far more screenings in the downtown area. This also became true for special events and new release films in the city. I did, however, twice use this strategy to see limited releases ahead of Canadian releases in New York City, in both April and October.

Movie going was a regular event every four to five days in the Spring, though really stalled in June and July, working on a live production and working on a contract in Muskoka. But starting mid-August, my rapid pace began again, and from September - January, I averaged about one new release film every three days. (Some I would see multiple at once, and there was no real pattern between viewing dates.) Most of my travelling was also around Halloween and November, with intense Oscar-film viewing in December.

Lastly, it's worth noting how widely my diversity of films and events in cinemas became this year. I attended several live events and feature shows, as well as nine repeat movies, for a total of about 130 visits to the movies in 2016. It was a far more concentrated year than ever before, and a pace I expect to (and hope to) maintain for the future in my new job.

PART TWO -   THE NUMBERS AND STATISTICS, PREFERENCES, AND COMPANIONS

Listed below are some of my habits, and some small details I found interesting. To save some space and not bore you with very specific statistics, I have stuck to the standout points and general comments. It should be also noted special events on screen and repeat viewings of the movies are not included in this set of data. This is an account of the one hundred and thirteen (113) different films I saw this year.

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There are more observations than last year when I did not consciously track some facts over the year, and all facts come from my saved movie tickets and journal from the expereinces. Some categories, like genre and days of week, I had to omit completely this year, not simply due to lack of information, but for fluidity here, and neither were particularly missed when they were not included. (For those curious, I had the most shows on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and the least on Mondays. My most common genres were drama and animation, with my least common were Western and Horror.)

MY PERSONAL RATINGS

After my initial viewing of each film, I would grade them on a scale between zero and four stars, going up in half star increments. This is the same rating scale used by many acclaimed journalists, including the late Pulitzer Prize winner Roger Ebert, hailed perhaps as the greatest movie writer in the history of film. Below are the averages of the 113 seen films this year.

Simply because I saw more than double the number of movies from last year, the number of exceptional films was diluted. There's still an overwhelmingly obvious trend to scores higher on list, because I prioritize seeing films I have better senses (or reviews) will be good movies as opposed to less so. I was also surprised by the majority 3 star films, and the percentage of movies in this category is 0.3% identical to last year's.

4 Stars (Near Perfect) :	10.6%
3 1/2 Stars (Excellent) :	14.4%
3 Stars (Great) :	22.1%
2 1/2 Stars (Good) :	19.9%
2 Stars (Okay) :	14.3%
1 1/2 Stars (Bad):	8.7%
1 Star (Very Bad):	6.7%
1/2 Star (Dreadful):	2.3%
0 Stars (Brendan Fraser):	1%

It may also be worth mentioned since the movie watching year has ended, I have caught up with some movies I missed on Netflix. If these titles were included, the whole scale would be far more balanced, and that percentage of 1/2 - 1 1/2 star movies would skyrocket.

SHOWTIMES

The other major detail I noted was the time of day in which I watched these movies. I put them into five categories of times of the day: Before 2:00PM, between 2:00 AND 6:00PM, between 6:00 and 8:00PM, between 8:00 and 10:00PM, and after 10:00PM. Originally, I had the late night time at 9:30PM, but it made the count disproportionally low, and when I wanted was a number reflecting the number of late night shows, it wasn't being accurately reflected.

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These numbers were sourced far more throughly than last year with a collection of tickets to show the data. The patterns, oddly enough, were much different from my findings in 2014 and 2015. Most of the shows (almost a quarter) began between 2:00PM and 6:00PM, avoiding my past trend of typical evening showtimes. What was different this year was the greater number of morning shows, especially in the spring months, that began before 2:00PM. There was no instant source I could detect on the reason, other than the reliable smaller crowds and discounted prices.

Also like last year, the most found tickets documented was between 7:00 and 7:15. This is because many event screenings and special preview shows (one of my favourites to attend) usually have a start time in this window.

PEOPLE AND VIEWING COMPANIONS

Like past years, this section has been cut from the essay due to privacy in the digital world, and to protect the names of those featured as part of my movies this year. This is a forced quality of the writing when I make this essay available for public viewing to everyone. It's important we all stay safe.

I will say like last year, I went to the movies this year with a wide range of people, from grandparents, friends, neighbors, siblings, co-workers, and classmates. The main category missing this year is girlfriends (which have been absent since early 2015). This also means last year's most frequent companion, said girlfriend(s), was not the same. Instead, it was another good friend of mine who also enjoys his movie-going habits. To put a name, we'll call him the generic "Chris", with fifteen movies seen with me this year. There was also one very special screening, where a group of 26 friends of mine all came out one sunny June morning for a special release day show of *Finding Dory* in Imax 3D.

While not as extensive as my past work may have been, this concludes the numerical analysis for my movie-going in 2016. Now on to the fun part…which ones were the best.

PART THREE -   MY FAVOURITE MOVIES, AND WHAT
I THINK ARE THE BEST

One of the fixtures of any resolute critic in the film industry is their Top 10 Lists. These lists show everyone's opinion on the best movies of the year, and you can learn a great deal by watching the differences between the wide range available. (The same could be said about the debates writers enjoy having after everyone reveals the lists they have carefully prepared.)

The first part of this section is a list of this year's best movies; including any movies I gave my highest score to (4 of 4 stars; a 9/10 or higher) followed by two versions of the Best 10. The first my personal Top 10 movies from 2016, and the second is a more traditional Top 10 without the consideration of extreme bias or more peculiar tastes.

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NOTE: **In previous years, this appeared as three lists: Tyler's 10 Favourite, Tyler's 10 Best, and the Definitive 10 Best. The latter two have been combined for 2016 as my shrewdness and confidence grows as a critic, with the hope someday these lists will eventually be summarized into just one sometime in the future.**

FOUR STAR MOVIES

When reviewing my list of seen movies and scores from this year, I looked to see what movies I had - upon my initial viewing - deemed worthy of a perfect score. This does not mean they were the best movies of the year, nor are movies with a low rating inferior, but simply put: I would review them at four stars out of four.

I was surprised after counting to find 11 movies reached a four star merit this year. This is the same number of 4 star movies as last year, despite having seen double the number of total films. I still see fewer bad movies than I do commonly recommended and/or lauded ones - though I suppose with the greater quantity both that I've seen and being released in general - the majority of this number comes from good or average ones.

The movies are listed below in chronological order of their release dates in 2016. These are my four star movies for 2016. (A * marks a Best Picture nominee).

ZOOTOPIA
CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR
KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS
THE EXCEPTION
MOONLIGHT*
ARRIVAL*
THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN
LA LA LAND*
A MONSTER CALLS
LION*
20TH CENTURY WOMEN

There were particular qualities of each that earned them the designation here, but all listed showed a number of exemplary qualities. They were entertaining, engaging, important, poignant, palatable and well produced motion pictures, and I'm glad to have seen all of them.

In previous years I've also listed broadcasts, plays, events, and special screenings I gave a perfect score to in this section. While there were many great events and special shows I attended, none of them were quite so high to earn a four star rating. The closest, maybe worth a honourable mention, was National Theatre Live's broadcast of their hit play HANGMEN in May.

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This list is not my "official top 10", but rather my ten personal favourite movies this year. This is my variation without adjustment for extreme preferences, nor opinions that may skew my ratings or thoughts in movies. This list is selfishly for me and me alone - but contain some overlooked titles from the year as well. This was an ongoing list I kept, adjusted, and changed as I saw new movies throughout the year.

Here are my ten favourite movies of the year.

1. 20th Century Women
2. La La Land
3. Arrival
4. Moonlight
5. Zootopia
6. Hacksaw Ridge
7. The Edge of Seventeen
8. Lion
9. Captain America: Civil War
10. Silence

For the first time since I began publishing this essay, my favourite movie is different from the actual title I thought was the best. (Though both these titles are #1 and #2 on the two lists in swapped positions.) While *La La Land* had superior technical skill, production value, skill and emotional resonance, *20th Century Women* used it's surprising intelligence and sincere fascination to create a gratifying movie like no other. I was thoroughly impressed, humbled, and entertained for the entirety of both; *20th Century Women*'s subtle surprise as a diamond in the rough was enough to classify it as my favourite.

There are some other titles on my favourites list unique from the other "Best Ofs", such as independent features like *The Edge of Seventeen* and *Silence*. The former used brutal honesty to create great humour and authenticity rare in comedy and teenage movies, while the latter is one of the best faith movies produced this century. You can feel Martin Scorsese's enthusiasm and passion for the project in every second of *Silence*, and I felt a great passion for it too as a practising Christian myself. I think it's this year's underrated gunner from the Oscars, and it's ultimately how it crept into my top ten favourites.

The only other unique title shown here is *Captain America: Civil War*. To me, it was the blockbuster movie that soared with the gravitas like the original *Iron Man* did so long ago. It had the emotional crest and moral backbone missing from last year's *Age of Ultron*, and was in some ways more exciting to see the final conflict for next year's *Avengers Infinity War* begin. Pure dazzle, but it doesn't have the maturity or concentration as many of this year's best, leaving it close to the bottom of the list.

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<u>TYLER'S TOP TEN OF 2016</u>

This is it. The best of the best. Factoring skill, art, enjoyment, quality, technique, and legacy thus far, these are what I believe to be the best movies of 2016.

1. La La Land
2. 20th Century Women
3. Moonlight
4. Arrival
5. Hell or High Water
6. Zootopia
7. Fences
8. Hacksaw Ridge
9. Lion
10. Manchester by the Sea

This is where *La La Land* really shines. I know there's heavy controversy on the number of awards it's been winning, and I do think the overwhelming praise is highly overrated. If you haven't seen it yet, go in with no knowledge or expectations of the product beyond knowing it's a modern Golden Hollywood musical.

If you have seen it, you can appreciate it's history, complexity, respect, MORE MORE MORE

And you may notice eight of the nine best picture nominees are also included on this list. The only one absent is the cunning and roof-raising *Hidden Figures*, which was a fascinating true story about the black, female scientists at NASA who saved the Apollo missions in the early 1960s. It was a great movie, but simply wasn't better produced or told than the other options. It's a crowded field with a high number of great movies, and gets outshined by the other choices. (Especially the better controlled *Hell or High Water* and *Fences*, which tackle similar themes.)

Next up is my list specifically about acting. This is the area I have the most insight to being a performer and thespian myself, and find there is the most worth mentioning here than any other job. (Movies need one director, for instance. But they need a lot of actors). There's no maximum, minimum, ranking, order, or restrictions to this list. Any actor whom I found exceptional, noteworthy, memorable, or worth making an effort to see I've included below. Each of these is organized into one of five categories - lead and supporting roles for either gender, and then cameo appearances (smaller, memorable roles.)

Returning from last year, I've also included a list of "Winners", and "Losers". These are actors from multiple projects this year who were either featured in a number of great things, or a number of bad things. You'll find both examples here, and if they are listed in this section, you'll find them omitted from the regular lists, too.

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You can see all the names and their characters below. These are my favourites of the year, listed and organized alphabetically.

LEAD ACTOR
Casey Affleck as Lee Chandler (Manchester by the Sea)
Josh Brolin as Eddie Mannix (Hail, Caesar!)
Benedict Cumberbatch as Dr. Steven Strange (Doctor Strange)
John Goodman as Howard Stambler (10 Cloverfield Lane)
Ryan Gosling as Sebastian (La La Land)
Tom Hanks as Cptn. James "Sully" Sullenberger (Sully)
Michael Keaton as Ray Kroc (The Founder)
Ryan Reynolds as Wade Wilson/Deadpool (Deadpool)
Andy Samberg as Connor4Real (Popstar: Never Stop Never Stopping)
Neel Sethi as Mowgli (The Jungle Book)
Denzel Washington as Troy Maxon (Fences)
Stephan James as Jesse Owens (Race)

LEAD ACTRESS
Amy Adams as Louise Banks (Arrival)
Annette Bening as Dorothea Fields (20th Century Women)
Lily Collins as Mieke de Jong (The Exception)
Marion Cotillard as Marianne Beausejour (Allied)
Auli'il Cravlaho as Moana (Moana)
Ellen DeGeneres as Dory (Finding Dory)
Taraji P. Henson as Katharine Goble (Hidden Figures)
Marina Nalwanga as Phiona Mutesi (Queen of Katwe)
Ruth Negga as Mildred Loving (Loving)
Natalie Portman as Jackie Kennedy (Jackie)
Emma Roberts as Venus "Vee" Delmonico (Nerve)
Hailee Steinfeld as Nadine Franklin (The Edge of Seventeen)
Rachel Weisz as Deborah Lipstadt (Denial)
Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Michelle (10 Cloverfield Lane)

SUPPORTING ACTOR
Barkhad Abdi as Jama Farah (Eye in the Sky)
Mahershala Ali as Juan (Moonlight)
Daniel Brühl as Helmut Zemo (Captain America: Civil War)
John Gallagher Jr. as Emett DeWitt (10 Cloverfield Lane)
Kevin Hart as Snowball (The Secret Life of Pets)
James Hong as Mr. Ping (Kung Fu Panda 3)
T. J. Miller as Weasel (Deadpool)
Nick Offerman as Richard "Dick" McDonald (The Founder)

SUPPORTING ACTOR (Continued)
Dev Patel as Saroo (Lion)
Chris Pratt as Joshua Faraday (The Magnificent Seven)
Jason Sudeikis as Larry Snyder (Race)
Courtney B. Vance as Walter Davic (Office Christmas Party)
Vince Vaughn as Sergeant Howell (Hacksaw Ridge)

SUPPORTING ACTRESS
Elle Fanning as Julie Hamlin (20th Century Women)
Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman (Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice)
Greta Gerwig as Abigail "Abbie" Porter (20th Century Women)
Kathryn Hahn as Carla (Bad Moms)
Rachel MacAdams as Christine Palmer (Doctor Strange)
Kate McKinnon as Jillian Holtzmann (Ghostbusters)
Helen Mirren as Col. Katharine Powell (Eye in the Sky)
Gugu Mbatha-Raw as Esme Manucharian (Miss Sloane)
Lupita Nyong'o as Nakku Harriet (Queen of Katwe)
Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn (Suicide Squad)
Gina Rodriguez as Andrea Fleytas (Deepwater Horizon)
Michelle Williams as Randi (Manchester by the Sea)
Alison Sudol as Queenie (Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them)

CAMEO APPEARANCE
Kim Basinger as Judith Kuttner (The Nice Guys)
Nicholas Cage as Hank Forrester (Snowden)
Johnny Depp as Gellert Grindelwald (Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them)
Randall Duk Kim as Grandmaster Oogway (Kung Fu Panda 3)
Salma Hayek as Theresa Taco (Sausage Party)
Sean Penn as Terence (The Angry Birds Movie)
Gabourey Sidibe as Banu (The Brothers Grimsby)
Martha Stewart as Herself (Bad Moms)
Channing Tatum as Burt Gurney (Hail, Caesar!)
Christopher Walken as Warren Sharp (Eddie the Eagle)
The Ghostbusters (Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson, Sigourney Weaver,
    and Annie Potts) as their Alter Egos (Ghostbusters)

THE ENTIRE CAST

20th Century Women	Long Way North
Deepwater Horizon	The Magnificent Seven
Fences	Moonlight
Hail, Caesar!	Silence
Hidden Figures	Zootopia

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Jeff Bridges (The Little Prince, Hell or High Water)
Billy Crudup (for Jackie and 20th Century Women)
Viola Davis (Suicide Squad, Fences)
Aaron Eckhart (Sully, Bleed for This)
Andrew Garfield (Hacksaw Ridge, Silence)
Scarlett Johannson (Hail Caesar!, The Jungle Book, Captain America: Civil War, Sing)
Felicity Jones (Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, A Monster Calls)
Leslie Jones (Ghostbusters, Masterminds, Sing)
Rooney Mara (Kubo and the Two Strings, Lion)
Keegan Michael-Key and Jordan Peele (Keanu, Storks)
J. K. Simmons (Kung Fu Panda 3, The Accountant, La La Land, Patriots Day)
Octavia Spencer (Zootopia, Allegiant, Hidden Figures)
Alan Tudyk (Zootopia, Moana, Rogue One: A Star Wars Story)

LOSERS
Chris Cooper (Demolition, Live By Night)
Anne Hathaway (Alice Through the Looking Glass, Colossal)
Queen Latifah (Miracles from Heaven, Ice Age: Collision Course)
Edward Norton (Sausage Party, Collateral Beauty)
Paula Patton (The Do-Over, Warcraft)
Justin Theroux (Zoolander 2, The Girl on the Train)
Gerard Butler (Gods of Egypt, London Has Fallen, The Headhunter's Calling)
**Jennifer Garner (Miracles from Heaven, Danny Collins, Mother's Day, Nine Lives)

As much as I've enjoyed the movies I've seen in this year, very briefly I've listed below what I think are the ten worst titles of 2016. Again, these are listed alphabetically. The titles in bold are ones I'm expecting to win at least one Razzie Award for the worst movies of the year. Keep in mind, I tend to avoid movies I know will be dreadful, and save my money for better ones.

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
A BEAUTIFUL PLANET
ICE AGE: COLLISION COURSE
INDEPENDANCE DAY: RESURGANCE
INFERNO
MIRACLES FROM HEAVEN
MISS PEREGRINE'S HOME FOR PECULIAR CHILDREN
MOTHER'S DAY
NINE LIVES
RULES DON'T APPLY

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There's a couple of honourable mentions for this category, notably *The Light Between Oceans*, *Sausage Party*, and *Food Choices*. They were all on this list, and ultimately spared because of their more disappointing companions.

Last year I discovered the hilariously awful Frank D'Angelo, Toronto producer of the worst independent films made today. This year's film was "Sicilian Vampire", and like his three previous films, are all complete insults to movies and disasters in their own right. They're also wildly addicting to see.

Part three concludes with my ten favourite scenes from movies this year. These are listed alphabetically, and chosen for different reasons described underneath each one. It's these kind of breathtaking moments ranging across the emotional and thematic spectrum that makes going to the movies so satisfying. All ten scenes this year cover a diverse spectrum, and was a fascinating list of titles that represent almost all of Hollywood's offerings from the year.

WARNING: These scenes include spoilers about the movies they mention, and some describe graphic, intense, or disturbing events. To skip the list, go to the bottom of page 13.

"It's Acid"
10 Cloverfield Lane
J. J. Abrams made a great horror movie spinoff to *Cloverfield* by avoiding pop-out scares completely and gain for the story's suspense and creepy imagery throughout instead. And the scariest moment of all? The reveal of a certain blue barrel filled with hydrochloric acid. It's the moment John Goodman's character turns from man into monster, and a terrifying surprise.

"Menstruation"
20th Century Women
Continous deadpan humour is brutally hard, especially in an intimate scene like the dinner table. Mike Mills' brilliant screenplay makes every conversation beautifully fascinating in *20th Century Women*, but it's Julie's (Elle Fanning) simple frustration of having her period that opens the floor for the hysterically funny and sweetly authentic dinner conversation towards the end.

"Airport Terminal Brawl"
Captain America: Civil War
Every year with summer blockbusters there's one scene where the producers waste millions of dollars to create the most spectacular action extravaganza possible. This got really out of hand when the Marvel Universe began their regular annual releases each Spring. But 2016 brought something special, in what was dubbed "Avengers 2.0"…twelve of the most popular superheroes fighting each other in an abandoned airport, and no consequences. Awesome.

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"Bo Derek"
Eddie the Eagle
Early last year featured one quietly smart scene in Matthew Vaughn's PG skiing biopic, with Hugh Jackman teaching the ski jump in an unorthodox way. So if you've wanted to do a 70-foot ski jump, just follow this one pro tip: Imagine having sex with Bo Derek. Oh, Bo Derek.

"Lord, Help Me Get One More"
Hacksaw Ridge
Soldier Desmond Doss repeats this over and over again as he rescues soldiers in WWII Japan, following the devastating battle atop Hacksaw Ridge. Unlike many great war scenes, this one isn't about the fighting. It's about the bravery it takes to be a healer, and what being a soldier really means. (That's about all I can say about the rescue without totally ruining the moment.)

"The Fools Who Dream (Reprise)"
La La Land
My nickname for this scene is not the movie's song of this title, but the dialogue-free montage that follows and closes the film. Similar to Damien Chazelle's (the director) first movie, the last eight minutes carry a surprising profundity and power that takes the audience's breath away. His finale here is a reprise to the story of "the fools who dream", but then summarize the film's morals in a mystifying way.

"Tasting Jalebies"
Lion
Early in the film, the young hero Saroo (an abandoned Indian child) yearns to taste a funnel cake-like dessert called Jalebi, only to have it whisked away from him. And halfway through the movie, when the boy grows up, he discovers a plate of jalebies in a modern kitchen 20 years after a terrible tragedy. This heartbreaking scene captures the whole essence of the story so powerfully, and is the greatest show of vulnerability in a long time.

"This Week in Washington"
Miss Sloane
The first crisis of the movie comes with a great musical swell, and an almost untouchable monologue from Jessica Chastain. Her political insults on a TV interview are so ferocious and fast it's a miracle the show host survives. But just wait until the end, when one confession of hers on camera warps every perceived notion of her character so far, and the war of words begin.

"Swimming Lessons"
Moonlight
This early scene may be enough to justify the overwhelming praise for Mahershala Ali's performance as mentor/drug seller Juan. He teaches the young Chiron to swim in the LA bay, but the lessons he describes are a breathtaking parallel to the following chapters in the protagonist's life. The later schoolyard fight is a perfect example - everything the movie becomes starts here.

"Silent Penguin Fight"
Storks
Without question, this short, goofy animated fight scene was the funniest three minutes of any movie this year. While a baby is asleep, a stork and human must fight an army of mean, cuddly penguins. But they all love the baby so much, they all must fight carefully enough so the child isn't woken up. It's side splitting to watch, and I was laughing so hard I couldn't breathe.

Honorable Mention:
"Elephant Hide and Seek"
The Brothers Grimsby
In this overlooked British spy comedy from last year, Sacha Baron Cohen and Mark Strong are running from enemy spies on an African Savannah, when something goes horribly (and hilariously) wrong. I've never - NEVER - been so repulsed and shocked by any film scene in my life. I was laughing, and actually had to force myself to turn away from the screen.

PART FOUR - ROAD TO THE OSCARS, AND PREDICTIONS

I would argue there's no award more prestigious in Entertainment today than the Academy Awards. While their annual award shows are famously boring and poorly hosted, the awards themselves are the benchmark for movies across the Globe, and more often than not, reflect wise choices in honouring the best in the art and science of movies.

While the scrutiny of whitewashing has no doubt had an impact, the honor of the Oscars stays astute. This year sees the end of "Oscars So White", with seven of the twenty acting nominees being a minority ethnicity. Each year I love trying to see all the films I think will be nominated for Best Picture before the nomination announcement in California, and it's like a sport between my family, friends, and especially my grandfather Paul to guess who will win all of the prizes. This year was the second time I achieved this goal, and by a wide margin, with weeks to spare of the (weirdly pre-recorded) announcement.

This year's awards are divided between one of two games: either wildly obvious for a clear winner, or impossible to guess a winner from some tight, fascinating races. Picking winners is going to be looking at some preferences, but also more gut instinct over what's been popular the last few months.

Here I've listed my complete predictions for all 24 categories, including three distinct marks: Who Will Win, Who Should Win, and Who I Want to Win. These three sometimes overlap, and sometimes they directly oppose each other. I explain my choices and background for all categories, and ultimately choose my official predictions for the 89th Academy Awards. (There are some rare cases where the possible winner is just too close to accurately predict.)

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BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

WHO WILL WIN: Mahershala Ali - *Moonlight, as Juan*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Mahershala Ali - *Moonlight, as Juan*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Mahershala Ali - *Moonlight, as Juan*

While all five nominees did a stellar job, the one everyone in Hollywood has talked about non-stop has been Mahershala Ali. He's been a formidable talent the last several years in television, but his intelligence, compassion, suavity and ferocity have never shined brighter than as cool neighbour Juan. He steals every scene he's in, and is 2016's most fascinating character.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

WHO WILL WIN: Viola Davis - *Fences, as Rose Maxon*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Viola Davis - *Fences, as Rose Maxon*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Viola Davis - *Fences, as Rose Maxon*

Viola Davis has no serious competition in this category, and it would be an enormous surprise if she didn't win on Oscar night. Her ferocity, subtlety, diction, and razor sharp focus are a master class in acting. Her performance as Rose already won her the Tony Award in 2010 (as did her co-star Denzel Washington), and she'll pick up her first Academy Award for the same part. Together with Ali, the supporting actors this year will finally bring an end to the #OscarsSoWhite tag that's (deservedly) plagued the Academy for so long.

BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

WHO WILL WIN: Kenneth Lonergan - *Manchester by the Sea*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Kenneth Lonergan - *Manchester by the Sea*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Mike Mills - *20th Century Women*

I personally thought Mike Mills' script for *20th Century Women* was nothing short of flawless. Every word from the five main characters was interesting, suspenseful, charming, and smart. It's rare a movie keeps me so intrigued as to what people are going to say next. Lonergan's script, however, is the very likely winner, if only for it's tremendous power and strength in a very heavy, emotionally thick story.

BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

WHO WILL WIN: Barry Jenkins and Tarell Alvin McCraney - *Moonlight*
WHO SHOULD WIN: August Wilson - *Fences*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Barry Jenkins and Tarell Alvin McCraney - *Moonlight*

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Moonlight tells it's story in an artful, textured way that Barry Jenkins has cleared laboured over and worked to perfection. The dialogue and stakes are so cleverly built that Chiron's tale is presented in the most elegant and dynamic manner. The only adaptation that rivals it would be the terrific work of Wilson's posthumous adaptation to his own broadway play, where the translation from stage to screen is always a difficult and sometimes crushing failure.

BEST DOCUMENTARY FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *O.J.: Made in America*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *O.J.: Made in America*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *13th*

I'd love to see Ava DuVernay take home an Oscar for the great *13th*, especially after her overlooked work in *Selma* two years ago, shut out director and writer. But *O.J.: Made in America* is this year's best documentary, and at 7 hours and 47 minutes, it is the longest film in Oscars history. It's overwhelming love in Hollywood and brutal dedication will secure enough votes to take home the gold.

BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT SUBJECT

WHO WILL WIN: *Joe's Violin* OR *Extemis*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Extremis*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *The White Helmets*

I find it interesting four of the five documentary shorts this year were all about the fallout from the Syrian refugee crisis, though the popularity of the topic has made it difficult for any one film to stand out. I personally have not seen any of the nominees, and none received a Canadian release. From what most editors and voters have discussed publicly, *Joe's Violin* has made a massive marketing campaign to win, though *Extremis* has been the widely thought winner since nomination morning. This race will be very close.

BEST LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *Ennemis Intérieurs*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Timecode*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Timecode*

Juanjo Giménez made a great short film with *Timecode,* but this trophy is all about awareness, and the only one in Hollywood that's been widely seen is Sélim Azzazi's *Ennemis Intérieurs.* It's not a guaranteed victory, though it's very likely. It's definitely one of these two though, with *Ennemis* firmly in the lead.

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BEST ANIMATED SHORT FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *Piper*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Piper*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Piper*

Uncertain predictions are easy to avoid in this category simply by choosing whatever short came from Pixar Animation Studios. While it lost with *Sanjay's Super Team* last year, there's no short film even close to the acclaim, love, and widespread awareness of *Piper*. Even the most jaded voters were awed by the adorable story of a seabird and a baby hermit crab.

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *Zootopia*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Kubo and the Two Strings*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Zootopia*

Disney Animation finally won it's first Academy Award in 2014 with *Frozen,* and followed it with a stolen win in *Big Hero 6. Zootopia* is arguably the most creative talking animal movie ever made, with an established moral backbone against racism, and expert timing of release. Disney's a sure-thing, but it's a shame it won't go to the dazzling, thrilling *Kubo and the Two Strings*, which is the best movie in the history of Laika Animation.

BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *The Salesman* (Iran) in Persian
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Toni Erdmann* (Germany) in German OR *The Salesman* (Iran)
                                  in Persian
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Toni Erdmann* (Germany) in German

If *The Salesman* wins this race, it will be a rare occasion where a politically influenced winner may be justified. Iran's director Asghar Farhadi has publicly announced his boycott of the Oscars in Los Angeles in protest of Donald Trump's muslim travel ban in the United States. Germany's *Toni Erdmann* is the objectively better movie, but the public (and voter's) response to Farhadi's bold statement have had a resounding influence. It works because Farhadi sincerely doesn't care if he wins - he's running a much bigger race.

BEST FILM EDITING

WHO WILL WIN: Tom Cross - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN: John Gilbert - *Hacksaw Ridge*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: John Gilbert - *Hacksaw Ridge*

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Expect *La La Land*'s house cleaning to begin here. Most of *La La Land*'s Oscars count will be coming from the technical categories in unconventional ways, and Cross' crisp editing should be first. Tom got a surprise win for editing Chazelle's last movie *Whiplash* two years ago in 2015, and he'll likely get a double win here. Personally, I think the more difficult and effective editing of action and time was in *Hacksaw Ridge,* and I think it the more deserving nominee.

BEST SOUND EDITING

WHO WILL WIN: Robert Mackenzie and Andy Wright - *Hacksaw Ridge*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Wylie Stateman and Renée Tondelli - *Deepwater Horizon*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Robert Mackenzie and Andy Wright - *Hacksaw Ridge*

Hacksaw Ridge is going to be one of those movies that gets to call itself "Academy Award Winner" by the fluke of one usually overlooked prize. For them, it's Sound Editing, though it's not ungarnered. For the same reason it's editing and timing were so compelling, the sound was the surprise character that gave soul to everything in the movie's gory background.

BEST SOUND MIXING

WHO WILL WIN: Andy Nelson, Ai-Ling Lee and Steve A. Morrow - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Andy Nelson, Ai-Ling Lee and Steve A. Morrow - *La La Land*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Andy Nelson, Ai-Ling Lee and Steve A. Morrow - *La La Land*

Being a musical film, the sound mixing is pivotal to making song an effective storytelling tool in the movie. Not only does it work here, the sound mixing (blend of effects, voice, score and songs) is what gives the movie is emotional transcendence. This is a well deserved award, but *Hacksaw Ridge* could make a surprise steal here too. The war scenes in particular were nearly all featuring sound, and it's not uncommon for the same film to snag both sound editing and mixing.

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

WHO WILL WIN: Robert Legato, Adam Valdez, Andrew R. Jones and Dan Lemmon - *The Jungle Book*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Stephane Ceretti, Richard Bluff, Vincent Cirelli and Paul Corbould - *Doctor Strange*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Stephane Ceretti, Richard Bluff, Vincent Cirelli and Paul Corbould - *Doctor Strange*

Doctor Strange had the best visual effects used in storytelling, action, and visual splendour. I believe it deserves to win (as it would any other year, similar to *Inception* in 2010), but the remarkable work creating the animals, sets, and entire world of *The Jungle Book* simply can't be overlooked. I do find it interesting that three of the five nominees are all from Disney (Buena Vista Pictures), and is a testament to the fabulous artists the studio employs.

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BEST ORIGINAL SONG

WHO WILL WIN:	"City of Stars" by Justin Hurwitz, Benj Hasek and Justin Paul - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN:	"How Far I'll Go" by Lin-Manuel Miranda - *Moana*
WHO I WANT TO WIN:	"How Far I'll Go" by Lin-Manuel Miranda - *Moana*
WHO'LL <u>NEVER</u> WIN:	"Can't Stop the Feeling" - by Justin Timberlake and Shelbk - *Trolls*

Original Song might be the most frustrating category at this year's awards. City of Stars is a decent song, but is only going to win because of its recognition. The clearly superior song is Lin Manuel Miranda's "How Far I'll Go", with a more original rhythm, pleasant sound, epic underscore and strong dramatic purpose. Moana as a character is defined in her movie by this song, only to be transformed later in "Song of the Ancients". This one should be Miranda's (making him the youngest EGOT winner in history), but it will at least go to deserving hands so long as Justin Timberlake doesn't win for his revolting pop anthem from *Trolls*. Fine song? Sure. But worthy of an Oscar? There's nothing it adds to the movie thaw wasn't already there.

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

WHO WILL WIN:	Justin Hurwitz - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN:	Justin Hurwitz - *La La Land*
WHO I WANT TO WIN:	Justin Hurwitz - *La La Land*

In terms of more deserving musical prizes, Justin Hurwitz is well worthy for *La La Land.* The two major dance sequences with his captivating score marry the best of Old Hollywood and contemporary Los Angeles. (The Griffith Observatory was particularly well done
Thomas Newman's score was the best part of *Passengers*.

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY

WHO WILL WIN:	Linus Sandgren - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN:	Bradford Young - *Arrival*
WHO I WANT TO WIN:	Linus Sandgren - *La La Land*

Bradford Young's stunning landscapes and great use of the camera to highlight polygons and the extraterrestrial shapes is by far the most creative cinematography this year. He's also notable as the first non-white nominee ever in this category. But Linus Sandgren's playful and warm shots set the stage for the love letter to Hollywood, and he can ride *La La Land*'s goodwill to a win.

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BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN

WHO WILL WIN: David Wasco, Sandy Reynolds-Wasco - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Stuart Craig, Anna Pinnock - *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Stuart Craig, Anna Pinnock - *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*

The Los Angeles landscape is one the critical emphatic elements that helps define *La La Land*'s setting and foundation. Though in terms of the very best, the new form of J. K. Rowling's wizarding world from *Fantastic* Beasts merged the fantastic and charming in an immersive, visually immaculate world. Those are the brilliant designs and craftsmanship worthy of Oscars.

BEST COSTUME DESIGN

WHO WILL WIN: Mary Zophres - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Madeline Fontaine - *Jackie*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Mary Zophres - *La La Land*

Aside from Natalie Portman's commanding role as Jackie Kennedy, the authenticity and precision of the costuming and fashion elevate Jackie from intriguing to mysterious. Though the same can be said for the complexity of fashions used in *La La Land* as well, in what may be the movie's unsung charmer (Aside from Ryan Gosling's unbeatable smile).

BEST MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING

WHO WILL WIN: Joel Harlow, Richard Alonzo - *Star Trek Beyond*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Alessandro Bertolazzi, Giorgio Gregorini, Christopher Nelson - *Suicide Squad*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Eva von Bahr, Love Larson - *A Man Called Ove*

Makeup and Hairstyling this year is probably the least intense contest, with three silly and obvious nominees that are all unsocial and passable movies. *Star Trek*'s intricate designs and whimsical creativity make it the frontrunner. But *Suicide Squad*'s hairstyling alone was more interesting, and I personally love it when the out-of-nowhere underdogs steal this prize when everyone expects the big blockbusters to win.

BEST ACTRESS

WHO WILL WIN: Emma Stone - *La La Land, as Mia Dolan*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Emma Stone - *La La Land, as Mia Dolan*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Emma Stone - *La La Land, as Mia Dolan*

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Best Actress is this is probably the least interesting and competitive of the acting categories. All five nominees are equally worthy (especially surprise nominee Isabelle Huppert for *Elle* and Natalie Portman for a brilliant starring turn in *Jackie*). But Emma Stone grounds *La La Land,* and it's her seriousness and focus that make the whole premise work.

BEST ACTOR

WHO WILL WIN: Denzel Washington - *Fences, as Troy Maxon*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Casey Affleck - *Manchester by the Sea, as Lee Chandler*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Casey Affleck - *Manchester by the Sea, as Lee Chandler*

A few weeks ago, this race was Casey Affleck's to lose, and lose it he did. After shocking wins with critics circles and the influential BAFTAs, Denzel Washington has suddenly become the popular favourite to finally win an Oscar for his starring turn in *Fences.* The character also won him the Tony for Best Actor in 2010, and his performance has only deepened and intensified since. This will be the nail-biter contest of the night, and it's neck and neck between Affleck and Washington. Both are equally deserving, giving career bests. This one is almost too close to call.

BEST DIRECTOR

WHO WILL WIN: Damien Chazelle - *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Damien Chazelle - *La La Land*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Damien Chazelle - *La La Land*

Damien Chapelle has already established himself as a formidable director, writer, and music aficionado with his first major film *Whiplash* in 2014. His talent was never a question, but despite the movie winning 3 Oscars, Chazelle lost his sole screenplay nomination at the 87th Academy Awards. This time, *La La Land* has been the commercial favourite since its premiere at TIFF last September, and Chazelle's genius vision and heart made the most important musical movie in decades.

BEST PICTURE

WHO WILL WIN: *La La Land*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Moonlight*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *La La Land*

Last year I was pessimistic and safely guessed the wrong choice for Best Picture, forced to choose between commercial favourite *The Revenant* and true masterpiece *Spotlight.* This year, those interests are one in the same, with *La La Land*'s one-two punch of dramatic heft and spectacular entertainment value.

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At the same time, *Moonlight* is going to be remembered as a landmark film that explored and territory and substance for what American cinema can represent, and if anyone steals *La La Land*'s thunder, it's them. I would be satisfied with either emerging victorious, though the publicity and reception for the musical may be unstoppable.

As for the other nominees, the only other title that has any mathematical chance of winning is *Manchester by the Sea*, and that would be by a crazy number of second place votes on the preferential ballot. Best Picture isn't a majority winner-take-all like the other 23 awards; preferential ballots are counted in order of voters 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and subsequent choices. This counting continues until one winner has at least 50% of the total cast ballots.

But this voting system will have minimal effect when the frontrunner *La La Land* is so overwhelmingly popular with the Academy. This one will be an easy big winner, and it would be a major upset if it lost tonight.

Final Thoughts for the Year

This year's Oscars appear to be open and closed, with some reliable guesses. With that in mind, assumed predictability is how twist can appear and surprise. In such a crowded field of great movies, however, some movies are going to be totally shut out. But the only real loser is whoever can't survive three hours of Jimmy Kimmel's terrible jokes at the ceremony. (Sigh).

The very least I can say is how wonderful going to the movies has been this year, and the consistent joy I felt with how frequently I was surprised by what I was seeing. My movie watching pace has built to a great level, and I know how fortunate I am to have to opportunity to do so. 2016 is casually remembered as a disappointing year, but thankfully Hollywood created a great number of outstanding films to entertain, teach, and soothe the tumultuous world.

Last year I shared my desire to hopefully make this a permanent fixture in my life, getting to talk about and share movies to a larger audience, and I'm sincerely humbled I've been able to do so. I also know after just under a year, I'm only starting in what's going to continue to grow. I also must thank all the readers who read my reviews, stories about the movies, and this annual essay. For everyone who takes the time to read this, thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

There's so many great movies I implore you to see, especially if looking for some great media and entertainment. These movies are the stories that share human life and extend empathy to the furious world we live in. For those you've already seen, I hope you enjoyed them as much as I did, and I'm eager and excited to what 2017 has to offer.

Hollywood is far from perfect, but the world cinema is finally starting to press the importance of change, and it seems like we're moving in the right direction. The end of #OscarsSoWhite is just step one, as there's a hundred other cultures to go. But for now? I'm satisfied to celebrate the work that is and was for the legacy and joy that will be.