

## 65th AWARDS - VISUAL EFFECTS NOMINATING COMMITTEE MAIN MEETING

Opening remarks.

Once again - welcome to the nominating meeting for Visual Effects for the 65th Academy Awards. Thank you all for coming,..... and would you please be sure that you've collected your ballot folder before you take your seats.

I'm Jonathan Erland, Chairman of the Visual Effects Nominating Committee. Also present we have Pete Clark, Vice Chairman of the Committee - Pete if you would rise, sir.

(Applause)

Well, we have a busy evening before us, reflecting a busy year for the practitioners of our craft. And it has been an eventful year in a number of ways. Since we, as the visual effects community, don't assemble together except on this auspicious occasion, this meeting has to double as the Chairman's Annual Report and so I'd like to take a minute or two to share some significant events with you.

Our meeting this year is not graced with the physical presence of Geoff Williamson though I expect he is with us in spirit. This community suffered a sad loss with his passing in January after a valiant and arduous battle with cancer. He had been a major influence in almost redefining the motion picture camera, and those of us whose work involves the more exotic forms of cinematography such as Vista-Vision at 200 frames per second, Imax or Showscan, depended on him and will now have to soldier on with the handicap of his absence.

Three years ago this Academy bestowed on him the Medal of Commendation, and this year, at the Sci-Tech Awards, he would have collected his fifth Technical Award. Five of the seven productions we will screen this evening used Geoff's cameras.

Five years ago few of us would have believed that a 200 frame per second VistaVision camera was possible, Geoff's legacy to us is the conviction that anything is possible. Our hearts go out to his wife, Joan, in the hope that, henceforth, the world will be gentle with her.

In 1992 we witnessed the end of an era with the demise of Apogee Productions. Many of us here tonight are veterans of Star Wars and owe much of what we have achieved in our careers to the magic that was created at the "anonymous warehouse" at 6842 Valjean Avenue.

Since the product of the industry conducted there was magic, the enterprise was called, appropriately, Industrial Light and Magic. I'm sure many of us can still recall the early deliveries of steel or welding tanks with burly drivers enquiring if this establishment were, "Industrial Light and ...um..uh.. Mumm..muu..Magic"???

I.L.M. of course is still very much alive and well in San Raphael where it was moved shortly after Star Wars was released, and Boss Films thrives in Marina Del Rey, but the company that was formed by those that remained behind at Valjean has switched off the light and no longer makes magic.

So, after two years as I.L.M., and fifteen years as Apogee, the famous "anonymous warehouse in Van Nuys" is, once again.... just an anonymous warehouse. Everything inside the building has been returned to its pre - Star Wars condition.

However, what can never be returned to its pre Star Wars condition is the motion picture industry itself. During the preceding two decades we have witnessed an almost stunning evolution in visual effects and the pace quickens even as we meet here tonight.

Within the Academy, the Effects Community reflects these changes also. The Visual Effects Rules Committee, which is responsible for these nominating procedures as well as the admission of new members, has been restructured so as to better represent the growing diversity of talent within our community.

The nominating rules are exhaustively re-examined every year in an effort to defend and enhance the integrity of these Awards. The new member requirements are also revised to ensure that the Academy embodies the highest ideals of our profession. Applicants now require not only two sponsors but also two testimonial letters.

We are poised on the threshold of a new millennium and this Academy is not oblivious to the fact. Two years ago the immediate past President of the Academy, Karl Malden, instituted the Long Range Planning Committee with a mandate to revitalize the Academy. This committee is made up of all of the living past presidents of the Academy, and they recently presented to the Board of Governors a number of recommendations.

Among these were preliminary steps leading to possible branch status for Visual Effects. Up til now we have been classified as Members at Large with no representation on the Board of Governors. As a first step the visual effects "group" (as we are still officially called) has been invited to send a representative to attend Board meetings to participate in a non-voting capacity.

Adjustments to the Academy's structure are a complex matter, undertaken after much careful deliberation. The last new Branch created was in 19?? Thus it is all the more encouraging for the Visual Effects community to know that the growth of our craft's scope, skill and stature over the last two decades is acknowledged in the highest council of the Academy.

During this period Visual Effects, as a profession, has attracted many highly skilled practitioners from a variety of disciplines such as nuclear physics and computer science. Yet,

for all the intensely scientific attributes they bring to the industry, they nonetheless epitomize the highest calling of our profession and can fairly be called..... *entertainers*.

The expanding role of the Visual Effects group in the larger industry community is evidenced by such actions as providing the impetus for the creation of the Technology Council which is now doing such valuable work for the whole industry.

Gary Borton, of Eastman Kodak has said, "The close working relationship between Kodak and the Visual Effects community in the development of new filmstocks and digital image processing will have vast implications for the motion picture industry." We'll be observing some of those implications unfold before us here this evening.

The work we'll see tonight has drawn on the cumulative body of knowledge and technique acquired over one hundred years. From the inception of our industry, motion pictures, by their very existence, have always been a "special visual effect." Throughout our history we have enhanced that fundamental "effect" with an increasingly rich tapestry of visual artistry.

While much of the artistry the moviegoer perceives is attributable to basic cinematography, art direction, editing and performance, with the passage of time, and with the increasing complexity of the technology, more and more of what an audience sees upon the screen is the result of the art and craft of visual effects. Besides the obvious "effects spectacular" films such as "Star Wars," there is a rapidly expanding dependence on this craft for the "invisible" effects that make many films artistically and economically feasible.

We have come a long way and built well on the solid foundation laid down by such pioneers as..Méliés, Cruickshank, Dunning, Dawn, Edourt, Gillespie, Iwerks, Jennings, O'Brien, Anderson, Van der Veer, Abbott, Walker, Shuftan and so many, many more.

The current generation of craftsmen gathered here tonight are the progeny, both figuratively and in some cases, literally, of the illustrious men I just named, but with one notable exception; and he was a contemporary and a peer of these men.

We're honored to have with us the Past Vice Chairman of this Committee, a former Governor of the Academy, former President of the ASC, and the acknowledged Dean of the Visual Effects community,.....Linwood Dunn.....stand up Lin, if you would.

(Applause, etc.,)

And so, without further ado, let's move on to the Main Agenda Item of tonight's meeting, which is to provide to the full voting Academy Membership the recommendations of this, the Nominating Committee for the Visual Effects Award.

As some of you are here for the first time, either as members, or guests of members, I'm going to take a moment to describe what this process is all about.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, was formed in 1927 with the express purpose of encouraging the pursuit of excellence in these arts.

To achieve this goal the Academy elected to recognize excellence by creating Awards of such prestige that professionals in our art would lie awake at night dreaming of how they might win one of these.....

(produce Oscar)

.....So well did they succeed that it's probably fair to say that only the Nobel Prizes take precedence in the minds of most people on this planet.

A rigorous peer review process was set up to ensure that only the most meritorious work was rewarded. The official designation of this trophy, by the way, is an Academy Award of Merit; "Oscar," being an affectionate nickname of dubious origin! The popular story being that Bette Davis (a past President of the Academy, incidentally) thought it reminded her of a favorite uncle of that name.

The Awards process supplants financial compensation as the ultimate arbiter of the value of our efforts to our industry and society, and presents both to our profession and to the world at large, the embodiment of the highest ideals to which we all, as individual artists, may aspire.

Thus the individuals who are the recipients of such Awards take on a very special significance in the eyes of every aspirant for a similar Award. Our Awards, in and of themselves, cannot bestow honor or glory; they can only recognize and reflect the honor and glory personified by the recipient.

It follows then that the gleam of an Oscar is a direct reflection of the brilliance of the talent on whom it is bestowed.

To ensure the integrity of the Awards, membership in the Academy, which is by invitation, is restricted to those who have achieved a level of distinction sufficient to satisfy their particular peer group. Then, within the Academy, the various crafts, arts and sciences break down into "branches".

Each branch is charged with the responsibility to pass judgement on applicants for membership in the Academy as well as the formidable task of nominating its peers for Award recognition by the whole Academy body. The entire activity is overseen by a Board of Governors made up of three representatives from each of the branches.

O.K. So, to recap the nomination process so far:

Early in January the Visual Effects Steering Committee met to review all feature film product that was deemed to be eligible for the 65th. Awards year. A number of some two hundred and thirty six films.

This committee sought to identify any and all productions that contained visual effects in any significant degree.

This process revealed that some fifteen films had sufficient effects in them to warrant consideration and from that group the committee selected the seven productions that contained work of sufficient merit to appear on your list this evening.

The Producers of these seven films were then contacted and asked to provide written descriptions of the visual effects work, a film excerpt from composite release print, as well as the names of the four primary individuals involved with and responsible for these visual effects. They complied.

Additionally, in order that we might gain more insight into the merit of the work presented, the Producers are invited to provide qualified representatives to attend this meeting, um, so that Bill Taylor can ask questions.

Well, excuuuuse mee! Actually, everyone present, committee members and guests alike, are encouraged to join in during the questions. We have a group of extraordinarily gifted craftsmen here tonight and this is a rare occasion for all of us and I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Committee, to express my appreciation for their efforts in making themselves available.

Well, from this description it must be apparent that quite a lot of work goes into making all of these preparations, so I'd like to express my appreciation to awards administrator, Rich Miller, ably assisted by the indomitable Claudia Barrett, along with Michelle Reggin and the rest of the Academy staff, for their performance of the Herculean task that goes on quietly and relentlessly throughout the process, leading up to tonights meeting.

(Applause)

O.K. Now, a word about our balloting procedure. The object of this ballot is to select the three productions we believe worthy to be forwarded to the General Membership, which, of course, includes us. So we here this evening will have a second opportunity, this time with our peers and fellow members, to vote for the Visual Award Oscar itself.

To achieve this, however, we must be careful to accord a high score to each production we deem worthy of nomination. It is neither necessary, nor desirable, to try to determine the Award itself at this meeting, though on occasion that has happened.

Last year this committee did an exceptional job in this nominating procedure and we anticipate that the extraordinary productions we have before us tonight will yield similar results. Just be sure to give high marks for merit, and we'll be certain to deliver three Award worthy nominees to the full Academy Membership.

All right, without further ado, let us get on to the screenings. As is customary, the order in which the reels will be screened was determined by lot, the excerpts will be introduced by a spokesman for the production and following each reel we will all have our opportunity to ask questions. Microphones are provided and I urge you to use them so that everyone can benefit from the discussion.

The first reel will be "Death Becomes Her," a Universal Studios Production, Robert Zemeckis and Steve Starkey, Producers. Visual Effects Supervisor, Ken Ralston will introduce this entry.

(reel)

O.K. now we have an opportunity to ask questions about this work. Joining Ken Ralston are Doug Chiang, Doug Smythe and Tom Woodruff, Jr.

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The next reel will be "The Lawnmower Man," from New Line Cinema, Gimel Everett, Producer. Brett Leonard will introduce this entry.

(reel)

To answer questions about the work on "The Lawnmower Man," we have Brett Leonard, Gimel Everett, Mark Malmburg and Brad Hunt.

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We'll move on now to "Bram Stoker's Dracula," a Columbia release, Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs and Charles Mulvehill, Producers.

(reel)

And now we have Roman Coppola, Michael Lantieri, Gene Warren, Jr. and Michael Pangrazio available to discuss their work.

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Next we'll see an excerpt from, "Honey I Blew Up th Kid," a Bueana Vista production, Dawn Steel and Edward S. Feldman, Producers. Tom Smith will introduce this work.

(reel)

O.K. Now Tom Smith, Harrison Ellenshaw and John Fante will take the podium for "Honey".

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And now we'll see the reel from "Alien 3," a Twentieth Century Fox production, Gordon Carroll, David Giler and Walter Hill, Producers. Richard Edlund will introduce this entry.

(reel)

For "Alien 3", Richard will be joined by Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, Jr.

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The sixth reel is "Batman Returns," a Warner Brothers release. Denise Di Novi and Tim Burton, Producers. Michael Fink will introduce Batman.

(reel)

O.K. to answer questions about the work on "Batman" we have, besides Michael, Craig Barron, John Bruno and Dennis Skotak.

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And the seventh, and last reel this evening is "Toys," a Twentieth Century Fox production. Mark Johnson and Barry Levinson, Producers. "Toys" will be introduced by Clay Pinney.

(reel)

Taking questions on the work in "Toys," Clay will be joined by Jamie Dixon, Mat Beck and Mark Sullivan.

## PRE-VOTE COMMENTS

O.K. Now turning to your ballot, which is the Green sheet in your package, you will see that you have the option of scoring each of these productions on a scale of six to ten. Note that you **can** vote as much as a ten for all seven productions.

Only those productions, to a maximum of three, **averaging 8** or better, will advance to the full voting Academy body as our nominations. After what we've seen this evening I'm sure you will agree that, at the very least, we have three worthy candidates.

We are retaining the practice we initiated last year and have only one nominating ballot. So we won't have a tally of this ballot tonight. We'll all discover the results together when the nominations are announced here on Wednesday, February 17th. (at 5:30 A.M., at which time you will all naturally be here of course!).

As a consequence, after turning in your nominating ballot you are free to depart, with our grateful thanks for your participation and your patience! We look forward to seeing you again next year! Goodnight!

