

67TH. AWARDS - VISUAL EFFECTS NOMINATING COMMITTEE

MAIN MEETING

Opening remarks.

Good evening! Welcome to the Nominating Meeting for Visual Effects for the 67th. Academy Awards!

Thank you for being here for this very special, - and, indeed, historic occasion. If you're a voting member of the committee. please be sure that you've collected your folder from the Price Waterhouse people before you get settled in your seats.

We've a very busy evening's work ahead of us so we need to get cracking.

I'm Jonathan Erland. Chairman of the Visual Effects Nominating Committee. With us also is Pete Clark, Vice Chairman of the Committee - Pete. if you would rise. sir.

We're also honored by the presence of two of our most illustrious former Vice Chairmen: Lin Dunn, and Al Whitlock.

I'd like to extend our welcome to the guests of the committee, Academy Members and non-members alike. We're delighted you could Join us to observe what we regard as one of our most significant and solemn duties in the service of our Academy: the nomination of films for achievements in Visual Effects for the 1994 Award year.

While the occasion may be fraught with awesome responsibility for us, it is also a joyous, one might even say an exuberant event. This is the one occasion of the year when we can convene such a major contingent of the Visual Effects community and see all our old friends and/or enemies as the case may be.

This event also serves as the only opportunity for me, as your Chairman, to report to you on the activities of the Effects community within the Academy during the past year.

As I've reported at the last two of these occasions, the Academy Board of Governors has been considering the matter of a change to the By-Laws of the Academy that would establish Visual Effects as a fully fledged Branch of the Academy. As you well know. most of us entered this Academy as "Members at Large."

And. as I've said on those occasions, "Adjustments to the Academy's structure are a complicated matter, undertaken after much careful deliberation."

Truer words were never spoken!

And indeed, it is not a trivial matter. Bear in mind the last change in the Academy By-Laws affecting Branch status was in 1947. I was eight years old then, and many of you, perhaps most of you, had not yet been born.

At the Board of Governors meeting of January 17th, the issue of Branch Status for Visual Effects was taken up. Academy President, Arthur Hiller, placed on the Agenda a unanimous recommendation in favor of Branch status from the Board Realignment Committee, a body that he had formed to study such issues.

The matter was discussed vigorously and at some length by the Board and a vote was then taken. However, since a by-laws change requires a two thirds majority of the entire Board, the vote had to be completed by polling those Governors who were unable to attend the meeting, some of whom were on location in darkest Costa Rica.

If the suspense is killing you, it should!

So now, to alleviate the suspense, it is my great privilege and high honor to introduce to you the President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Arthur Hiller!

(Arthur Hiller address.)

Thank you, Arthur, from all of us!

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank some of the many people who gave so freely of their time and counsel during the preparation of our presentation to the Board.

Besides, obviously, the members of the Visual Effects executive committee and the Academy staff there were: Ellen Wolf, George Turner, Jim Morns, Lucia Schultz, Rochelle Ventura, and Diane Perlov.

I would especially like to thank Robert Boyle of the Art Directors Branch who stood resolutely by his conscience and his tradition. His vigorous and fundamental reservations regarding our cause forced us to apply very stern tests to our appeal which, in the end, helped in the presentation of a compelling case before the Board of Governors.

In the course of preparing our presentation for the Board, we gathered a wealth of data about the FX community, and I'd like to share just a few of the findings with you.

The membership roster for this new branch, which will number about one hundred and fifty people, shows us to be quite a distinguished group.

There have been some sixty-nine Awards of Merit (or Oscars) awarded to this group. sixty-six Nominations, twenty-nine Sci-Tech Awards, two Medals of Commendation and two Gordon Sawyer Awards. Thus, at one hundred and sixty-eight honors bestowed on this group of 150 people, we average a little more than one honor per member of this Branch. Or,

(Put up Oscar!)

- just under half of one of these apiece.

Of course, some here are doing more than their share to raise the averages! I can already hear some wag demanding to know where's his half of this Oscar. Well I'm sorry, they don't look nearly this good when cut in half.

Now that we've achieved this goal, we have to reflect on some of the implications of this accomplishment. It means that, in the eyes of the Academy, we are no longer just a subset of a profession. Full Branch Status Implies full professional status in our industry. With this status, then, comes full responsibilities to our profession. to our Academy and to our society.

We have clamored for some years now for the Academy to do this for us. And there's no question it was appropriate for the Academy to take this action. But now, to paraphrase a notable American President, the time has come to, "ask not what our Academy can do for us, but to ask what we can do for our Academy." Because there is quite a bit.

We, perhaps uniquely within the Academy, have had to become accustomed to technological futureshock. Poised, as we all are, at the edge of a new millennia, there will be times of turmoil ahead. This community is well equipped to help our Academy negotiate the bumps and turns that will confront our art and science as it enters its second century.

But in the nearer term there are several things that come to mind.

The first is quite easy.

The significance of any technical and artistic discipline can be gauged, in part, from its bibliography. During our preparations for our presentation, therefore, we assembled a bibliography of the visual effects field. This came to fifty two titles.

In checking this list against the Academy's Library catalogue, we find that the Academy is in possession of almost all of them. It would be appropriate for us, as a Branch, to fill the few remaining gaps that may exist. So adopt a book, buy two copies: one for your own library and one for the Academy. In short order we can complete that collection.

All you have to do is call Lucia Schultz or Claudia Barrett at the Academy, and they'll provide you with the list. Pete Clark, Lin Dunn and Rod Ryan are exempt from this assignment as they not only contributed books, they wrote their own books.

The next is a little harder.

The Academy is guardian and champion simultaneously of both our future and our past. The FX community, by its nature, lives on the cutting edge of our technological future. Our expertise therefore holds the key to the rescue of our industry's past.

One of this Academy's gravest concerns is the restoration and preservation of the rapidly deteriorating wealth of creative effort of one hundred years of motion picture making. If you want to know just how rapidly this deterioration occurs, let me point out that the work we will view so proudly here tonight may well be in tatters barely twenty years hence. *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* both now require restoration.

The National Endowment for the Arts recently deleted the remaining \$400K for film restoration from its budget. I'm not going to make a plea for you all to call the NEA and ask for the restoration of this budget because, as many of you are already aware, in fairly short order there will most likely be no NEA at all. And in any case \$400K would not restore one single film.

Nor am I going to ask you for money. Rather, I'm going to ask that we all put a portion of our creative effort into solving the technological problems of restoration and preservation.

Valuable work is already being done by the effects community: Phil Feiner of Pacific Title is working with the Technology Council on Black and White LAD. Pete Kuran of VCE has applied his skills in film composites to the development of a very promising process for restoring faded colour negative. John Galt and Bill Webber at the Sony High Definition Center have done a lot of work developing restoration technique and Bruno George and Cinesite have shown us what can be done with digital technology in restoring Snow White.

So we've demonstrated that we have the knowledge base to deal with the issue. We need to continue to cultivate an effective and economical set of tools for the task. But above all, we need a commitment to the cause.

When you feel you have a contribution to make, the Academy's archivist, Michael Friend, who is with us here this evening, will be delighted to hear from you, as will I. In the very near future, Michael and I hope to arrange a Restoration and Preservation Symposium here at the Academy particularly for the Effects Community so that we can all get brought up to speed on the issues Involved. Bear in mind, a scant twenty years from now, tonight's work will be the subject of this discussion.

The third is harder still.

As a recognized profession now, we are also under a solemn obligation to guard the reputation and integrity of our professional expertise. We've been blessed in the last couple of decades with the influx of many new faces, and I mean literally in the thousands, bringing many new skills, coming to us from varied backgrounds; nuclear physics, computer sciences, you name it. The new abilities they bring have propelled us at breakneck speed into the digital era and we revel at the greatly expanded power of our vocation.

But we owe it to ourselves, to our fellow professionals and to our illustrious forebears in this profession, to have a rounded and thorough knowledge of our art and craft, increasingly difficult and diverse though that may be.

We have all shared, with horrified hilarity, such recent anecdotes as the FX supervisor who was reviewing the filmstock requirements submitted by the FX DP for a shoot and demanding to know why there was an excessive tally for 35mm. stock and absolutely no provision for VistaVision stock.

I didn't make that up. As Mark Russell says, this is rip and read, folks , rip and read.

Only slightly more forgivable was the FX supervisor who demanded to know if the locked off camera before him shooting a background plate was on nodal. If not it should be repositioned on nodal, locked off again. and the shot done over.

Perhaps we can make up such deficiencies in expertise fairly readily with a remedial study program. Indeed, the Academy's Motion Picture Study Centre which incorporates the Herrick Library we discussed earlier, containing a number of excellent books on these subjects might be just the right setting for such a program.

In the meantime, John Van Vliet's excellent annotated and illustrated calendar provides a wonderful opportunity for instruction. John! if you please!

A real tragedy is the erosion of the skills of illusion that our craft built up in its first century. Today we have the brute computing power to sledgehammer images pixel by pixel into whatever arrangement we wish. or can afford. But our craft was born of smoke and mirrors epitomized by the likes of Georges Méliès.

Some of you present here tonight may have attended the FX Symposium this Academy hosted at Show Biz Expo last June where we screened a tour-de-force hanging miniature shot produced by Jim Danforth.

Jim conjured up a dusty fort in Kashmir at the turn of the century with a camel munching quietly, the Himalayas in the background, soldiers on guard while musicians play and a dancer twirls. Only a small fragment of the scene was real and at full scale. Most was either miniature (including the camel) or a painting (including the Himalayas). It had to be, for it was filmed in Danforth's mother-in-law's backyard in Van Nuys.

Digital image manipulation is an essential part of our artist's palette, the proof of which will shortly parade across this screen, and those who entered the profession prior to the computer certainly have an obligation to learn this technology. And, indeed, I've watched as our revered pioneer Lin Dunn hunkered down at a workstation running "Flame."

But there is an elegance of style, an economy of effort and an equally exhilarating air of sheer magic to be found in the work of such masters as Jim Danforth, and of Bill Taylor who is not averse to resorting to Schuftan mirror technique when appropriate. How many among the growing army of effects practitioners still know which acid removes the unwanted portion of the silver mirror for such a shot? How many would recognize in the script the opportunity to use such techniques?

It can only be a **professional** judgement to reject one approach in favor of another if one is in possession of the background to intelligently discuss them all.

Our new skills should be an addition to an ever expanding lexicon of technique. Obsolete technology should indeed be discarded, but there is no such thing as obsolete art.

So, these are a few of my observations on our growing responsibilities as we assume our new stature in the professional community. I believe that we will so conduct ourselves that we

will ensure that our fellow Branches will be just as pleased to have us join their Council as we are at the honour that they have here bestowed on us.

Now to the main agenda item, the Nomination for Visual Effects for 1994.

For new members and our guests, a brief explanation of the purpose and the process of this meeting.

One of the principal functions of this Academy is to foster the pursuit of excellence in filmmaking. To that end the Academy devised an Awards system that has achieved such prestige that it ranks in much the same esteem as the Nobel Prizes. (Except that we, unfortunately, lack the cash to go along with the 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 that meritorious work is rewarded, a rigorous peer review process was established of which this evening's work forms a part. The process actually began in January when the Visual Effects Steering Committee met to sift through the two hundred and forty-eight films that qualified for consideration under Academy rules.

Seventeen films were identified as containing Visual Effects worthy of at least some discussion. And indeed, the discussion continued until quite late in the evening. The Steering Committee meeting was concluded by a ballot that reduced the films under consideration to the seven that we have before us this evening. That task was not an easy one, nor will its sequel here tonight be easy.

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.

Shortly thereafter the Visual Effects Rules Committee met to examine the submissions returned by the producers in an effort to ensure that all were in compliance with the Academy rules. In this regard, we must acknowledge that no rules and no process can guarantee perfect justice to the satisfaction of all concerned. In making the required selection of our individuals, the producers have been asked to perform an almost impossible and inevitably cruel task.

In addition to the film clips we'll be viewing, the producers are asked to send qualified representatives to attend this meeting so that we can all ask questions,

Everyone present. committee members and guests alike, are encouraged to join in with Bill Taylor during the questions.

We have a group of extraordinarily gifted craftsmen here tonight. This is a rare occasion for all of us and I'd like, on behalf of the Committee, to express my appreciation for their efforts in making themselves available.

Obviously. an immense amount of work goes into making all of these preparations and I'd like to thank awards administrator, Rich Miller, ably assisted by the indomitable Claudia Barrett. along with Lisa Niel and the rest of the Academy staff, for their relentless endeavor leading up to tonight's meeting.

(Applause)

O.K Now, a word about our balloting procedure.

This is not the final ballot for the Visual Effects Award. This is the nominating ballot by which we will determine the nominees to be forwarded to the full voting Academy membership.

Therefore, your ballot calls for an evaluation of merit on a scale of six to ten for each of the films we're about to screen, independently of each other. Theoretically. you could vote all of them a ten on this ballot. Only those films receiving an average rating of eight or better, to a maximum of three films, will be forwarded to the full Academy membership as nominees.

All right. now let's 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 "**Speed**," a Twentieth Century Fox Production. Mark Gordon. Producer. "**Speed**" will be introduced by: Boyd Shermis.

(reel)

O.K. now we have an opportunity to ask questions about this work. With us we have Boyd Shermis, John Frazier, Ron Brinkman, Richard Hollander, Jan De Bont and Mark Gordon.

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The next reel will be "**The Mask**," from New Line Cinema, And Bob Engleman, the producer, will introduce this entry.

(reel)

To answer questions about the work on "**The Mask**," Bob Engleman will be joined by. Scott Squires, Steve Williams, Tom Bertino, John Farhat, and Chuck Russell.

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We'll move on now to "**True Lies**," a Twentieth Century Fox release, James Cameron and Stephanie Austin, Producers. And Jim Cameron will introduce the reel.

(reel)

Joining Jim we have John Bruno, Tom Fisher, Jacques Strowels and Pat McClung, to discuss their work.

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Next we'll see an excerpt from. "**The Lion King**," a Buena Vista production. and Don Hahn, the producer. will introduce this work.

(reel)

O.K. Now Randy Fullmer, Scott Johnston and Scott Santoro will take the mike for "**The Lion King**"

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And now we'll see the reel from "Forrest Gump" a Paramount Pictures production. Wendy Finerman, Steve Tisch, and Steve Stareky producers. Ken Ralston will introduce this entry.

(reel)

For "**Forrest Gump**". Ken will JoIned by George Murphy, Stephen Rosenbaum and Steve Starkey.

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The sixth reel is "**Interview with the Vampire**" a Warner Brothers release. David Geffen, and Stephen Woolley, producers, and Stephen Woolley will introduce the Vampire, I mean the reel!

(reel)

O.K. to answer questions about the work on "**Interview with the Vampire**" we have, Rob Legato and Price Pethel.

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And the seventh. and last reel this evening is "The Hudsucker Proxy," a Warner Brothers production. Ethan Coen, producer. "The Hudsucker Proxy" will be introduced by Mike McAlister

(reel)

Taking questions on the work in "The Hudsucker Proxy" will be Mike McAlister, Janek Sirrs, Patrick Turner and Mark Stetson.

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 Academy body as our nominations. After what we've seen this evening I'm sure you'll agree that. at the very least. we have three worthy candidates.

We have only the one ballot in this process and we won't have a tally of this ballot tonight. We'll all discover the results together when the nominations are announced here on Tuesday, February 14th. (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!

