

# AND THE OSCAR GOES TO...

BOB IVRY

It took just 11 months for Oscar voters to retreat from the edge and scurry down the well-worn path to Sappyland for the 73rd annual Academy Awards, nominations for which were announced Tuesday. Gala back-slapping is slated for March 25, with Steve Martin hosting.

Eleven months after the academy bestowed laurel wreaths on the heads of courageous upstarts like "American Beauty," "The Matrix," and "Boys Don't Cry," it's back to pap like "Chocolat" and "Billy Elliot."

Even accounting for the fact that 2000 generally lacked the in-your-face attitudes of some of 1999's surprise honorees, mind-blowers like "Requiem for a Dream" and "The Cell" had to content themselves with one nomination each. "You Can Count on Me," almost revolutionary in its character-driven complexity and grace, received just two.

And if all goes according to industry scuttlebutt, Julia Roberts -- as safe and as unthreatening as an actress can be in these fast-changing times -- will beat out two of the best and bravest female performances in recent times, fellow nominees Ellen Burstyn ("Requiem for a Dream") and Laura Linney ("You Can Count on Me"), for the Oscar.

Othe bright side, the adventurous "Pollock," the bio flick of the maverick

drip-painter Jackson Pollock, received two well-deserved acting nominations, for Ed Harris in the title role and Marcia Gay Harden as Pollock's long-suffering wife, Lee Krasner. "Pollock" ran for one week in December to qualify for the Oscars and was the centerpiece of the New York Film Festival, so it's reassuring to see cut-to-the-bone performances rewarded in a film that few people have seen.

Also trumpeting an eclectic if a bit annoyingly mainstream attitude from the academy is the fact that the five best picture nominees represent a sizable spectrum of styles. There's the throwback action-adventure megahit "Gladiator," which garnered a year's-best 12 nods; the feel-good crusade of "Erin Brockovich"; the verite camera work and dramatic complexity of "Traffic"; and even a foreign-language martial arts saga, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

And, of course, to round out the contenders, the sap-filled "Chocolat."

The one big surprise nominee for best picture, "Chocolat" is respectable, well-acted, fabulistic, predictable, and terribly boring. Just pronouncing the French title correctly can make one feel pretentious. But "Chocolat" was produced by Miramax, the New York-based Oscar juggernaut responsible for "The English Patient" and "Life Is Beautiful." "Chocolat" definitely benefited from Miramax's Oscar campaign, or per-

haps preacher-turned-film-critic Jesse Jackson's well-publicized endorsement of the film put it over the top.

Aside from the edgy long shots, shut out from the best picture category were Cameron Crowe's "Almost Famous," which was crippled by crummy box office, and Robert Zemeckis' "Cast Away," which was, seemingly, crippled by \$210 million of box office.

To be fair, the academy was more than welcoming to Ang Lee's offbeat masterpiece, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." The film overcame subtitles, a melodramatic story line, a plot hinging on a mystical sword, and relatively unknown actors -- at least in the United States -- to nab an astounding 10 nominations, for director, picture, foreign language film, cinematography, costumes, score, song, editing, adapted screenplay, and art direction.

And Oscar voters did make "Traffic," with its varying film stocks, hand-held camera, and sometimes brutal story, a five-time nominee -- for picture, director, supporting actor (Benicio Del Toro), adapted screenplay, and editing.

The director of "Traffic," Steven Soderbergh, is in the rare position of competing against himself; he was also nominated for "Erin Brockovich." The possibility exists that Soderbergh's risky work in "Traffic" will be eclipsed by the fact that he



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essentially took TV Movie-of-the-Week material and made it sing in "Erin Brockovich" and the votes for his two flicks will cancel each other out, delivering the bald statuette to someone else.

"Billy Elliot," the film for which he's nominated for best director, is Daldry's first feature film, after a career as director of the Royal Court Theatre in London. Daldry may be known to New York audiences as the Tony-winning director of "An Inspector Calls."

Ridley Scott rounds out the category. Scott's resume includes "Alien," "Blade Runner," "Thelma & Louise," and, yes, that classic of the form, "G.I. Jane." His followup to "Gladiator" also may be familiar -- "Hannibal."

Once again, the academy gave a whoopee cushion to comedies. Carrey wasn't really ever in the running for anything this year (unlike his ignored performances the last two years in "The Truman Show" and "Man On the Moon"), but neither did Oscar voters see fit to reward the best comedy of the year, "Best in Show," or the second-best, "Meet the Parents." Joel and Ethan Coen did get an adapted screenplay nomination for "O Brother, Where Art Thou?," but otherwise, even that tour de force of laffs, "Dude, Where's My Car?," remained a question sadly unanswered.

## BRIDGE: Hard Work Pays Off

JULIAN LADERMAN

Many bridge players rely on the Blackwood Convention or one of the many variations of Blackwood whenever they are searching for a slam. On many hands, particularly very distributional hands, control-showing bids may provide the bidders with more useful information. Often these bids are called cuebids.

On the illustrated hand, the North-South partnership can get to a grand slam by using control-showing bids. South's 4S bid indicates at least an 8 card spade suit, but not enough high card points for a one-level opening bid. Since North holds the spade king, he should assume that South has the spade ace, and probably the queen. Therefore, it is reasonable for North to envision a slam with 8 trump tricks, 2 club tricks, and 2 heart tricks, providing South does not have two diamonds that the defense can snatch on the first two tricks. North's 5C bid is a control-showing bid indicating first-round control of clubs, either the club ace or a club void. The bid also shows slam interest with spades as trump. It does not show a desire to make the club suit trump since South's hand is known to be virtually useless in any contract other than spades. North can get very excited when South responds 5D, indicating either the diamond ace or a diamond void. North can count on declarer winning 13 tricks if South holds the diamond ace. If instead, South has a diamond void, North should feel that declarer may still have 13

|              |                  |            |           |
|--------------|------------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>NORTH</b> |                  |            |           |
| ♠            | K 4              | AK 3       | 6 5 4 3 2 |
| ♣            | AK 4             |            |           |
| <b>WEST</b>  |                  |            |           |
|              | 9                | Q 10 8 4   | ♠ 8 2     |
| ♠            | Q J 10 6         | ♠ K J 10 9 | J 9 5 2   |
|              |                  | ♣ Q J 10 6 | A Q 8 7   |
| <b>SOUTH</b> |                  |            |           |
| ♠            | A Q J 10 7 6 5 3 |            | ♣ 9 8 3   |
|              | 7 6              |            |           |
| ♣            | 7 5 2            |            |           |

DEALER : EAST  
BOTH SIDES VULNERABLE

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| --   | --    | Pass | 4S    |
| Pass | 5C    | Pass | 5D    |
| Pass | 7S    |      |       |

Opening lead: club queen

top tricks since South might hold either the queen of clubs or the queen of hearts. In any case, North can rationalize a quick prayer and the aggressive bid of 7S.

When declarer sees the dummy he can count only 12 top tricks. The club loser is staring up at him. Declarer must try to develop a diamond winner in dummy in order to discard the club loser. Even though declarer's highest diamond in dummy is the lowly 6, dummy has five diamonds. With proper declarer play and if East-West's

diamonds break 4-4, the fifth diamond will become that much needed winner.

It is necessary to play the diamond suit five times: four times to ruff and a fifth time to take advantage of the diamond winner. Therefore declarer needs five entries to dummy. Since declarer has exactly five entries to dummy, it is essential to use each entry to play a diamond from dummy. Therefore, when declarer wins the opening lead in dummy, he must play a diamond before pulling trump! If he plays even one round of trump, he will find himself with one entry too few to establish and use the diamond winner. Notice that it was necessary to plan the play of the entire hand as soon as dummy appeared. This theme has appeared in many of the bridge columns in *The Bronx Journal*.

The defenders may complain about their bad luck since the chance of their diamonds breaking 4-4 is only 33%. But declarer should be given credit for appreciating the potential value of his five card suit in dummy and putting in the hard work required to take advantage of a 4-4 split. A 33% chance of success is much better than a 0% chance.

On hands where declarer has a singleton and dummy has a five cards in that suit, the fifth card can be established if the defenses' seven cards split 4-3. The chance of this is a much better 62%.

Appreciate the potential of long suits. A small spot card can win a trick as well as an ace if declarer can see its hidden power.

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### SOLUTION TO PUZZLE FROM PAGE A-11

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E | D | S |   | S | A | C | K |   | M | A | M | E |
| R | O | O |   | E | P | E | E |   | A | D | A | Y |
| A | D | H | E | R | E | N | T |   | N | O | N | E |
| S | O | O | N | E | R |   | T | A | N |   |   |   |
|   |   |   |   | E | N | S |   | L | O | A | D | E |
| B | L | A | M | E |   | E | E | K |   | E | V | A |
| R | O | S | Y |   | R | N | S |   | C | L | E | F |
| I | L | K |   | T | E | E |   | G | R | I | S | T |
| M | A | S | S | E | D |   | F | L | Y |   |   |   |
|   |   |   |   | E | A | U |   | R | E | P | L | A |
| S | P | E | W |   | C | R | E | A | T | U | R | E |
| H | I | R | E |   | E | A | R | N |   | G | E | L |
| H | E | R | R |   | S | H | E | S |   | S | A | L |