

Desperately seeking Oscar

Shakespeare's affair with Oscar seems ready to begin; Truman on Academy's outside

The nominees for the 71st annual Academy Awards were announced yesterday and to quote a line from *L. A. Confidential*, "Nothing too original because, hey, this is Hollywood."

The 5,467 voting members have until March to fill out their ballots. The ceremony will be held March 21 at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles.

As expected, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Life is Beautiful* garnered nominations for Best Picture, but the increase in musicals, *The Thin Red Line* and *Elizabeth* were mild surprises to many.

Most expected *The Truman Show* to be nominated, especially considering its Golden Globe success. Perhaps the Academy of Arts and Sciences took the media pervasiveness topic to heart too seriously.

Like a movie, let's take a moment to suspend disbelief and vote for Best Picture. Here's the lowdown, in order of the favorites:

Shakespeare in Love is the most accomplished and original of the nominations. Young William Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes) as writer's block, and it takes an affair with Viola De Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow) to free him. Not only is it a sizzling love story with the best ensemble acting of the year, but the highly original screenplay sees the Bard in a different light. There are also ounces of modernity thrown in: a "taxi" driver pitching Shakespeare, a souvenir mug from Stratford-on-Avon and the ultimate in-joke — an Affleck playing a stuck-up actor. Imagine

Shakespeare being fun for a change.

Life is Beautiful is an Italian import many may not have heard of or seen but was always considered a lock for a nomination. Roger Ebert saw the film at the Cannes Film Festival this summer and immediately predicted it would receive a nomination for Best Picture. *Life is Beautiful* was also named a nominee for Best Foreign Language Film. This wonderfully told fable was written, directed and stars

The Thin Red Line may have missed most audiences, but it still borders on a masterpiece. This visual poem is based on Charlie Company during the battle of Guadalcanal in World War II. Director Terrence Malick's style is short on dialogue, but long on imagery. In fact, it is one of the most visually beautiful films ever made. Malick's film is ambiguous and disjointed, but it has moments of pure power and depth. It is the only film nominated that aspires to art.

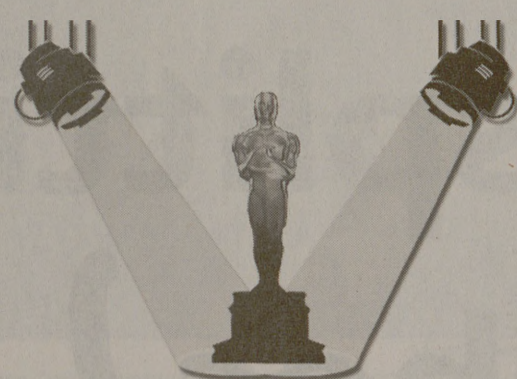
Saving Private Ryan is the out-and-out favorite to win not only Best Picture, but nearly everything it is nominated for. Another Steven Spielberg melodrama, this WWII epic is already the stuff of legends: eight soldiers set out to rescue Pvt. Ryan (Matt Damon), whose three brothers died in the war. Although many liked this film when it first came out, the cracks in its armor immediately began to show. After a stunning opening sequence, an overwhelming recreation of D-Day, it is all down hill. Spielberg turns to the Hollywood movie director's best friend: clichés and jingoism. Spielberg said he wanted to make an anti-war film, but this film becomes something no anti-war film should be, reaffirming. The last battle is another excellent piece of filmmaking, but the film is like a sandwich with no meat.

Elizabeth is the most surprising inclusion. This well-made film about Queen Elizabeth (Oscar-nominated Cate Blanchett) is a typical costume drama. Director Shekhar Kapur adds touches of his native India to the art direction but this difficult-to-follow film, with a *Godfather*-style montage at the end, is nothing special.

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JEFF SCHMIDT



JP BEATO / THE BATTALION

Italy's crown prince, Roberto Benigni (picture a kinder, gentler Jim Carrey). Benigni plays Guido, a Jewish man, who woos and marries a "princess" in the first half of the movie. The second half is much darker, befitting the setting: a concentration camp. Guido and his son are imprisoned in a labor camp, but Guido concocts a plan to hide his son by pretending it is one big game, the winner of which gets a brand new tank. Guido instructs his son to stay hidden to gain points. Guido tells his son the Nazis are losing, and that's why they are so angry all the time.



Bust a Groove
Console: Playstation
Category: Rhythm/Dance
Developer: ENIX

Most fighting games involve least warriors and kung fu masters from other worlds fighting it out for the fate of the universe. In some dorky fighting title, but Bust a Groove decided to take a different approach.

The combos in Bust a Groove initiate dance move sequences instead of a flaming triple-barrelled driver.

With the use of CDs as the new gaming medium, music for video games is now more than raps and whistles.

The first popular game to rhythmically take advantage of this was Parrapa the Rapper, a date, addictive video game that

had the player punch a sequence of buttons along to the music.

Bust a Groove takes rhythm games a step further. The game has 10 dancers with a few hidden characters. Each one has his own dancing style to complement his or her own personality.

The 'fight matches' consist of the dancers squaring off with different dance moves determined by the series of buttons the player pushes. The person who has the most rhythm and versatility in style is the winner.

The moves for each character are excellent and look like something the player might want to try on the dance floor.

Don't get too carried away, or you will start breaking all the furniture in the room. (Grade: A-)

— Kyle Whitacre

NCAA Final Four 99
Console: Sony Playstation
Category: Sports
Developer: 989 Sports

If the wild hoopla of "March madness" generated by the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament is too far away, 989 Sports offers NCAA Final Four 99 for Sony PlayStation to quench the thirst of hoops-crazy fans.

The game features more than 250 Division I men's teams with authentic home and away jerseys, as well as down-to-the-hardwood-floor stadium reproductions.

Virtual Texas A&M benefits from injured Calvin Davis in the lineup and plays on the parquet floor in Reed Arena.

The 6th Man meter allows players to pump up the crowd af-

ter a made dunk, intimidating visitors into missed shots.

Despite the realistic captured player movements of former University of Kansas All-American and current Boston Celtics standout Paul Pierce and Orlando Magic forward Charles "Bo" Outlaw, the trademark jerky animation of 989 Sports is too much to handle.

Game players also can alter the talent levels of players before a game, pumping up the three-point shooting of a backup center from 10 to 99, sometimes making the game too easy.

In addition, the play-by-play of commentator Quinn Buckner seems more of a drawback than an addition, as any college basketball fan might imagine. (Grade: C+)

— Jeff Webb

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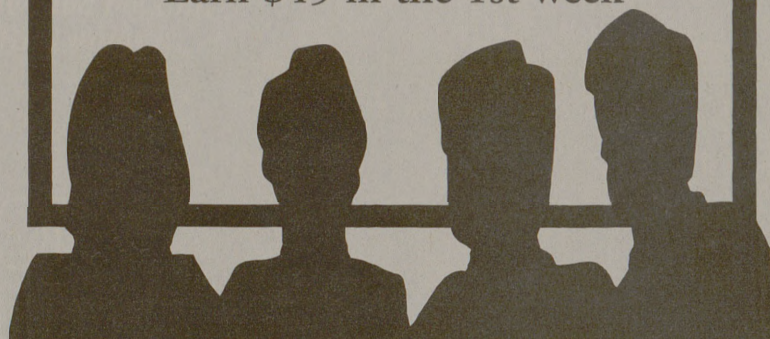
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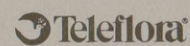
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