

And the winner is . . . the low-budget, small indies

The 65th annual Oscar nomination list seemed to shirk the glitz of high-price-tagged Hollywood glam for low-budget, independent, "artsy" films. Although moves like *Unforgiven*, starring, directed by and produced by aging, leather-faced Clint Eastwood got the nod, smaller films like *The Crying Game* and *Howards End* received virtually unprecedented nominations.

The small-guy nominations apparently took people off guard—including those who were involved with the films.

"I never thought it was an Oscar kind of movie," Neil Jordan, who wrote and directed *The Crying Game*, told the Associated Press. "It's not a period drama, there's not an Edwardian dress in sight. It's not even about people triumphing over insuperable odds."

John Sayles, who wrote the script for Oscar-nominated independent film *Passion Fish*, said he was glad to see the Academy was finally recognizing smaller films.

"The good thing is that those mov-

movie news

JENNIFER BRETT

ies are getting seen at least by the people who are nominating Academy Awards and that there's no big stigma attached to them," Sayles told the Associated Press.

Ismail Merchant, who produced *Howards End*, a film starring Emma Thompson, about the intricacies of wealth, love and scandal in an English family, was in India when he learned his picture had been nominated.

"It's a great endorsement of the feeling that independent producers can do and deliver the goods at half the price the majors do," he told the AP. "The economics play a great part"

One third of the nominations for best picture, best actor and best actress were handed to indie films. In the top eight categories, independent films claimed almost half of the 40 nomina-

tions. Last year, only one nomination was given to such an outsider production.

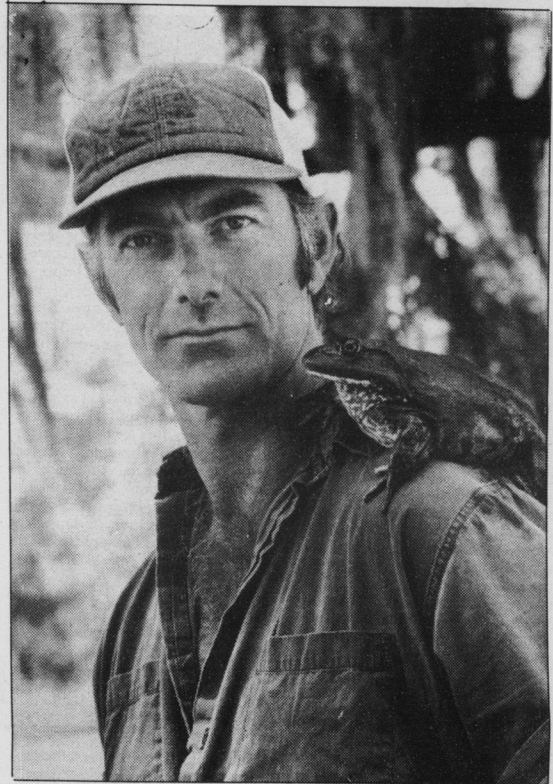
In Chapel Hill, where independent, low-budget films have long enjoyed a captive audience, theater proprietors are hopeful that the Oscar attention garnered by such films as *The Crying Game* and *Howards End* will boost interest in big-screen, small-scale films.

"Artistic films have always been around," said Mary Stone, who with her husband, Bruce, owns and manages the Chelsea Theater. "A lot are quite good but go unrecognized."

An indie snatch at the Oscars might change that, she said.

"It's hard to say," Stone said. "We've had some (films) that were extremely good—but the audience wasn't there. Certain ones catch on; others don't."

Smaller films often don't receive the publicity or critical acclaim that their multi-million dollar counterparts do, Stone said. "This area is good for independent films," she said. "As for a trend, we'll have to wait and see."



John Sayles and his frog might win an Oscar

Racy series will excite night owls

Silk Stalkings

Rob Estes, Mitzi Kapture

Thursday, 12:00 Midnight
CBS (WRAL Channel 5)

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He's a studly fashion plate with a passion for American heavy metal. She's a street smart beauty with a stunning smile. As the duo tool around Palm Beach, no one suspects that they are undercover detectives unraveling the previous night's silk stalking.

But what is a silk stalking? As Sergeants Chris Lorenzo and Rita Lance know all too well, it's a crime of passion that often takes place in the bedroom. And, as you might guess, some of these crimes are a bit bizarre.

For instance, in a recent episode that borrowed a bit of its story line from *Basic Instinct*, a vixen quenched her demented sexual desires by knifing her lovers while in the midst of passion. Yet solving the series of murders was no easy task for Chris and Rita. In fact, the plot became as twisted and intertwined as a fly in a spider web.

The obvious rarely happens and the final who-done-it clue always remains hidden until the end. Watching the series is like playing Clue—except that *Stalkings* replaces the butler in the library with the pool man in the Serta. There's a lot of sexual tension between Chris and Rita. And in the chemistry department, *Stalkings* is reminiscent of *Hunter* or *Remington Steele*. Although series creator Stephan Cannell crafted the intriguing Lorenzo/Lance partner-

television

ROB BRITAIN

ship, Rob Estes and Mitzi Kapture add the extra pizzazz that makes their series sizzle.

Yet Estes and Kapture can't take all the credit for steaming up CBS's Thursday late night scene. Instead, *Stalkings'* director of photography and its set designer deserve congratulatory pats on the back.

While previous detective dramas such as *Cagney & Lacey* and *St. Elsewhere* prided themselves in gritty visuals, *Stalkings* dares to be different. The series' lavish Palm Beach Police Precinct is the epitome of comfort and modernity.

In fact, *Stalkings'* detective bull pen looks more like the inside of an ad agency than a precinct. Gracing the office's double doors are two enormous, picture-perfect palm tree silhouettes. There's also an ultra cool neon clock just above the entrance and enough halogen lighting throughout the office to melt Plastic Man.

Aside from the palm trees and the latest in lighting, *Stalkings'* set has magnificent Crayola-colored walls. Just imagine giving your little brother a box of "Big 8's" and letting him go crazy. That's what *Stalkings'* set designer did. And just like the color-drenched *Dick Tracey*, *Stalkings'* end product is an awesome spectacle.

Even when Rita and Chris take to the streets, their cinematographic ambience follows. Their investigations take them to posh mansions with Carolina blue pools and miniature Gardens of Eden. Fortunately, Estes' chiseled features and Kapture's flawless figure allow the twosome to blend into the pictorial masterpiece.

Yet perhaps *Stalkings'* bright, cheery visuals aren't just for looks. Perhaps they are symbolic of the series' overriding theme: that things are often not what they seem.

Accordingly, the series' words reflect such a paradox. As Chris looks

onto the corpse of a man who was butchered by the aforementioned vixen, he speculates that the victim "could have gotten it while he was gettin' it." Hence, we return to *Stalkings'* predominant theme: love can be deadly.

In highlighting the inherent paradoxes of love, *Stalkings* also bears an incredible bluntness and realism. For instance, as Chris's former flame, Melissa, explains: "Fantasies can be very exciting. Sometimes more so than the real thing . . . they're the ultimate safe sex."

Who knows, maybe Melissa also uncovered the attraction of a sexy, late night drama series. Perhaps *Silk Stalkings* speaks to repressed libidos and sexual frustrations. And perhaps watching *Silk Stalkings* is yet a form of absolutely safe sex.

nielsen ratings

1. (17) **Queen, Part 2**, CBS
24.1 rating, 22.4 million homes
2. (1) **60 Minutes**, CBS
23.4, 21.8 million homes
3. (X) **Queen, Part 3**, CBS
22.18, 21.3 million homes
4. (X) **ABC Analysis**
20.9, 19.5 million homes
5. (5) **Murder, She Wrote**, CBS
20.4, 19.0 million homes
6. (9) **Family of Strangers**, CBS
19.8, 18.4 million homes
7. (3) **Home Improvement**, ABC
18.8, 17.5 million homes
8. (2) **Roseanne**, ABC
18.7, 17.5 million homes
9. (18) **Fresh Prince of Bel Air**, NBC
18.4, 17.4 million homes
10. (15) **Rescue 911**, CBS
17.9, 16.7 million homes

Listings include the week's ranking, with full season-to-date ranking in parentheses, rating for the week, and total homes. An "X" in parentheses denotes one-time-only presentation. A rating measures the percentage of the nation's 90.4 million TV homes.

one woman's fluff is another woman's fire. —omni

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ratings

- — miss it
- — watch it and rag on it
- — use it as a study break
- — watch it religiously
- — tape it