

# The keepers of the Academy Award winners break in a rookie this year

Garrison, Rosas and Oltmanns have a meticulous routine for tallying votes, which takes three days

BY BETH HARRIS  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — The keepers of Hollywood's 24 biggest secrets shrink from the spotlight and wouldn't dream of name-dropping in a town that thrives on gossip.

What fun is that?

Of course, the ability to stay quiet makes Greg Garrison, Rick Rosas and Brad Oltmanns the ideal keepers of the hush-hush information that can catapult a career.

Their secrets? The winners of the Academy Awards.

The three accountants will know who's going home with Oscar a full 48 hours before the envelopes are opened on the Feb. 27 telecast.

Usually just two of them know, but PricewaterhouseCoopers is breaking in a rookie this year. Oltmanns, a 24-year employee, is joining veterans Rosas and Garrison on the ballot team. Garrison is working his last Oscars before transferring to the firm's New York office.

Besides the winners, the trio have another secret they must keep — this one forever: Who came in second in each category. Some years, races have been decided by a single vote.

"There have been some very close elections, but we don't tell anybody, so the academy doesn't know and they like it that way," he said.

The firm boasts it hasn't had a security breach in 71 years of tabulating one of the world's most

anticipated contests.

One of the reasons is that each of the 5,808 ballots mailed to academy members Feb. 2 contains a control number that corresponds to the voting member.

If a voter's ballot is lost or stolen — it happened in 2000 — they report it to the academy. Their control number is voided and a new ballot with a different control number is sent out.

"If somebody was trying to print up duplicate ballots and then mail them in, we'd know," Garrison said.

Ballots are due at PricewaterhouseCoopers' office by 5 p.m. on Feb. 22.

And if one arrives at 5:01?

"We'll still take the ballot. There's no need to have a scene in our lobby," Garrison said. "But when we count them, we're going to push it aside."

No hanging chad here; Oscar voters make their selections using pencil, pen or in one case, according to Rosas, a crayon.

Neatness counts, too.

"If it's a case where we can't tell who they're trying to vote for, we won't count that vote in that category," Rosas said. "We're not here to interpret or to make a judgment call."

In an era of worrisome electronic voting, Oscar has a better idea: Each step of the tabulating process is done by hand, at the academy's insistence.

"None of this information is in computers where it can be hacked

out at any time," academy Executive Director Bruce Davis said.

Garrison, Rosas and Oltmanns take three days to count the final ballots, finishing the Friday before the Sunday night show. They tabulate in a secured, windowless conference room — psst, at a secret location — just big enough to contain them, a few carefully chosen assistants and 5,808 pieces of paper.

On the day of the show, accompanied by tuxedo-clad Los Angeles police officers, the men take separate routes to the Kodak Theatre carrying briefcases containing two sets of envelopes with the winners' names.

He and his colleagues memorize the winning movies in each category in case of any goofs by star presenters. Like when Sharon Stone accidentally sent an unopened envelope off with a previous winner and was left without anything to say.

So what happens to the unused envelopes at the end of the show?

Some are given to winners as souvenirs; others wind up in Garrison's briefcase until he opens it the next year to put in a new set.

"I've actually got a bunch of them at my house," he confessed.

During the Oscar show, Garrison and Oltmanns have to stand in the wings for three-plus hours, handing their envelopes to presenters before they walk out.

"You get to see some really neat moments backstage as a winner comes off," Garrison said. "The presenters are very nervous before they go on."

# First half of 'Hitch' good for a few laughs, last half loses a lot of momentum

Smith's transition to a romantic comedy is a rocky one, but the Valentine holiday weekend will help boost sales

BY DAVID GERMAIN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Will Smith waited a long time to bring his bottomless charisma to a romantic comedy. He should have waited longer, at least until the many hitches were ironed out of "Hitch," an occasionally cute trifle that had all the ingredients to be a great date flick.

Instead, "Hitch" offers a few laughs and the odd smarter-than-average romantic exchange between Smith and co-star Eva Mendes before veering into a foolish plot conflict that drains all credibility and chokes whatever goodwill the movie built up in its first half.

Smith's Alex "Hitch" Hitchens is a professional Manhattan "date doctor," a master at hooking up geeks with mates seemingly light years out of their reach. Hitch only takes on decent guys as clients, men who will treat a woman like a queen through a lifetime of commitment. And while he does coach his pupils through Cyrano de Bergerac-like pretense, there is no malicious deceit involved.

For all his optimism on others' behalf, Hitch has closed himself off to the prospect of romance because of a painful love affair that left him crying in the rain years earlier. An awkward flashback presents the story, which lacks conviction as to why such a self-assured man cannot rebound from a garden-variety heartbreak.

When Hitch finally meets his own dream woman, gossip columnist Sara Melas (Mendes), she turns out to be as cynical about personal romance as he. Hitch's ploys to catch Sara's eye, and the clever but calamitous first date he plans, offer some refreshing moments in the tired boy-meets-girl genre.

The movie quickly loses momentum as "Hitch" begins to wallow in romantic mush. And rather than letting the story develop authentically from Hitch and Sara's innate resistance to intimacy, the filmmakers try to forcibly inject dramatic friction by creating professional discord between the lovers.

Far more engaging is the undercard romance involving Hitch's lovelorn-accountant client Albert Brennaman ("King of Queens" star Kevin James), a meek, tubby accountant smitten by beautiful heiress Allegra Cole (Amber Valletta). James displays wonderful flair for broad physical comedy while instilling depth and pathos into a character that on the page would read as a one-dimensional loser. Valletta likewise makes Amber's passion for this portly nobody believable.

Because this is a Will Smith flick, and a romance opening over Valentine's weekend to boot, audiences will jam theaters for "Hitch." But it's a shaky transition from action movies to love stories for Smith.

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There will be an informational meeting on Wednesday February 16th in the football theater located on the 2nd floor of the Casanova Center (next to Autzen Stadium). Meeting will start at 7:00 PM.

APPLICATIONS ARE NOW AVAILABLE

Pick up your application in the football office on the 2nd floor at the Casanova Center. Interviews will be held February 21 - February 25, 2005. You can sign up for your interview time when you pick up your application.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS FEBRUARY 18, 2005 BY 5PM

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