

BEST ACTRESS

CHARLIZE THERON

Personifying anger, hurt, ugliness, desperation and a yearning for love, Charlize Theron embodies the life of a serial killer, in such a way that we're compelled to watch "Monster," despite the disturbing images across the screen.

Stepping outside her typical, glamorous roles, as those in "The Legend of Bagger Vance," "Sweet November" and "The Italian Job," Theron stands out among the nominees for attempting such an emotionally exhausting role.

Deglamorizing herself in such a way that shocked even Hollywood, Theron's portrayal of a homosexual prostitute and serial killer was strikingly believable.

The role, which required a convergence of violence and intimacy, was successfully accomplished by Theron's stance, posture, eyes, tone of voice and her terribly worn and freckled face (practically unrecognizable from the Charlize we know due to hours of make-up).

Although her physical appearance may have been the most prominent element of believability, Theron's interpretation of her character, aside from her appearance, convincingly led the audience to believe they had gotten a glimpse into the mind of a deeply troubled woman.

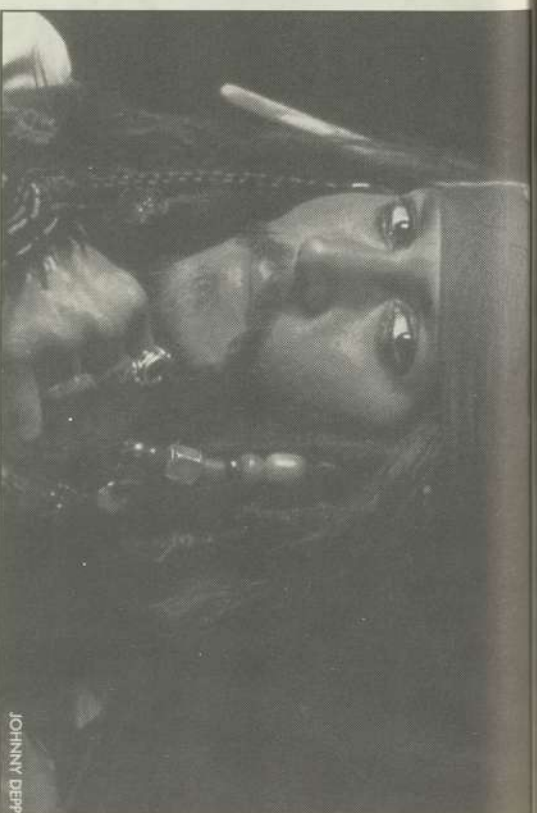
A complete physical and emotional transformation, the guts to take on a nearly unprecedented role and the ability to pull it off—merits an Oscar for best leading female actress.

Rest assured, Charlize—you've got my vote.

—Karen Hill



GEORGE RUSH



JOHNNY DEPP

BEST ACTOR

JOHNNY DEPP

Best Actor is a no brainer: Johnny Depp. He kept up his character's "perpetually drunk" persona from the opening scene to the roll of the credits. His incredibly sloppy mannerisms were consistent with a man who spent much of his life throwing back one swig of hard liquor after another (i.e. rum, as explained later in the movie).

A combination of his saucy screen personality and penchant for dramatic action scenes make little girls everywhere want to meet him and little boys want to challenge him to a duel. That's easier said than done, however, since he learned a thing or two about swashbuckling in preparing for his own sword-fighting scenes in the movie. This puts him a hop, skip and a jump ahead of Bill Murray's only known weapon of choice... a Proton Pack in "Ghostbusters."

Can't speak too poorly of Murray, as he claims an impressive resume of his own. With movies like "Scrooged," "Caddyshack" and "Little Shop of Horrors," but even an actor of Murray's caliber can only do so much with a script that seemingly drags on forever. "Lost In Translation" didn't do much to showcase Murray or his talents, but he has some movies currently in "post-production" that look fairly promising.

Be that as it may, this is definitely Depp's year to take home the statue. Murray is the only actor up for the award that poses any threat, but the script of "Lost In Translation" just doesn't allow him the creative freedom to upstage the flamboyant Depp.

—Jeff Sorenson

VISUAL EFFECTS

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

The category for best visual effects is crammed with three of the best movies of the year. "The Pirates of the Caribbean" should pull a squeaker over "The Lord of the Rings" and "Master and Commander."

The visual effects in "Pirates" were amazing. In the opening 30 minutes, the Black Pearl bombards the coastal town with cannon fire. Buildings blow up in the audience's faces making them feel like they're in the battle.

The final fight scene was just as great; this film is packed with oohs and aahs from beginning to end. That final scene is what will win this trophy for them.

Johnny Depp and Geoffrey Rush batted back and forth walking in and out of the moonlight. Each time the moonlight hit one of them, the character turned into a skeleton. It was amazing how real they were able to make this look.

"The Lord of the Rings" brought nothing new to the special effects world, creating the same effects as the last two movies.

"Master and Commander" was just too bland. How many times do we have to put up with a man and his dingy? Seriously, it's gone far enough and we need to cut it off before we have "Brady Bunch: Family Trip on a Really, Really Big Boat."

But, for a fresh and more creative approach, one should make a beeline straight to "The Pirates of the Caribbean." This is not just a story about a man and his boat, but a story about his fight to become captain once again. It will be a disgrace if they do not receive this award.

—Cory Price



CHARLIZE THERON

And the Other Nominees are...

Best Directing

City of God
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King
Lost in Translation
Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World
Mystic River

Best Picture

Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King
Lost in Translation
Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World
Mystic River
Seabiscuit

Visual Effects

Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King
Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl

Best Actress in a Leading Role

Keshia Castle-Hughes - Whale Rider
Diane Kraton - Something's Gotta Give
Samantha Morton - In America
Charlize Theron - Monster
Naomi Watts - 21 Grams

Best Actor in a Leading Role

*Johnny Depp - Pirates of the Caribbean:
The Curse of the Black Pearl*
Ben Kingsley - House of Sand and Fog
Jude Law - Cold Mountain
Bill Murray - Lost in Translation
Sean Penn - Mystic River