

'And the winner might be...'

By Lawrence Savell

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THIS WEEK, lawyers from around the world witness yet another night of fierce competitiveness, shameless playing to the media, delayed releasing of information and harried naming of names. But this is not a deposition, negotiation or closing. It's just the Alternative Oscars—featuring movies that have been or should have been nominated.

Hollywood took something of a sabbatical from the law in the past year. Few of the nominated or noteworthy films are law-related. However, a little investigation has uncovered documentation revealing that early (i.e., rejected) versions of several recent popular releases dealt specifically with legal matters. Here are a few examples:

"Bill This": In a stunning turn from drama to comedy, Robert DeNiro plays Rico Statute, a reputed mobster who, determined to appear pro se in his upcoming homicide trial, enlists the reluctant tutelage of a noted Harvard law professor (Billy Crystal). Mr. Statute must quickly master the defenses to the charges against him to avoid crushing defeat at the hands of notorious prosecutor Seymour "The Bald Spot" Nussbaum.

"Prosser in Love": Joseph Fiennes plays the dashing Will, in this fanciful period romp about the drafting of the leading treatise on torts, and the romantic liaison that may have led to it. Gwyneth Paltrow co-stars as Mrs. Palsgraf.

"Saving Partner Ryan": Tom Hanks stars in this emotional drama about a crack legal team's special mission to rescue one of their own who is trapped in an interminable client trade association meeting. The film opens with a wrenchingly graphic and disturbing battle scene, as meeting attendees fight over the last available cheese danish.

"Law Is Beautiful": In this poignant foreign offering, an attorney takes his young son to work with him one day, and tries valiantly to hide the monotony and tediousness of his existence through fun and games.

"The Thin Redline": Nick Nolte and Sean Penn star in this harrowing profile of an emaciated proofreader in a corporate law firm.

"200 Associates": Ben Affleck, Courtney Love and Christina Ricci are just a handful of the actors portraying the legal staff at a bloated West Coast firm's 1981

summer outing.

"Pitch Adams": Robin Williams plays a young rainmaker who quarrels with his firm's staid management committee as he brings in droves of new clients with his humorous presentation style. The film reaches a climax with Adams' successful representation of circus clowns in a worldwide class action against the manufacturers of defective rubber noses.

"Zero Dates": An overworked law firm associate videotapes himself having no social life whatsoever.

"The Rage: Carrie Eq.": A misfit attorney with telekinesis wreaks havoc on the legal system through her ability to move court dates, raise billing rates and drop causes of action at will. Horror ensues.

"Baby Litigators": Kathleen Turner stars in this talking-children story, originally titled "Look Who's Suing," in which diapered barristers, between naps and feedings, seek to extend age discrimination laws to cover infants.

"My Favorite Marshal": In this reincarnation of a short-lived sci-fi sitcom crossed with a long-running Western series, Christopher Lloyd plays a frontier sheriff suddenly transported to a present-day big city. The film ends tragically, as the six-gun-toting lawman accidentally wanders into the start of an illustration competition and overhears the proctor announce, "Draw."

"The Price of Egypt": This epic animated feature about a real estate attorney haggling over the terms of a massive overseas deal is loaded with fantastic special effects, such as the almost-believable simulation of daylight as lawyers leave the office after work.

"Rush Some More": Bill Murray shines as the gruff night manager of a law firm's messenger department who pushes his staff to the limits of their endurance, as they pedal furiously to catch up with FedEx trucks heading to the airport.

"Waking Ed Levine": A narcoleptic partner emeritus is tapped by his firm to handle one last case.

"Message in a Briefcase": A maroon leather attache drifts unclaimed on a baggage carousel until a passerby reads its contents: a passionate billing letter from an attorney to his dilatory client.

The finder (Robin Wright Penn), a Black's Law Dictionary apprentice punctuation editor, tracks down the lawyer (Kevin Costner), who turns out to be a North Carolina admiralty specialist currently in hot water. ☐

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