The nominations were announced Tuesday for the 73rd annual Academy Awards. 2000 was one of the least predictable seasons in years. What were projected to be big winners at this year’s awards, “Pay It Forward,” “The Insider,” “Cast Away,” and “Saving Private Ryan,” didn’t get any nominations. Ridley Scott (“Gladiator”), Steven Soderbergh (“Erin Brockovich”) and Steven Spielberg (“Amistad”) were all pushed back into 2001. The thin field has left room for a few odd choices this year, including the subtitled action film “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” as a Best Picture nominee. Here’s the low down on the other surprises Oscar 2000 has in store.

For only the second time in Oscar history, there are only four nominees for Best Director. Steven Soderbergh was nominated twice, for “Erin Brockovich” and “Traffic.” Michael Curtiz was twice nominated in 1938 for “Four Daughters” and “Angels With Dirty Faces” (and lost). Soderbergh, who won most of the major critics awards, is a favorite, but only if his votes aren’t split too far between his two nominations. Ridley Scott (“Gladiator”), is the only repeat nominee: he was nominated in 1991 for “Thelma & Louise.” Ang Lee (“Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”) and Stephen Daldry (“Billy Elliot”) round out the field. Look for the Best Director statuette to go to the director of the Best Picture winner; these awards have only been split up three times in Academy history.

The hardest major category to pick, Best Actor has no real standouts, and a lot of familiar faces. Russell Crowe (“Gladiator”) was nominated last year for his work in “The Insider.” Geoffrey Rush (“Quills”) won the award in 1996 for “Shine,” and Tom Hanks (“Cast Away”) is a 2-time winner for “Philadelphia,” “Forrest Gump”). Other nominees are Robert Downey, Jr. (“Shine”), Russell Crowe (“Gladiator”), and Steve Buscemi (“Fargo”). The irony of the award is that the frontrunner is a young man, this year’s first-time nominee, Denzel Washington (“Training Day”).

Best Picture, on the other hand, is a four-way horse race. “Gladiator,” one of the biggest movies of the year, is the favorite. It’s a rousing epic, very easy to like, and it was the Best Dramatic Film at the Golden Globes. “Erin Brockovich” has charisma, a strong female character, big box office numbers, and is based on a true David and Goliah story. “Traffic” has all the critical credentials, and the Academy likes movies that have a lot to say. And “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” is gaining more and more momentum as well as more and more box office to boot it. “Chocolat” was a surprising nomition, and its underdog status could help it gather supporters.

What got left out? “Cast Away,” for one. This movie had Oscar written all over it: a stand-out performance by a respected star, decent box office, and a little dialogue in the second act. “Almost Famous,” one of this year’s “feel-good” movies, was another critical and word-of-mouth success, though it’s box office left something to be desired. “Quills” had great writing and acting, but the themes were a bit heavy for the older Academy members. Ditto for the drug epic “Requiem for a Dream.” “Dancer In the Dark,” the quirky and dark Danish musical starring pop star Bjork, won the Palme D’or at Cannes, and has critical credentials, and the Academy likes movies that have a lot to say. “Quills” had great writing and acting, but the themes were a bit heavy for the older Academy members. Ditto for the drug epic “Requiem for a Dream.” “Dancer In the Dark,” the quirky and dark Danish musical starring pop star Bjork, won the Palme D’or at Cannes, and has critical credentials, and the Academy likes movies that have a lot to say. “Quills” had great writing and acting, but the themes were a bit heavy for the older Academy members. Ditto for the drug epic “Requiem for a Dream.” “Dancer In the Dark,” the quirky and dark Danish musical starring pop star Bjork, won the Palme D’or at Cannes, and has critical credentials, and the Academy likes movies that have a lot to say.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences presents the 73rd Academy Awards on March 25. For a complete listing of all the nominees go to www.oscar.com or www.oscar.org.