

## Box Office Power Rankings: Can't Be a Hater

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
Friday, 23 January 2009 15:29

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A reliable rule for critical aggregators is that Rotten Tomatoes will almost always be a more extreme number than Metacritic. Put another way, the Metacritic number will generally sit between the Rotten Tomatoes number and 50. This is a function of the up-or-down Rotten Tomatoes system compared to the shadings allowed by Metacritic. (A three-star review is fully positive to Rotten Tomatoes, but only three-quarters positive to Metacritic.)

There are so few significant exceptions that it's worth noting when they crop up. In this week's [Box Office Power Rankings](#)

(won, for a second consecutive week, by

*Gran Torino*

), there are two:

*Notorious*

and

*Defiance*

. They both scored 52 at Rotten Tomatoes and significantly higher (61 and 58, respectively) at Metacritic.

The obvious explanation is that while critics were roughly evenly split on the movies, those who liked it liked it more than those who didn't like it didn't like it. Less stupidly, each got marginally negative reviews and enthusiastic positive ones in equal measure.

But I wonder if these special cases speak to some sort of critical fear. My theory is that these outliers reflect that critics were afraid to dislike these movies, or perhaps more accurately that a significant segment of critics felt obligated to "love" them. The Holocaust movie about heroic Jews, and a bio-pic of a slain African-American rapper. I could see it.

Alternatively, maybe they're simply exceptions. I dunno.

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### About Box Office Power Rankings

Box Office Power Rankings balance box office and critical reception to create a better measure of a movie's overall performance against its peers than gross receipts alone.

The weekly rankings cover the 10 top-grossing movies in the United States for the previous weekend. I assign equal weight to box office and critical opinion, with each having two components. The measures are: box-office gross, per-theatre average, Rotten Tomatoes ( [RottenTomatoes.com](http://RottenTomatoes.com) ) score, and Metacritic ( [Metacritic.com](http://Metacritic.com) ) score.

Why those four? Box-office gross basically measures the number of people who saw a movie in a given weekend. Per-theatre average corrects for blockbuster-wannabes that flood the market with prints, and gives limited-release movies a fighting chance. Rotten Tomatoes measures critical opinion in a binary way. And Metacritic gives a better sense of critics' enthusiasm (or bile) for a movie.

For each of the four measures, the movies are ranked and assigned points (10 for the best performer, one for the worst). Finally, those points are added up, with a maximum score of 40 and a minimum score of four.

For more Box Office Power Rankings, visit [CultureSnob.com/bopr](http://CultureSnob.com/bopr) . Culture Snob is the Web site of Reader Managing Editor Jeff Ignatius.

#### Box Office Power Rankings: January 16-19, 2009

Box Office Ranks  
Rank

Critics' Ranks  
Movie

[Last Week](#)

Gross

Per T

[Rotten Tomatoes](#)

[Metacritic](#)

1

*Gran Torino*

1

9 (\$25.6M)

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2	<i>Notorious</i>	-	7 (\$23.4M)
3	<i>Slumdog Millionaire</i>	-	1 (\$7.0M)
4	<i>My Bloody Valentine 3D</i>	-	8 (\$24.1M)
5	<i>Paul Blart: Mall Cop</i>	-	10 (\$39.2M)
6	<i>Defiance</i>	-	3 (\$10.5M)
7	<i>Hotel for Dogs</i>	-	6 (\$22.9M)
8	<i>Marley and Me</i>	3	2 (\$7.5M)

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<b>9</b>	<b><i>The Unborn</i></b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4 (\$10.5M)</b>
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<b>10</b>	<b><i>Bride Wars</i></b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5 (\$13.9M)</b>
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