

## Box Office Power Rankings: Eye of the Beholder

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Thursday, 12 November 2009 08:40

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As people tell us time and time again, box-office performance is in the eye of the beholder.

Box Office Mojo [wrote](#) that *Michael Jackson's This Is It*, in its debut weekend, did "exceptionally well for a concert picture or music documentary." On the other hand, *Disney's A Christmas Carol* ["stumbled a bit out of the gate."](#)

Guess which one made \$30 million and which one pulled in \$23 million in its opening weekend.

Yep. The stumbler made more.

The two movies are within a couple hundred theaters of each other. Michael Jackson had literally no new-wide-release competition, and as you might have heard, Michael Jackson died suddenly in June. Charles Dickens had to fight off *Goats*, aliens, and whatever Richard Kelly is selling in *The Box*. And again: *A Christmas Carol* made \$7 million more than *This Is It*, even though it had significantly weaker reviews.

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It also earned \$7 million more in its opening weekend than *The Polar Express*, made by the same director with the same technique for the same holiday. But as Mojo helpfully adds: “

*Polar Express*

... was muted by opening a few days after

*The Incredibles*

whereas

*Carol*

had no such direct competitor.”

The unstated premise here — and it is truly unstated in these weekend roundups — is the size of the gamble. *A Christmas Carol* cost \$200 million to make (\$35 million more than *Polar Express* , by

the way), while the production costs of

*This Is It*

had been spent before the decision was made to turn those rehearsals into into a movie. So any revenue generated by

*This Is It*

is gravy, while

*A Christmas Carol*

has far to go before it's in the black.

I'm no defender of Robert Zemeckis or these motion-capture animated things, but I refuse to consider a \$30-million, non-Thanksgiving November opening a disappointment, either in absolute terms or compared to a postmortem cash-in. (Yeah, I know it was [assembled with affection and skill](#) , but it's still a postmortem cash-in.)

Others might be harsh in their assessments, but cheer up, Robert! You *did* win the [Box Office Power Rankings](#) , and Michael didn't.

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### Box Office Power Rankings: October 30-November 1, 2009

Box Office Ranks

Critics' Ranks

Rank

Movie

[Last Week](#)

Gross

Per Theater

[Rotten Tomatoes](#)

[Metacritic](#)

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1	<b><i>Paranormal Activity</i></b>	1	9 (\$16.4M)
2	<b><i>Michael Jackson's This-Is It</i></b>		10 (\$23.2M)
3	<b><i>Where the Wild Things Are</i></b>		6 (\$5.9M)
4	<b><i>Law Abiding Citizen</i></b>	4	8 (\$7.4M)
5	<b><i>Astro Boy</i></b>	6	4 (\$3.5M)
6	<b><i>Saw VI</i></b>	3	5 (\$5.3M)
7	<b><i>Amelia</i></b>	-	1 (\$3M)
8	<b><i>Couples Retreat</i></b>	9	7 (\$6.5M)

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9                                    *Cirque Du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant*                                    2 (\$3.1M)

10                                    *The Stepfather*                                    10                                    3 (\$3.2M)

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### Box Office Power Rankings: November 6-8, 2009

Box Office Ranks	Critics' Ranks		
Rank	Movie	Last Week	Gross

[Rotten Tomatoes](#)

[Metacritic](#)

1                                    *Disney's A Christmas Carol*                                    10 (\$30.1M)

2                                    *Michael Jackson's This Is It*                                    9 (\$13.2M)

3                                    *Paranormal Activity*                                    1                                    6 (\$8.3M)

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4	<b><i>The Men Who Stare at Goats</i></b>		8 (\$12.7M)
5	<b><i>Where the Wild Things Are</i></b>		2 (\$4.2M)
6	<b><i>The Fourth Kind</i></b>	-	7 (\$12.2M)
7	<b><i>The Box</i></b>	-	5 (\$7.6M)
8	<b><i>Law Abiding Citizen</i></b>	4	3 (\$6M)
9	<b><i>Astro Boy</i></b>	5	1 (\$2.6M)
10	<b><i>Couples Retreat</i></b>	8	4 (\$6.1M)

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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.net/bopr](http://CultureSnob.net/bopr) . Culture Snob is the Web site of Reader Managing Editor Jeff Ignatius.