

Come on, admit it. Every year the big, important movies come out and the critics lavish praise on them. Oscar time rolls around and the nominations pile up for those same serious films and you think: "Wow, I ought to see those."

And then you don't.

The 80th Academy Awards will be broadcast on ABC WTVG-TV, Channel 13, tonight beginning at 8, with comedian Jon Stewart as host. For a link to an Oscars ballot go to [www.toledoblade.com](http://www.toledoblade.com).

Instead, the weekend comes around and you find yourself more interested in a green ogre named Shrek or an animated rat who cooks or Johnny Depp with dreadlocks. Don't feel bad. The numbers make it obvious that you're not alone. Every year there are movies we should see — i.e. the Academy Award nominees — and movies we do see. Last year, the biggest of the box office smashes was *Spider-Man 3*, bringing in more than \$336 million but no Oscar nods. Compare that to those nominated for Best Picture. Only one has

managed to top \$100 million so far, and most have made less than half that. That's not a judgment, just a fact. George Clooney may be great in *Michael Clayton*, but you wouldn't know because you were busy watching the latest Harry Potter movie. So in this year when the Oscars were threatened by a writer's strike and all the big nominees are relentless in their weight — even the lightest of the top picks, *Juno*, features teen pregnancy — The Blade is here to offer some last-minute help. Stop worrying that you still haven't

seen *Atonement* or *There Will Be Blood*. Features editor Rod Lockwood watched all five Best Picture nominees for you over the course of a week (like you, he was too busy watching *Alvin and the Chipmunks* before then) and picked out all the important parts for you. And for those of you who only care about the movies you did see, staff writer Ryan E. Smith rented the top five box office draws of 2007 and offers his observations on the films that would likely be nominated if the Oscars really were a popularity contest. Optimus Prime versus Shrek for best actor? Now that's a toughie!

# EVERYMAN VERSUS OSCAR

ACADEMY NOMINEES TAKE ON POPULAR PICKS.

## Atonement



**SYNOPSIS**

Imagine a chick flick welded to a war movie with sumptuous scenery, romance, lots of English accents, and frolicking in the British countrysides. Throw in an ending that is a big-time downer and this adaptation of the Ian McEwan novel is an all-out epic.

**BUZZ**

It was the Golden Globe winner for best picture and its sprawling scope and Keira Knightley — beautiful as ever as a snotty rich girl — give the film cachet.

**THE BEST PART**

An unbroken, surreal shot along the beach at Dunkirk capturing the disjointed horror and confusion of war as the British army prepares to retreat. *Atonement* >>



**THIS MOVIE IS FOR...**

Guys who want to impress their significant others by appearing to volunteer to see a romantic film while actually getting a war movie.

“Thanks Briony, you’re a real brick.” - *Atonement*

## Juno



On paper it sounds like a major buzz kill: 16-year-old girl tries sex, gets pregnant and gives the baby up for adoption. In the hands of writer Diablo Cody and with a cast led by Ellen Page as the precocious Juno, the movie ends up being a love story.

Juno was pretty much unheard of when it came out. It's a sweetheart of a movie that has built momentum simply because it's so good.

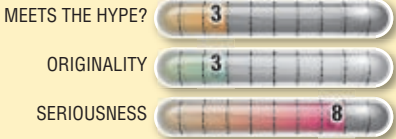
Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman as the adoptive parents interviewing Juno and letting the subtle cracks in their marriage show in subtle physical gestures.

Everybody.

“As boyfriends go, Bleeker is totally boss. He’s the cheese to my macaroni.” - *Juno*



## Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix



No one believes Harry that Lord Voldemort has returned, so the kid wizard goes back to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and trains an army of students while dark foes rise around him. Mediocre but harmless.

Another faithful adaptation of the Harry Potter series, this one is the darkest yet.

Imelda Staunton is inspired as Dolores Umbridge, the prim but cruel “reformer” at Hogwarts.

Muggles who have already seen the first four movies in the series.

“Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

## Michael Clayton



George Clooney, hollow-eyed, rumpled, and haggard, is his law firm's “fixer.” He's the guy who cleans up other attorneys' messes until he finds himself tangled up in a case that appears to have no fix, setting up a morality tale that is surprisingly gripping.

This may be the quietest of the Oscar nominees. It's an intellectual action flick that requires viewers to think along with Clooney.

Clooney's confrontation with his legal nemesis, played with jangled intensity by Tilda Swinton, who is one of the movie's highlights.

Unapologetic conspiracy theorists and the ethically challenged looking for some inspiration.

“I’m not a miracle worker. I’m a janitor. There’s no angle here.” - *Michael Clayton*

## No Country For Old Men



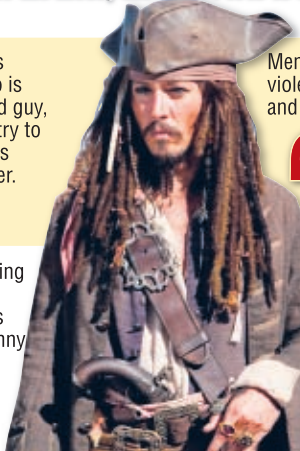
Javier Bardem plays an innovative hit man who leaves a trail of blood as he tries to chase down \$2 million worth of drug money in the hands of Josh Brolin. Tommy Lee Jones plays a craggy cop. Think *Fargo* in the southwest, only without the humor.

Because the movie is based on a Cormac McCarthy book, it comes with a built-in audience. The popular pick to win the Oscar according to Las Vegas oddsmakers.

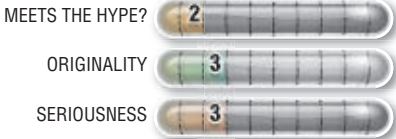
Watching Brolin's character — who is essentially a good guy, albeit greedy — try to outthink Bardem's cold-blooded killer.

Men, mostly, given the violent subject matter, and McCarthy fans.

“This country is hard on people.” - *No Country For Old Men*



## Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End



Keira Knightley and crew set out to rescue Johnny Depp from Davy Jones' Locker (whatever that is), then head back to make a last stand against a tea-drinking villain and an immortal, tentacle-faced captain. Way over the top.

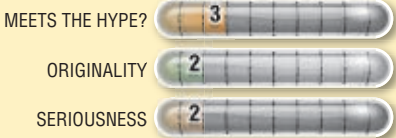
Everyone is back from the third-biggest grossing movie in history.

Recognizing Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards as the father of Johnny Depp's character. That, or seeing a monkey get shot out of a canon.

Women who like Johnny Depp and guys who dig Keira Knightley.

“Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

## Shrek the Third

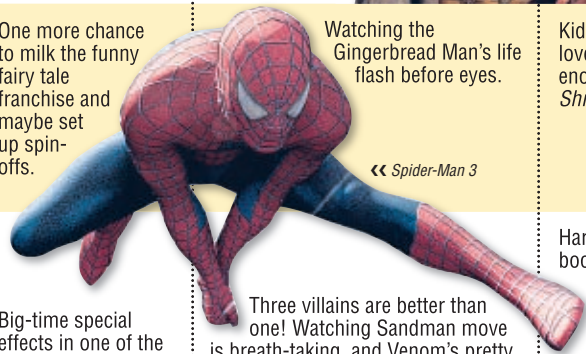


Green ogre — and heir to the throne — Shrek hits the road to find someone else to rule the kingdom, while Princess Fiona is pregnant and Prince Charming plans a coup.

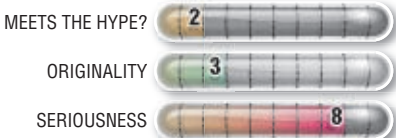
One more chance to milk the funny fairy tale franchise and maybe set up spin-offs.

Watching the Gingerbread Man's life flash before eyes.

Kids who are old enough to love the humor and young enough not to remember *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*.



## Spider-Man 3



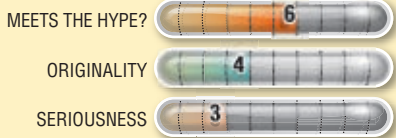
Peter Parker develops a big ego and an alien goo strokes his dark side as he struggles to find his uncle's killer, a better relationship with Mary Jane, and himself. Too heavy, not enough fun.

Big-time special effects in one of the most expensive movies of all time.

Three villains are better than one! Watching Sandman move is breath-taking, and Venom's pretty cool, too — once we see him. And don't forget about the Goblin.

“Transformers

## Transformers

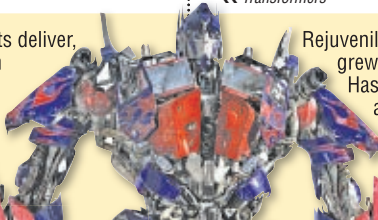


A gang of good alien robots disguised as a Camaro, semi truck, and more try to save humanity from evil alien robots led by a jet. Great action sequences even if the plot's a bit confusing.

Incredible special effects based on your favorite toy from the '80s could spawn the next mega-franchise.

The special effects deliver, but so does John Turturro in a supporting role as a government agent who loves his job a bit too much.

Rejuveniles who grew up with the Hasbro toys and still have Optimus Prime on their desk.



## There Will Be Blood



Daniel Day-Lewis is a misanthropic oil man at the turn of the 19th century who cons Californians out of their land. It's bleak and has a soundtrack that will drive you insane. Day-Lewis and Paul Dano as his nemesis, Eli Sunday, gobble up scenery shamelessly.

Everything about Day-Lewis' performance screams OSCAR! He invests in the character all the way from his body language to his intensity.

The first 15 to 20 minutes of the film feature no talking at all, capturing the desolate loneliness of the west perfectly.

“I hate most people.” - *There Will Be Blood*



There Will Be Blood >>