

# Expansion, Oscar Noms Fuel *Dark Thirty* Win

By Pamela McClintock  
**Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty*** killed the competition at the weekend box office, grossing a better-than-expected \$24 million as it expanded nationwide after earning an Academy Award nomination for best picture. Heading into the weekend, tracking had suggested that *Zero Dark Thirty* would end up in a close race with Warner Bros.' period mob pic *Gangster Squad*, but in a surprise twist, the star-studded new film was beaten both by *Zero Dark Thirty* and horror spoof *A Haunted House*.

*Zero Dark Thirty's* No. 1 finish is a sizable victory for Sony and Megan Ellison's Annapurna Pictures, which continue to battle criticism that the film about the CIA's decadelong hunt for Osama bin Laden overemphasizes the role torture played in tracking him down. *Zero Dark Thirty* has earned a total of \$29.5 million since opening Dec. 19 in New York and Los Angeles.

The critically acclaimed movie scored an A- CinemaScore from audiences. Males made up nearly 60 percent of those buying tickets, while two of the three top-performing theaters were in Washington, D.C., where the film has

become a lightning rod.

*Zero Dark Thirty*, financed and produced by Annapurna, was penned by Mark Boal, who also teamed with Bigelow on the Oscar-winning *The Hurt Locker*. That 2008 pic, like many other modern-day films about terrorism and war, failed to whip up much interest at the box office, grossing only \$17 million.

"*Zero Dark Thirty* is a big success," said Sony worldwide president of distribution Rory Bruer. "Kathryn did a masterful job of telling this story."

Fueled by African-American and Latino moviegoers, *Haunted House* outpaced expectations to gross a hearty \$18.8 million for Open Road Films, IM Global and Endgame Entertainment. Placing No. 2, the movie starring Marlon Wayans is a parody of the *Paranormal Activity* franchise and other found-footage films.

IM Global financed *Haunted House* through its Octane label, while Jim Sern's Endgame put up the marketing money. According to exit surveys, 48 percent of those buying tickets were African-Americans, and Latinos made up 30 percent.

Open Road marketing head Jason Cassidy cred-

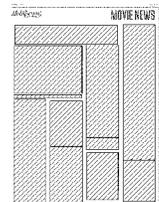
ited much of the film's success to Wayans, who crisscrossed the country doing publicity. "Marlon created a groundswell," he said.

Warner Bros.' *Gangster Squad*, placing No. 3, grossed a soft \$16.7 million while receiving a B+ CinemaScore. Directed by Ruben Fleischer, *Gangster Squad* revolves around a special task force formed by the Los Angeles Police Department during the late 1940s to fight mobsters. Josh Brolin, Ryan Gosling, Sean Penn, Michael Pena and Emma Stone star.

The film was supposed to open in September, but its release was pushed back after the Colorado theater shooting in July because of a scene in *Gangster Squad* that depicts a theater shooting. That scene was deleted.

*Zero Dark Thirty* was among a handful of films that enjoyed a boost after landing an Oscar nomination for best picture and is easily on course to become Bigelow's top-grossing film to date, besting the \$45 million earned domestically by 1991's *Point Break*. The film earned a total of five nominations, including a best actress nom for Jessica Chastain.

Receiving the top Acad-



emy Award nom greatly can improve a film's fortunes if the timing is right, which is why Sony waited until now to unleash *Zero Dark Thirty* nationwide.

Among other best picture contenders, the Weinstein Co.'s *Silver Linings Playbook* was the big victor. The film was up 38 percent from the previous weekend

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The found-footage-horror spoof *A Haunted House* finished No. 2 with \$18.8 million in its debut.

— the most of any film — grossing \$5 million for a total \$41.3 million. The movie ups its theater count to 2,500 locations next weekend.

Disney and DreamWorks' *Lincoln* fell less than 17 percent, grossing \$6.3 million in its 10th weekend for a domestic total of \$152.6 million. *Life of Pi*, now only play-

ing in 757 theaters, was down a scant 5 percent after the nominations were announced, grossing \$2.7 million domestically for a cume of \$94.8 million.

Best picture nominees *Django Unchained* and *Les Misérables* didn't see as much of a bump but already are big grossers.

Also from the Weinstein Co., *Django* came in No. 4, grossing \$11.1 million for a domestic cume of \$125.4 million.

Universal's *Les Misérables* fell 37 percent from the previous weekend, grossing \$10.1 million for a total \$119.2. Overseas, the musical took in \$25.5 million for the weekend from 22 markets for an international

cume of \$115.1 million and worldwide total of \$234.3 million.

Sony Pictures Classics' best picture contender *Amour*, playing in 15 theaters, scored the second-best location average of the weekend, grossing \$270,575 in its fourth weekend for a theater average of \$18,038 and cume of \$651,852.

New specialty entry *Quartet*, directed by Dustin Hoffman and starring Maggie Smith, walked away with the best theater average of the frame. Debuting in two theaters in New York and L.A., the Weinstein Co. title grossed \$50,333 for an average of \$25,166.



*Zero Dark Thirty* expanded wide after nearly a month in limited release.