

awards watch

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Scenes from some of the films nominated for an Independent Spirit Award: "Enron: The Smartest Guys In The Room," "Romantico," "Grizzly Man," and "Our Brand Is Crisis"

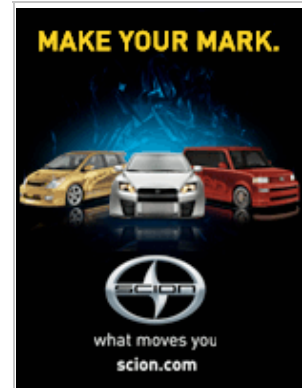
The Spirit Awards Alternative: A Survey of This Year's Nominated Docs

Awards Watch coverage presented by [Pop Secret](#)

by Jonny Leahan (February 28, 2006)

The **Independent Spirit Awards** have changed a lot since the ceremonies began two decades ago, and this year's nominees look a lot like the **Oscars** - except in the documentary category, where "**Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room**," is the only doc to be nominated for both honors. This season, the Spirit Awards nominees are an eclectic mix of some truly excellent documentaries, in both the Best Documentary section as well as for the Truer Than Fiction Award, which presents a \$25,000 grant to an unrecognized documentary filmmaker. The prizes will be awarded this Saturday, the day before the annual Academy Awards, and will be broadcast live on **IFC** (with a re-broadcast on AMC).

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Whether or not the Spirit Awards have a noticeable effect on the success of the winning documentaries is often debated, as some people feel the ceremonies get very little attention outside of the industry -- especially compared to the Oscars. **Mark Becker**, whose film "**Romantico**" was the only one selected for consideration in both Best Documentary and the Truer Than Fiction Award sections, feels that the awards can be very helpful. "I think the bigger awards shows do help the docs that get nominated," Becker told indieWIRE. "So many of the smaller docs are being distributed without much of a marketing budget, and so the publicity that accompanies an award show can only help. 'Romantico' has definitely breathed new life, in terms of interest and offers, since the two nominations for Spirit Awards."

There are five nominees for Best Documentary, including the aforementioned "**Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room**," directed by **Alex Gibney**. Based on the best-selling book of the same name, "Enron" is an in-depth examination of one of the biggest corporate scandals in history, in which top executives from the seventh largest company in the U.S. siphon off nearly a billion dollars, leaving investors and employees with nothing. Also nominated is **Werner Herzog's** extraordinary "**Grizzly Man**," which tells the story of grizzly bear aficionado **Timothy Treadwell**, who was tragically killed, along with his girlfriend, by one of the animals he was so passionate about studying.

The nominated "**Sir! No Sir!**," directed by **David Zeiger**, documents the nearly forgotten GI movement against the Vietnam War, which in the '60s penetrated the armed forces so deeply that it changed the course of history - while hundreds went to prison and thousands fled the country. The film faces stiff competition from **Scott Dalton** and **Margarita Martinez's "La Sierra**," which follows three young people in Medellin, Colombia, which is controlled by a gang connected to the nation's paramilitary armies.

While Becker's "Romantico" has a shot at taking home Best Documentary, he could also win the Truer Than Fiction Award, which is presented to an emerging director of non-fiction features who has not yet received significant attention. The film follows Mexican musician **Carmelo Muniz Sanchez**, a street performer in San Francisco's Mission District where Becker lived at the time of filming. Shortly after he began shooting this gorgeous 16mm film, Sanchez decided to move back to his hometown of Salvatierra, and Becker followed as an emotional story unfolded before the cameras.

Rachel Boynton's "Our Brand is Crisis" is also a finalist for Truer Than Fiction Award, and follows a team of Democratic political consultants, which includes **James Carville**, as they strategize for a struggling presidential candidate in Bolivia. The consultants concoct an American-style smear campaign complete with intensely negative ads, turning their candidate into a desirable "brand" in an attempt to win an election in which the results turn out to be highly damaging to the country. **Garrett Scott** and **Ian Olds**

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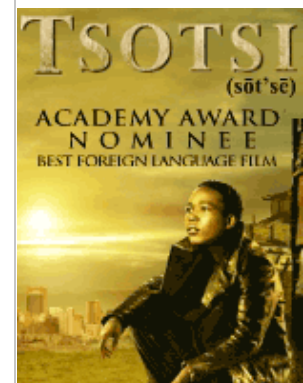
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directed the finalist "**Occupation: Dreamland**," a portrait of a squad of the US Army's 82nd Airborne deployed in Falluja during in 2004. As the soldiers struggle with confusion and disarray, the situation begins to descend into a chaos that ultimately destroys the city.

Thomas Allen Harris' "Twelve Disciples of Nelson Mandela" is the remaining finalist for the grant, and is also a strong contender. Faced with the death of his stepfather, director Harris goes on a quest to understand the man who raised him, "Lee" - an African National Congress foot-soldier who gave his life for the liberation of his country. One of the first South African freedom fighters, Lee and his fellow soldiers left their home in 1960 to tell the world of the brutality of apartheid and to garner support for the ANC and its leaders, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo.

Among some notable omissions were "**Mad Hot Ballroom**" and the Oscar-nominated "**Murderball**," which surprised some but didn't faze others. "I don't know if I can see a logic to what kinds of docs are nominated, which I think is an encouraging sign," says Becker. "Actually, both the Spirit Awards and Academy Award nominees this year include a fairly varied palate of films, which reflect the diversity of the documentaries out there right now. I was definitely happily surprised that 'Romantico' was nominated alongside documentaries that already had theatrical commercial success, like 'Grizzly Man' and 'Enron.' Ultimately, however, the awards shows can only help so much. In terms of getting a documentary out there theatrically and otherwise, it seems like commercial value is still the bottom line."

Documentary Independent Spirit Awards Nominees:

BEST DOCUMENTARY (Award given to the Director)

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room, Director: Alex Gibney

Grizzly Man, Director: Werner Herzog

La Sierra, Directors: Scott Dalton & Margarita Martinez

Romantico, Director: Mark Becker

Sir! No Sir!, Director: David Zeiger

TRUER THAN FICTION AWARD

The 10th annual Truer Than Fiction Award is presented to an emerging director of non-fiction features who has not yet received significant attention. The award includes a \$25,000 unrestricted grant. The Finalists are:

Rachel Boynton for "Our Brand is Crisis"

Garrett Scott & Ian Olds for "Occupation: Dreamland"

Mark Becker for "Romantico"

Thomas Allen Harris for "Twelve Disciples of Nelson Mandela"

(posted on Feb 28, 2006 at 12:01PM | filed under [Awards Watch](#), [Lead Story](#), [Trends](#))

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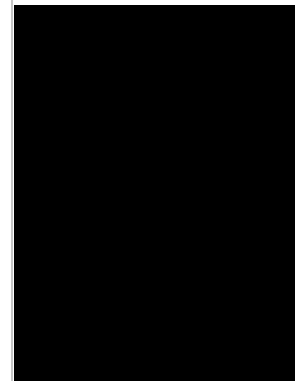
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