

The Dark Knight Rises triumphantly

By  Daniel Derksen

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In an age of crime- and terrorism busting, warfare, and maniacs shootings cinema-goers dominating news headlines, 2012 celebrates the rebirth of superheroes in film. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, it has been a year of Marvel's The Avengers, The Amazing Spider-Man, and now The Dark Knight Rises, merging entrainment and edutainment in turning ordinary men and women into superheroes to resolve serious issues, and cradle the concerns of humankind in a compassionate and entertaining manner.

In the words of John F Kennedy: "Our problems are manmade, therefore they may be solved by man. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings."

Filmmakers and visionaries like Joss Whedon (The Avengers), Marc Webb (The Amazing Spider-Man), and Christopher Nolan (The Dark Knight Trilogy), use film as a weapon of mass distraction to shine a beacon of light on hope, and through reel entertainment make sense of a real world spinning out of control.



Mutated to a modern city

In The Dark Knight Rises, Gotham City has mutated from its comic book origins and the fantasy world of Tim Burton in Batman, to a modern city that represent contemporary civilisation.

Following in the footsteps of the madman Scarecrow (Batman Begins) and the anarchist Joker (The Dark Knight), The Dark Knight Rises features one of the most monstrous criminals and threat to humanity: the physically intimidating and vengeful masked villain and terrorist named Bane, who makes his presence known to the citizens of Gotham with an explosive display of power.



"Without despair, there is no hope," says Bane - and he is serious about causing mass destruction, leading a terrorist onslaught to destroy the city, and justifies the act as not "conquering people", but liberating people from oppression.

At the end of the 2008, The Dark Knight Commissioner Gordon stated: "Batman is the hero Gotham deserves, but not the one it needs right now."

Eight years later

With *The Dark Knight Rises*, it has been eight years since Batman vanished into the night, turning, in that instant, from hero to fugitive. Assuming the blame for the death of DA Harvey Dent, the Dark Knight sacrificed everything for what he and Commissioner Gordon both hoped was the greater good. For a time the lie worked, as criminal activity in Gotham City was crushed under the weight of the anti-crime Dent Act.

Now, everything changes with the arrival of a cunning cat burglar with a mysterious agenda and a masked terrorist whose ruthless plans for Gotham drive the Caped Crusader out of his self-imposed exile.

With *The Dark Knight Rises*, Wayne gets to fulfil a desire he set in motion in *Batman Begins*: "To seek the means to fight injustice," and to "turn fear against those who prey on the fearful."

The Avengers, Peter Parker and Bruce Wayne, have almost become the anti-hero and their rebirth in film marks a new era in film, where superpowers are in the hands of every man and woman, empowering them to save the world from evil forces.

Every frame is a work of art

Although *The Dark Knight Rises* solemnly addresses serious issues, every frame is a work of art in image and sound; it has a masterful screenplay written by Jonathan Nolan and Christopher Nolan (from a story by Christopher Nolan and David S Goyer, based upon characters created by Bob Kane and published by DC Comics), superior vision, understanding and execution by director Christopher Nolan, and a powerful music score by Hans Zimmer.

On an artistic level, that most definitely raises the bar in filmmaking, Christopher Nolan utilized IMAX cameras even more extensively than he did on *The Dark Knight*, which had marked the first time ever that a major feature film was even partially shot with the large-format cameras.

Nolan's extraordinary visualisation is well supported by the craftsmanship of director of photography Wally Pfister (who won an Oscar for his work on Nolan's *Inception*), production designers Nathan Crowley and Kevin Kavanaugh; editor Lee Smith; and Paul Franklin and Chris Corbould, who both won Oscars for the effects in *Inception*, and supervised the visual and special effects, respectively.

Entertainment that is unequalled

The result is entertainment that is unequalled, filled with astuteness, awe and spectacle beyond belief, the 162 minutes of *The Dark Knight Rises* showcases what film and filmmaking are all about.

Add to this a magnificent cast and you are in for a cinematic experience that guarantees to blow your mind.

A major contribution to the overall impact and power of *The Dark Knight* is the evolution of stereotypical comic book characters from one-dimensional cardboard creations, to fully fledged three-dimensional beings; this evolution began with films like *Batman Begins* and *Superman Returns*, in which superheroes not only fight off evil and save damsels in distress, but also seriously contemplate their respective destinies and the emotional landscape of their characters.

In *The Dark Knight*, the emotional depth of the characters provide ample food for thought for discerning audiences and respectfully reward fans with added insight about characters that have become a part of our culture.

The essence of a tormented soul

Christian Bale is superb in the dual role of Bruce Wayne and Batman; he perfectly captures the essence of a tormented soul whose journey to redemption began in *Batman Begins*. Bale's sensitive approach and agile power are underlined by a great sense of understanding, never turning his character into a helpless victim but into an empathetic human being whose outcry and despair are shared with the audience.

Equally impressive is Anne Hathaway in her dual role of Selina Kyle and the iconic Catwoman, a sexy and seductive cat burglar and the ultimate femme fatale; what makes her role in *The Dark Knight* impressive is that the character is grounded organically in Wayne's world, and contributes immensely to his spiritual growth and healing process.

The chemistry between Bale and Hathaway is tremendous; it's amazing how Bale is representative of classic movie stars like Errol Flynn and Gary Cooper, whereas Hathaway's uncanny resemblance of Audrey Hepburn amplifies the romance of *The Dark Knight* and adds a gentleness to the hard core action and darkness that prevails.

Evil has two deceptive faces in *The Dark Knight*: Marion Cotillard delivers an astounding performance as Miranda Tate, a wealthy philanthropist who sits on the board of Wayne Enterprises and later becomes a trusted friend, with a totally unrecognisable Tom Hardy as Batman's new arch-nemesis; whereas Cotillard is superb as a conniving adversary who is compassionate and trustworthy, Hardy is relentless as the monstrous and brutal Bane who shows no mercy.

Joseph Gordon-Levitt is sensational as another original character: Gotham City police officer John Blake, who impresses Commissioner Gordon with his courage and integrity; other than to say that his character amplifies the inner journey of Wayne's distress, it would be a sin to spoil the development and outcome of his character in the film.



A remarkable performance

The film would not be the same without Bruce Wayne's loyal butler, Alfred, and Michael Caine once again deliver's a remarkable performance that is emotional and moving.

The Dark Knight Rises is indeed one of the highlights of the year. It has everything you could ask for in first-rate entertainment and intelligent escapism that is meaningful and rewarding. It triumphantly rises to celebrate the art of storytelling and filmmaking.

It is an emotional journey that embraces a universal story anyone can easily relate to; if you have ever questioned your role in the scheme of the bigger picture, tried to redeem guilt or fulfil a dream, the Caped Crusader is a hero who will definitely set you on a path of transfiguration, allowing you to become the hero of your own destiny.

In the words of Quentin Crisp: "The world is pining for a steady diet of celluloid; it desperately needs an alternative life to that through which it drags itself at the office or, worse, at home. This other existence need not be prettier, but it must be richer; it must have the power to use those capacities for love and courage for which we can find no worthy object in real life."

When you leave the cinema, you will definitely start the journey all over again and re-watch Batman Begins and The Dark Knight on DVD before returning for another screening of The Dark Knight. It's not only that good, it's that great!

All we have to do now is to wait patiently for Man Of Steel, a reboot of the Superman franchise in June 2013.

Behind the scenes

With this film, the last in his Dark Knight trilogy, Nolan completes the story arc he commenced with 2005's "Batman Begins." He recalled: "We were all very excited to bring this tale full circle; that was our chief inspiration for returning to Gotham. We also felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to fulfil expectations based on the first two movies, while giving the audience something they hadn't seen before. It was a tricky balance." Christian Bale, who reprises the film's title role, detailed: "In Batman Begins, you see the tragedy and the pain that motivates this angry young man, who feels useless and is searching for a path - who wants to find out who he is and what he can become. Then in The Dark Knight, he's discovered that path. He is useful; he is doing what he imagines is the best thing for him to be doing in his life. Now, we are eight years on and he has lost the one thing that gave him a purpose - until he is forced to deal with a new threat to the city and to himself."

Reflecting on the completion of the Dark Knight trilogy, Christian Bale said: "It was very bitter-sweet when I took off the cowl for the last time, because it's meant so much to me personally to play this character. It never stopped giving me goose

bumps to stand in that suit, because I recognise the honour of having portrayed this icon. And I can't help but feel immensely proud."

Christopher Nolan concluded: "Bruce Wayne's story has fascinated people for more than 70 years because it's a great story. We were thrilled to bring our interpretation of this legend to the screen with these three films. It has been an extremely gratifying experience. We are very proud of this ending, and we hope the audience shares our excitement."

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