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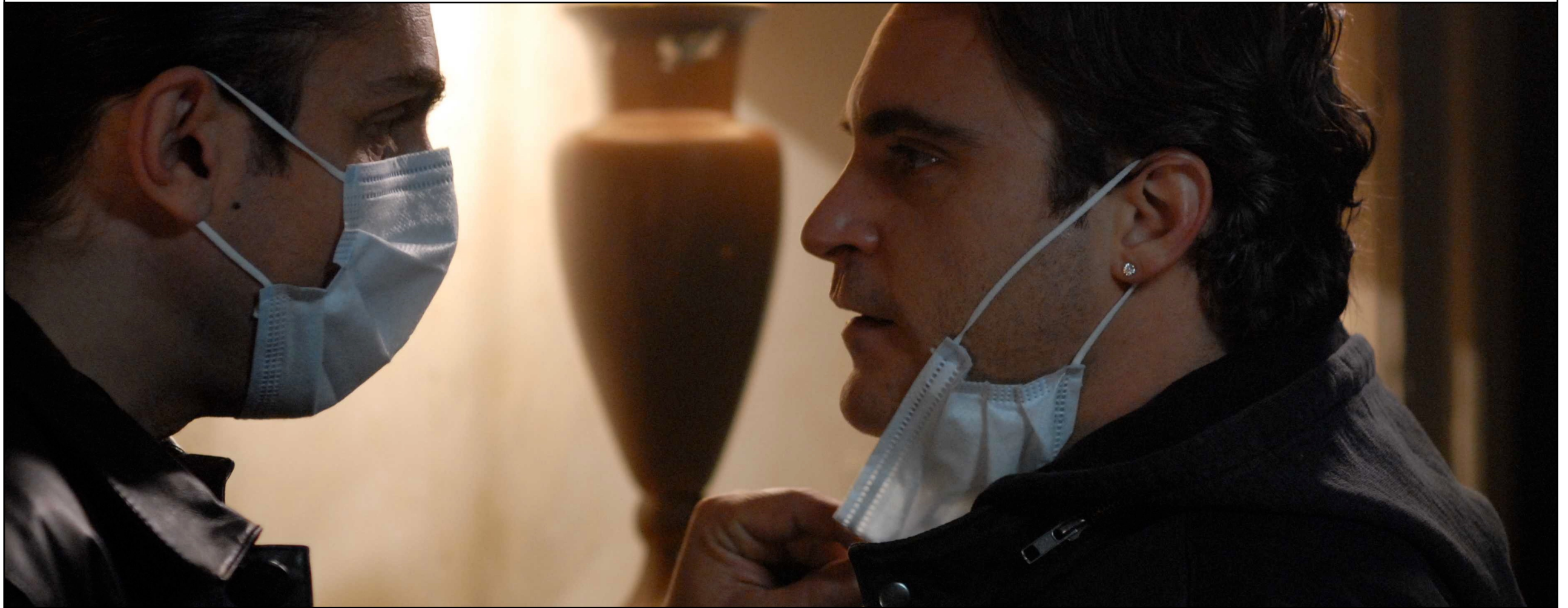
# The Dark Knight Rises



A Hope Lies Monograph

INTRODUCING

# The Hope Lies Monograph



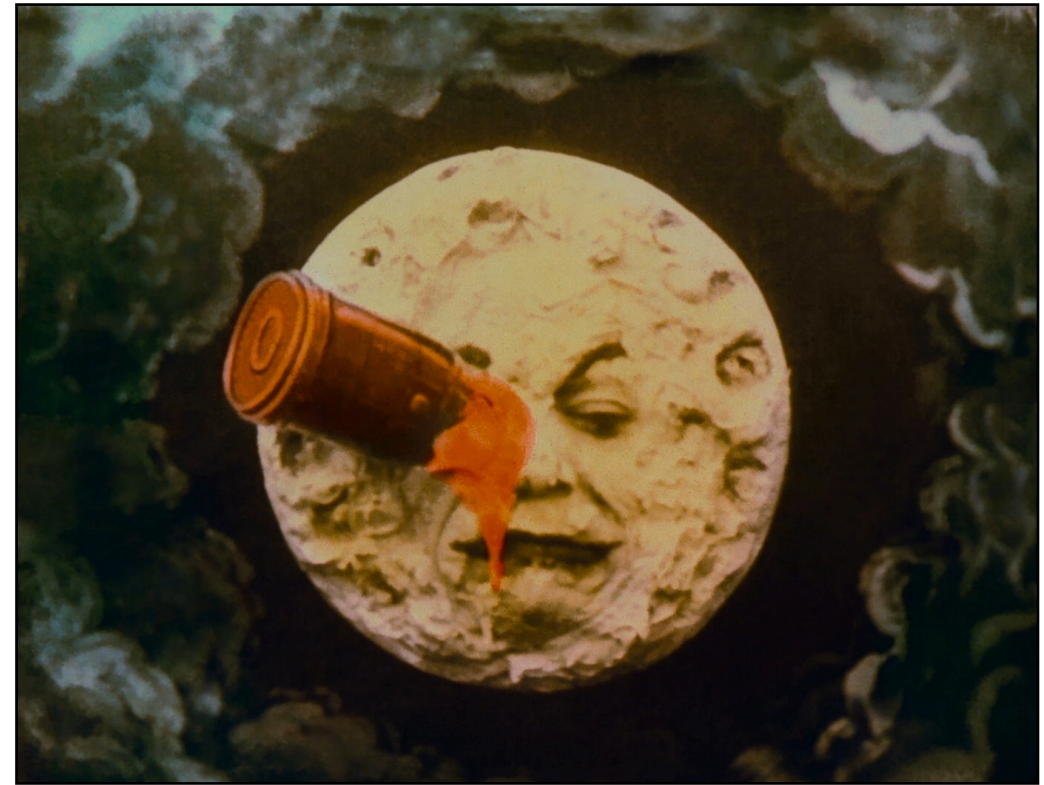
Welcome to the latest Hope Lies Monograph. Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second is an independently run film website based in the UK. Over the course of the last two years Hope Lies has built itself up from simple blog to being one of the most respected film websites in the UK (and, we're told, the 12th most influential in Europe...).



Cinema fascinates us. Every facet, from the latest Aki Kaurismäki feature to the most over the top blockbuster that Hollywood has to offer, gives us something to mull over, debate or be passionate about. Our long held tagline on the website has been "*From A Bout de Souffle to Zabriskie Point, Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second attempts to cover every corner of the cinema spectrum*" and that stand remains as strong as ever: we have a passion for the cinema that knows no bounds, and we hope that these Monographs reflect that.

Technology also fascinates us, which is why we've decided to experiment a little with this Monograph that you hold in your hands. We are utterly convinced that the future of reading delivery is digital: it's convenient, it's good for the environment and ultimately it provides a very satisfying reader experience. We say this as fans of what publications like Film Comment, Cinema Scope and Empire Magazine have been doing with their digital alternatives to their traditional publications, and if we can replicate/mimic one iota of the great work being done by those institutions then we'll be happy. As with any experiment there will no doubt be issues at first, but we thank you in advance for helping us to resolve any that may crop up.

Our aim with the website has always been to remain as influence-free as possible, so we're looking to instill similar innovative methods of delivery here too: we want to keep this free, but we don't want to be overly reliant on advertising (We appreciate just as much as anyone how mass advertising can ruin a clean user experience). Feel free to get in touch if you would like to be involved with that aspect of the Monographs.





This Monograph is designed to be read in landscape orientation. That's when it looks its best. If you'd like to read it sans film stills and whatnot then simply turn it to portrait scale.

Each Monograph, as the title suggests, takes a look at one film. There's no defining reason for why a film might be subjected to coverage, but it's probably a given that a timely theatrical release will lead to featuring. With that in mind we do have a mammoth special edition in the works in which we'll be taking a look at the complete oeuvre of a specific filmmaker to mark an anniversary, but more on that later.

In closing, we would like to thank you for downloading and giving this Monograph a shot. Please do check out the rest of the catalogue, and any feedback will be really appreciated.





MONOGRAPH

# The Dark Knight Rises





# The Dark Knight Rises (Nolan, 2012)

## Noteworthy

1. The Dark Knight Rises is the final film in director Christopher Nolan's Batman series. The film follows in the wake of Batman Begins (2005) and The Dark Knight (2008).
2. While four years of real-time have passed between Bat-flicks, The Dark Knight Rises takes place eight years after its immediate predecessor.
3. Among the returning cast and crew are players Christian Bale, Morgan Freeman and Michael Caine, while Nolan's regular cinematographer Wally Pfister lenses the picture. Nolan's brother Jonathan co-scripted the film (the brothers third film together).



*Christian Bale's Bruce Wayne and the noble Alfred are the two real constants throughout Nolan's Batman trilogy.*

It is difficult to not simply resort to hyperbole when greeted with a film as infinitely satisfying as Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*. So well crafted is the film, and so downright captivating is the material presented that it's tempting to simply wallow in the scale of everything, one's critical faculties crippled in the face of the

grandest of visions. It's debatable as to whether or not there has been a project quite as highly anticipated as this, the British filmmaker's closing chapter to one of the most successful film franchises of all time, in recent memory at least, but it's probably safe to assume that it features very



highly in the consciousness of both the mainstream and geek culture.

The opening section of the film is the most leisurely paced, as the director prepares his canvas for the chaos that will reign over it before pictures end. Following a breathtaking opening prologue, which introduces the audience to Batman's latest adversary in a fashion that sets the tone for the rest of the picture (it's big and it's loud, it's tense and it's terrifying, and all told physically, without the aid of computer generated imagery) we step back and see the wider landscape laid out. Gotham is dissected and placed back together. Layers of society are outlined, from criminal to king, before being merged together to form a grand tapestry of the city. If *The Dark Knight* owed a debt to the oeuvre of Michael Mann, then the final, and most expansive film in Christopher Nolan's Bat-franchise takes its cue from Fritz Lang, and most especially to the director's 1931 sprawling tale of crime and the city *M*. Superimposed over the top of this great city tale is the contextually relative story of Bruce Wayne. Several years out of the limelight since last we met, Wayne is forced to readopt the mantle of the Bat in the face of Gotham's greatest threat to date, which sees a city fall first economically, and then physically.

With a storyline so achingly relevant that one might be excused for suspecting that the Occupy movement was an extravagant piece of viral marketing for Mr. Nolan's opus, the current political climate proves the ideal superstructure on which for the director to reflect upon. Contemporary mirroring for this series is nothing new: *Batman Begins*, the first film in the reinvigorated Batman franchise was an explicitly reactionary piece to the events of 9/11 and notions of fear, while *The Dark Knight*, with its musings on truth

and justice, can be read as a reaction to the political and authoritative fallout seen in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, in which the "system" failed the people (and let's not forget, *The Joker* was often referred to as a "force of nature"). *The Dark Knight Rises* hinges itself upon the financial meltdown, with economics the ultimate doomsday device held by the terrorist threat at the heart of the movie (and one earlier mooted by the antagonist of *Batman Begins*). What better device for destroying the American Dream than the couplets of Capitalism? While Gotham City might be the fic-



tional North American city over which the Batman perches, it remains the archetypal AMERICAN city in every other way. Nolan subverts the iconic imagery of the US in his quest to portray its downfall: the Star-Spangled Banner (the song) acts as a precursive hymn to chaos, while the Star-Spangled Banner (the flag) waves flatly post-chaos, threadbare and half-broken. The humble yellow



school-bus, previously a vessel for transporting chaos in *The Dark Knight*, here acts as a getaway vehicle from certain doom.

There's no greater visual signifier of the threat hanging over Gotham than Bane, the primary villain at the centre of this latest instalment. As with Batman, Bane is as much of a symbol as an actual presence. If the earlier villain was "a force of nature" then Bane is a bona fide natural disaster. And quite literally too: how many supervillains have the means or capacity to force the Earth below them to quake? Bane, while ever the lacking figure in his initial iteration as a comic-book villain (and let's not mention his brief appearance in Joel Schumacher's *Batman & Robin*) is given a new lease of life in *The Dark Knight Rises*. Reinvented from the ground up, although bearing some semblance to the character during his *Bane Of The Demon* mini-series, Nolan's Bane makes for the ideal correspondent to the director's Batman: the academic equal as well as the physical, and an orphan to boot, albeit one lacking the com-



forting figure of an Alfred Pennyworth in place of parents. With that in mind, it's the relationship between Bruce Wayne and Alfred that is perhaps the key line running through the series. The films most dramatic scene plays out between the two, sans score with the only accompanying audio being the echoes of the increasingly dramatic debate taking place between the two (with this particular exchange the inverse to the stifled dialogue of Bane).

Elsewhere, an exciting ensemble fills out the on-screen personas. John Blake, a new character in the Nolan series is the natural successor to Harvey Dent, serving as a reminder of what the latter could have been, had the events of the earlier film played out differently (he also recalls Thomas Wayne too, the series' first analogue for good). He is good, personified, and an example of Wayne's ultimate vision of the Bat as a symbol inspiring and aiding the ordinary. Extending the shared protagonist attitude employed with *The Dark Knight* this latest instalment is even more of a multi-character work. Much of the third-act build-up to the final reel takes place without the titular character on-screen at all, instead choosing to focus on the efforts of a Gotham rising against a threat too big for any one man to handle. Blake, and to a lesser extent, Gordon are at the forefront of this opposing revolution. Anne Hathaway's Selina Kyle (who is notably not once referred to by her more famous moniker) is on fine form too, her debutante anarchist making for an intriguing element within the grand scheme playing out, and a formidable counterpart to the films other strong female presence, Marion Cotillard's Miranda Tate.

It's a brutal film, but one that is not as disturbing as it's immediate predecessor. Structurally the work is one ground in an urgency and escalation. Nolan even throws in a staggered fade to black, no



doubt intended as a nod to the concept of the interval if not preceding an actual pause, following one of the films most personally intense moments, and a sequence which leaves our protagonist in a state of limbo. While many films would struggle to build upon such a moment, *The Dark Knight Rises* uses such a situation as mere warm-up, with the film escalating in to unimaginable areas as the film progresses in to the third act. Put simply, the film is huge. The scale of the thing is quite unlike anything one might expect in this age of digitisation, and impresses even more greatly when placed alongside it's lacklustre contemporaries that overly rely on such tricks to convince audiences that empty bombast trumps actual spectacle. It's on this front that the Nolan film succeeds greatest, the site of several thousand actual humans engaging in action a sight to behold. Iconic imagery bleeds subtext, while allusions to the earlier films in Nolan's series (especially *Batman Begins*, with both films containing highly personal "Bruce Wayne must overcome..." arcs, that never feel tired in their similarities) ensure that *The Dark Knight Rises* is the ideal final chapter to a series rich in overlapping and under-riding ideas.

*The Dark Knight Rises* cements the notion that the cinematic blockbuster landscape of 2012 is one set to be remembered for the formidable performance of the superhero movie, both critically and commercially. While Joss Whedon's *The Avengers* feels like a new dawn in superhero cinema, Nolan's film feels very much like the end of another. And it's not only the end of an era in terms of a franchise, but the end of an era in filmmaking: it's safe to assume that Nolan's spectacular finale is the end of grand scale 35mm filmmaking. With that in mind one can't help but find the whole affair a rather somber one. But a glorious one at that.





MONOGRAPH

# The Prestige





# The Prestige (Nolan, 2006)

## Noteworthy

1. The Prestige marks the second of four times that Christian Bale has played in a Christopher Nolan film. It's Hugh Jackman's first and to date only performance under the director. Nolan's "lucky charm", Michael Caine is the only actor to have appeared in more of the directors films than Bale.
2. The Prestige author Christopher Priest sought out Nolan for the job of directing the film adaptation of his novel, having been a fan of the directors earlier work.
3. Fans of Paul Thomas Anderson's Magnolia may be keen to know that Ricky Jay, the master American magician who narrated that films opening prologue appears in, and was an advisor on The Prestige.



*Hugh Jackman's Angier meets the legendary Nikola Tesla, played by The Man Who Fell To Earth himself, David Bowie.*

For his fifth film Christopher Nolan turned his attention to a Christopher Priest novel, The Prestige, a blend of science-fiction and Victoriana very much in the vein of the author's great influence, H.G. Wells. Ever one to turn to an existing source for material (its worth noting that 2010's Inception was only the directors second self-

penned tale), Nolan shifted from superpowers to the supernatural in the wake of 2005's Batman Begins with a tale weaved together from a pair of unreliable narrators that riffs heavily on themes of duality and subterfuge.

In the opening bars of the film the three-part form of a magic trick is explained. First, we are



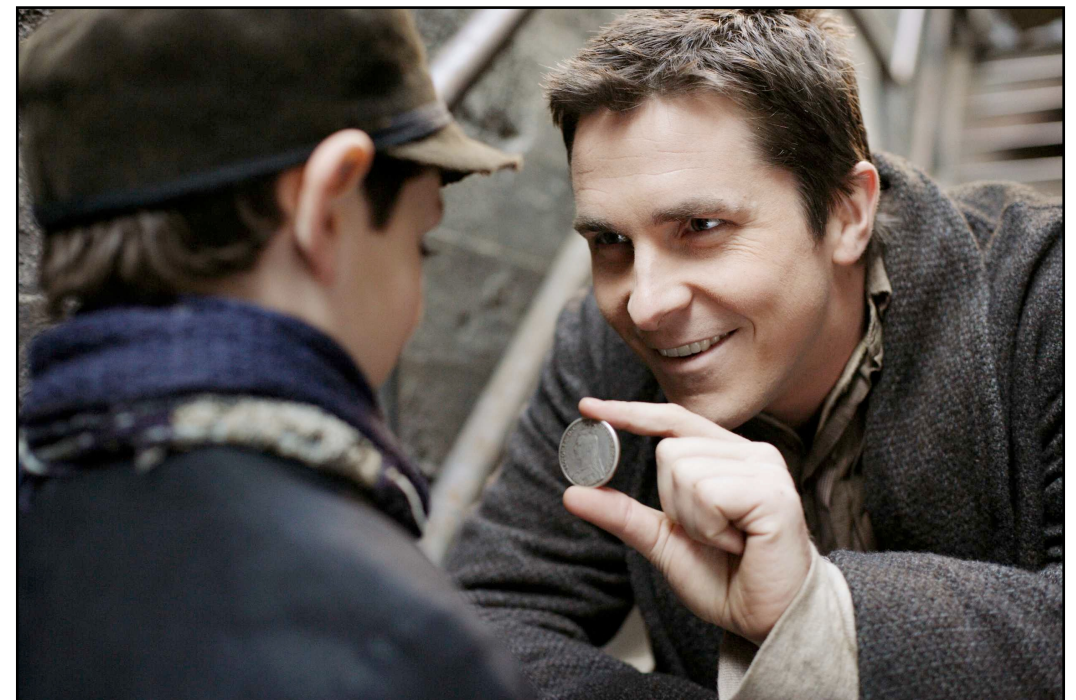
told, is the Pledge, in which the facing premise of the trick is presented to the viewer. This is followed by the Turn, which sees the relatively ordinary premise of the Pledge turned inside out, and made extraordinary. The Prestige is the third act of the magic trick. This is where the whole thing comes together, the reveal if you will. Now, it doesn't take a great leap of the imagination for one to realise that the narrative arc of a magic trick is very similar to that of a conventional movie, and in that respect Nolan's film itself is something of an attempt at the dramatic recreation of a conjurers trick. The cinema itself is inherently connected to the stage shows and theatrics of the magic show, the early picture houses sat on the very same boulevards as the final generation of the gentleman magician. This is Nolan's first and still to-date only period film, albeit one shot thru the lens of Wally Pfister, where the camera rarely sits still and close-ups dominate, a necessary combination to portray a film that deals heavily with detail and the slight of hand. The film merges history with fiction well, with the balance lending to an eerie feeling of confusion within the viewer, at times unable to differentiate reality with science fiction. That one of the cinemas great on-screen aliens portrays Nikola Tesla is a nice touch too.

One can't help but feel that there is a dry commentary on the state of the contemporary American cinema of 2006 inside of The Prestige, with it's treaty of a poor showman who controls an amazing content of illusion drawing obvious illusions to how it is the bland that hold the greatest power in the movies within Hollywood.

Somewhat ironically it's the complex plotting of the piece that almost undoes this reading, given that the focus is constantly shifting and redefining what has fallen before on an episodic basis. It serves as a reminder for just how structurally out of shape the vast

majority of Nolan's work is, with The Dark Knight the only film within the directors oeuvre that actually carries a traditional narrative flow (while structurally straightforward, Insomnia shifts time in a different manner entirely). Appropriately, and perhaps in an answer to the criticisms levelled at him in the wake of Batman Begins, it is the third act of The Prestige, the eponymously named section itself where the film really comes in to its own. As all is pulled together tightly, the most satisfying last act of the directors career drives the film towards it's closing titles.

It's appropriate that this films own "prestige" is pretty much the most daring of Nolan's career. Often written off as a small film made between Bat-flicks (as too was Inception said to be early on during it's production), The Prestige is a work as deeply satisfying as anything else within the directors body of work, it's Vertigo-riffing modulating on dualities placing the work firmly alongside the remaining works in the sibling/sibling? rivalry canonical likes of Dead Ringers, Adaptation and Chinatown.





MONOGRAPH

# The Inception Archives





# Inception (Nolan, 2010)



*Leonardo DiCaprio leads a varied ensemble in Inception.*

In 2010 Christopher Nolan unleashed his most celebrated work to date to the world. *Inception* might not have been his most financially successful film, but it was the first to be acknowledged by the Academy, taking home four well deserved Oscars after being nominated for eight. The film was something of a critical darling, with many quick to declare the non-franchise, original idea basis of the film as something of a breath of fresh air when

placed against the contemporary cinematic landscape of the time.

Included in this section is a three-part look at *Inception*. Alongside our review of the film you'll find an article written concerned with the film's Oscar hopes and a piece written in the run up to *The Dark Knight Rises*. First up, the 2010 review...



## Our Initial Review (July 2010)

I think that a great compliment to pay towards good science fiction is that it makes you question your own reality, which certainly could be said of Christopher Nolan's latest effort. His first release since 2008's billion dollar taking Batman follow-up *The Dark Knight*, *Inception* sees the director back to the experimental ways of his breakthrough piece *Memento*, with a film that blows the mind in more ways than one.

It's rare in the age of the digital that one has the opportunity to enter a film 'blind'. That is, to see a major new release without having had the experience prematurely diluted in advance thanks to the aggressive marketing campaigns that come as part and parcel of the blockbuster experience, with a presence on facebook, twitter and independent viral marketing campaigns the norm for anything that is released with a studio title card on the front of it. With Christopher Nolan's latest film this viewer made a conscious effort to avoid any and all marketing material before actually seeing the film. And succeeded.

"Inception tells the story of" would perhaps be the most inappropriate manner in

which to start any summary of this film, as the detailed plot deserves to be left as concealed as possible prior to seeing the film. That being said though, the basic plot points are thus; Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) heads a team of 'dream invaders', who utilise technology to manipulate the dreams of their victims. From within the dream world, in which death will result in a mere awaking, secrets and information are stolen, something which places dream invading in a prime position within the world of corporate espionage. Cobb, who as a result of his place within this murky profession has lost everything, is offered the chance to redeem himself with one last job. Now, I'm fully aware of just how hokey the above description sounds, which is why I was so apprehensive about writing such a summary, but please trust me when I say that it works so much better in the context of the film than it sounds on the page. In fact, the best description of the film would be Nolan's original tease that *Inception* was "A contemporary science fiction tale set within the architecture of the human mind" is all that one truly needs to know before heading out to see the film.

The cast of the film is second to none, with the film much more of an ensemble piece

than the DiCaprio-centric marketing would have you believe. The supporting cast is headed by Joseph Gordon Levitt, in a turn which cements his growing reputation as a major star of the future. His Arthur, DiCaprio's second in command holds the film together, while Ellen Page's Ariadne, whom acts as the instigator towards Cobb's catharsis finally sees Page come through on the promise of her long mooted-talent. Tom Hardy, as an identity controlling British invader is finally given the role that his potential deserves. The comedic double bill that ensues between Hardy and whomever he is placed with within a scene, be it Levitt, Cillian Murphy or Ken Watanabe results in pure cinema joy. He truly has a presence, and I look forward to seeing him build upon this role. Marion Cotillard is as endearing as ever as Cobb's wife, with their relationship drawing the strongest emotionally responsive performance that I've ever actually seen from DiCaprio. But yes, for all intents and purposes this is DiCaprio's film, and this performance seals his status as Hollywood's top leading man of the year, having turned in outstanding performances earlier on this year with *Shutter Island*.



One of my most immediate thoughts with Inception was that it feels like Christopher Nolan has finally achieved his full potential. The sparkles of genius seen previously in his work all draw together to create his magnum opus. It's an unusual thought, but I couldn't help but feel that maybe the Batman films are holding him back somewhat. Please don't get me wrong; I'm fully aware of how he's pushed the boundaries within the superhero genre (I named Batman Begins as my fifth favourite film of the last decade), but I can't help but think his talent may be best served elsewhere, on films that allow him to wholly push his vision; films like Inception. Although saying that, I'm as eager as anyone to see what he does with the next bat flick. Tradition may dictate that Nolan NEEDS these bat-punctuating films as a kind of leveler of sorts to proceed onwards with the next multi-million dollar batman epic, and it would certainly make sense, if one were to hold this film and The Prestige up next to one another.

It is the ambiguity of the piece that drives it the most succinctly. Does the final shot of the film poses a question, or is it merely a gag? Is the film some kind of vice as commentary on the mechanics of storytelling or filmmaking? Or is it simply a basic story told well? The importance of editing with regards to telling a story is highly relevant here, with the complexity of Inception formed in the cut. The film is audience friendly in the way in which it literally presents information on screen, yet it is shaken up somewhat in its layered presentation. Likewise the film as to me on identity, a concurrent theme running throughout Nolan's oeuvre. The questions raised will no doubt be mulled over by its audience for some time, yet I doubt any answers will ever be wholly uncovered.



Inception is a traditional blockbuster in the most base of manners (a fact which verges on the literal on several occasions). The combination of cutting-edge special effects, a high concept yet philosophically and politically aware plot, and a wonderful ensemble cast provide one of the most exciting and downright satisfying pieces of mainstream-straddling cinema this viewer has ever had the pleasure of experiencing. It's the sort of film that makes you want to stand up and applaud at the end, an incredibly ambitious work that sees one of the world's most competent and important filmmakers at the top of his game.



## Inception And The Academy

Ambition ruled the day when it came to originally registering my interest in the LAMB Devours The Oscars project. Blue Valentine was the film that got my vote, with a view to write on that when the film was nominated for Best Picture. Alas, that wasn't to be, yet "ambition ruling the day" would perhaps be an apt description of the film that I did end up looking at.

As far as spectacle, ambition and masterful storytelling on a massive scale goes, Inception really is quite something. Christopher Nolan's follow-up to The Dark Knight was originally mooted to be a quieter affair, a punctuation point between bat-flicks, yet with Inception the filmmaker once again surprised audiences by turning out his most ambitious work to date, and one that truly reinvigorated the concept of blockbuster spectacle cinema.

While the exposition may be heavy at times, Nolan never patronises his audience in the manner that one would expect of this type of film, nor did he contradict or hinder his vision in return for the quick sell. Action figures and merchandise didn't precede the \$200 million film, nor did a spoiler laden promotional campaign, instead, Warner left a talented filmmaker to his own devices and he produced an exciting work that was a) original, and b) drew the crowds in.

As a construction Inception is a genuinely impressive piece of cinema. First we have the performances, with not so much as a damp squib from any one of the fairly large ensemble cast. Hans Zimmer's score is genuinely fascinating, his use of the slowed down Edith Piaf track Non, je ne Regrette Rien to form the films already-iconic refrain truly astonishing. Complimenting Wally Pfister's

sublime cinematography we have the special effects, largely practical or in-camera, and never overly reliant on intrusive technology or gimmicks. Shunning 3D, Nolan chose to utilise older filmic techniques, such as 65mm photography, painstakingly selecting the right format for the right moment in the film (in total using seven



different types of film and cameras), all in aid of building spectacle. And yet there is heart. Has Leonardo DiCaprio ever shown as much emotion in a moment of film as he does in the scene in which the "reality" of his wife's fate is made clear? Has anyone ever wanted a spinning top to stop turning quite as much as the one that dictates DiCaprio's Cobb's outcome at the end of the film?

When discussing Inception's place within the academy awards its difficult not to bring up the places where it wasn't nominated.



Cries of “snub” etcetera filled the digital highways on Tuesday afternoon in the wake of the announcements, with many a commentator furious at a lack of director and acting nominations for the film. Rabid fanboys have all but ruined the ability to write thoughtfully on Inception, lest thee be declared “one of them”. While I’m not about to get in to the argument about who should have been praised for what, the sheer absurdity of how much one gets caught up in the silliness of awards ceremonies are never made more apparent when it is the big commercial hits of the year at the centre of the discussion. Last year it was James Cameron’s Avatar that rode the storm of fanboy anxiety, it somehow deemed worthy of Best Picture by default because it was the most successful film of the year at the box office. In 2009 it was Nolan’s first “snub”, when The Dark Knight left barely a mark on the Academy, in spite of breaking a billion at the ticket booth. Three years running, and yet people are still outraged at a lack of “respect” for the year’s breakthrough blockbuster. The Academy Awards, rightly or wrongly, do not celebrate this particular kind of cinema. It’s really not worth getting angry about.

### Re-Noting Inception - A Retrospective Piece In Celebration Of The Dark Knight Rises

\* The whole crux of the films rests on one distinction: that of what is real and what is a dream. Hollywood itself is a direct combination of the two, placing dreams against memories to provoke a dramatic response or reaction from the viewer. An eerie centre of reality haunts the movie: the most impressive scene within the picture, Mal’s suicide, exists in a purposefully constructed situation even when being it’s said to be being presented verbatim as a memory of one of the other characters.

\* Re-evaluating the film two years on from it’s initial bow, one cant help but remain in awe of the cut of the film. Its simply miraculous that so much is conveyed within the edit, as opposed to over-explained in expositionary dialogue, as per the accusations of some (there’s not actually a single line of exposition in the films opening 20 minutes, which sees the concept of “levels” explained ably in purely visual terms). The entire third act takes place over five separate levels, each occupying a different temporal plane, in which the rules of time pass

differently. That this is projected in a clear, accessible manner is hugely impressive.

\* The film bounces from set piece to set piece, leading us to somewhat jingoistically deem it a digi-North By Northwest in a recent article for elsewhere. It’s not a complicated film by any means, but that’s not to say that it isn’t complex.

\* Inception might just be one of the most magnificently “loud” movies of the past decade. The imposing boom of the electro-horns is derived directly from Edith Piaf’s Non, je ne Regrette Rien, a song utilised as a narrative device in the film too. So it’s actually theoretically sublime as well as being effective on the ears.

\* While the collaboration between Christopher Nolan and Wally Pfister goes all the way back to Memento, it is with Inception that Pfister’s eye really comes in to its own. Iconic imagery fills the picture, from the opening sequences inside Saoto’s dream-land headquarters, through to the sight of a diesel-train ploughing through the streets of a rainy New York. In spite of such grandstanding, it’s the moments in which Pfister and Nolan play loose that one really notices the aesthetics of the picture: take the



sequence set in the Parisian workshop as Joseph Gordon Levitt's Arthur sets up a space for Ariadne and Cobb to connect, as a handheld camera, or the "dream bigger" sequence, in which the chaos of the situation is conveyed by a disconnected, loose camera.





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# Credits

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