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movies BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST



Last Exit to Gotham

The Dark Knight Rises but fails to fly

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES: Directed by Christopher Nolan. Screenplay by Jonathan and Christopher Nolan, based on a story by the Nolans based on characters created by Bob Kane. Cinematography, Wally Pfister. Editor, Lee Smith. Music, Hans Zimmer. Starring Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Gary Oldman, Anne Hathaway, Tom Hardy, Marion Cotillard, Morgan Freeman. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2012. PG-13. 165 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

High expectations sometimes lay you low, and the very word “superhero” spurs one’s anticipation of a movie adaptation to leap tall multiples in a single bound and travel faster than a speeding bullet to the box office. It can’t be helped. Walking into the July 20 midnight premiere of *The Dark Knight Rises*, my hopes were high. I assumed that this grand finale would be not only a step above all predecessors, but also well worth the particular discomfort of cramming into a packed theater at midnight. Neither of these assumptions panned out.

Don’t get me wrong: *The Dark Knight Rises* isn’t complete bat guano. It has enough redeeming qualities to allow for some people to overlook the glaring flaws. First off, the film has guts, confronting our fears of terrorism and militant police states, as well as full-blown economic collapses. Director Christopher Nolan (who also helmed the first two films in the trilogy) plunges the viewer into a Gotham City that metastaticizes from peaceful and prosperous to dangerous and defunct.

And don’t worry: In the end, all those bat-toys come out to blow stuff up in fine fashion. The special effects will not disappoint you, the soundtrack is superb and the cinematography is solid. Here’s the first problem, though: *The Dark Knight Rises* is two hours and 45 minutes in duration and, at that length, screenwriting brothers Christopher and Jonathan Nolan’s story arc could not be properly sustained. The movie needs to be way shorter, and even then it should contain more connective tissue.

The Dark Knight Rises opens with a scene of Abu Ghraib-style black-bagged prisoners being driven to some airstrip in the middle of nowhere. A CIA agent oversees the prisoner transfer, the plane takes off and, within moments, moviegoers are treated to a spectacular mid-air hijacking. Enter Bane (Tom Hardy), the new Batman bad guy who looks like a hybrid of Darth Vader and Vin Diesel. Unfortunately, Bane’s character

presents the movie’s second serious stumbling block.

Granted, after the late Heath Ledger’s bloodcurdlingly epic portrayal of the Joker, any ensuing Batman mega-villain has some pretty nasty boots to fill. Bane, however, just doesn’t present a quality super villain — that is to say, he is not super; he’s just a villain. Bane’s iniquity is more suited to something out of the *Die Hard* movies, where he’d be fine playing opposite Bruce Willis. Not only does Bane lack the charismatic flare required of a Batman baddie, but his villainous voice is nearly impossible to understand. Just because you’re wearing a souped-up SARs mask and need to counterbalance Christian Bale’s raspy Batman voice doesn’t mean you can be aggravatingly inaudible.

Other places where the film falls short include a distended storyline; a lackluster Cat Woman (Anne Hathaway); Bale spending more time as an emo Bruce Wayne than as an ass-whooping super bat; and a generic cohort of mercenaries-turned-terrorists who all somehow happen to be black, Middle Eastern, Asian or just very tan Europeans.

This last dynamic is rather interesting. Given that Gotham is intended to mirror the look and demographic of cities like New York and Chicago, the fictional city’s inherent lack of diversity among its residents is curious. They’re pretty much all white, excluding Morgan Freeman, some football players and a cop or two.

I wanted to like this movie. I returned the following day to see it again, despite the horrific shooting less than 24 hours beforehand in Aurora, Colo., that killed 12 people and injured 58 more at the midnight screening of *The Dark Knight Rises*. I wish I could tell you I was paying full attention to the movie, but I can’t. My eyes kept scanning the emergency exits, just like the dude next to me. The collective consciousness of moviegoers that night — and perhaps forever — was seriously rattled.

So maybe I didn’t get the best second look at *The Dark Knight Rises*. And yet, for the periods of time I wasn’t memorizing the exits and premeditating the best escape route, I did enjoy the movie a bit more. Maybe it really is better the second time around. Or maybe it’s just that those high expectations were no longer present. **EW**

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