

# As The Dark Night Rises

Back in 1968, the Rolling Stones imagined a world in which “every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners saints.” More than half a century after the release of “Sympathy of the Devil,” those lyrics are coming to life: The police are scourged, targeted, and de-funded, while convicts and low-lives are hailed, released – and some have even received a kind of [hagiography](#).

In fact, works of literature and popular culture have often anticipated future events. In his 1914 novel *The World Set Free*, H.G. Wells envisioned the atomic bomb, three decades before the first one was detonated in 1945. In 1932’s *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley imagined the mass media being cynically and deliberately used in order to anesthetize the population; at the time, the addictive powers of television and social media were decades in the future. Then, in 1994, in the novel *Debt of Honor*, Tom Clancy raised the possibility of a passenger jet being intentionally crashed into the U.S. Capitol; just seven years later, of course, came 9/11.

So now, in the midst of a national nightmare of violence, disease, and ill will, we might look back at a presciently creepy film from 2012, Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight Rises*.

In fact, Nolan’s *TDKR* – part of a Batman trilogy, released from 2005 to 2012 – is regarded as both a commercial triumph and a classic of contemporary cinema.

We might also add that Nolan is at least some kind of conservative; *TDKR* is unabashedly pro-police and anti-radical, even as it takes the dramatic license of making the bad guy, Bane, as vivid and interesting as the good guy, Batman. (In 2017, Nolan released *Dunkirk*, an overtly patriotic and admiring recollection of Britain’s miracle in World War Two.)

In fact, even though *The Dark Knight Rises* is ultimately a morality tale of good defeating evil, as a piece of art, it must necessarily include plenty of nuance, and even murk. To be sure, such shades-of-graying have been at the heart of Batman's appeal for more than eight decades, since the Caped Crusader made his comic-book debut in 1939. Unlike most superheroes, Bruce Wayne – alias: Batman – himself has no super powers. Yes, he has super-technology, but he is distinctly mortal and vulnerable. After all, his parents were murdered by a robber, right before his eyes – and it was that tragic incident that provoked the young heir to dedicate his life to fighting crime.

Yet still, as every pop-culture fan knows, even after creating a high-tech Bat Cave underneath the brooding manse he calls home, Bruce Wayne/Batman is afflicted with Hamlet-level hesitations and uncertainties. And so even if, like Hamlet – or like Achilles, King Arthur, or Simba, the cub-turned-Lion King – Wayne is ultimately summoned to duty, the path by which he responds to the Bat Signal is always strewn with psychic obstacles.

*TDKR*, released barely more than a decade after 9/11, vibrates with echoes of that tragedy. It's set in Manhattan – thinly renamed, of course, "Gotham City" – and so we see terrorists blow up structures, while the blue-clad police stoically do their duty – and go to their fate.

Yet at the same time, the film also recalls more recent events, such as Occupy Wall Street – and then spins forward to the rise of Antifa and hard-left radicalism and demagoguery.

Indeed, early in the film, a female character says to the hidden Batman, "There's a storm coming, Mr. Wayne. You and your friends better batten down the hatches, because when it hits, you're all gonna wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us." Okay, so that's the speech of a revolutionary, even if, in this

instance, the speaker is an opportunist hypocrite; she is, after all, a cat-burglar, not a class-warrior.

For his part, Wayne responds, “You sound like you’re looking forward to it.” And the woman answers, cool cynicism in her voice, “I’m adaptable.” Eight years later, those chill words stick with us, since, as we know, the revolution of 2020 – as much cultural, right now, as physical – is being championed, and even financed, by adaptable wokesters. That is, by woke celebrities, tycoons, and corporations, all seeing tactical advantage in positioning themselves as cultural revolutionaries, while not actually risking their own income or property.

So when Bane, the lead terrorist, having already attacked the New York Stock Exchange, takes over City Hall and declares, “I give it back to you, the people” – the insincerity in his voice is louder than his amplified volume. Indeed, eight years later, the same fraudulence oozes out of advertisers, marketers, and influencers across the landscape.

Moreover, when Bane, leading an Antifa-ish horde, proclaims, “The police will survive when they learn to serve true justice,” we are reminded that “true justice” is whatever the violent proclaimer wishes it to be.

And so the revolutionaries create their own kangaroo court, giving defendants the choice of “death or exile,” knowing that the sentence actually always means both.

Indeed, to help set the tone, the film even quotes a passage from Charles Dickens’ 19th-century anti-revolutionary novel about the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Moreover, in Nolan’s 21st-century anti-revolutionary telling, even the woke plutocrats who financed the revolution aren’t safe; they, too, are sentenced to doom. Thus one is reminded of Louis Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, a cousin to Louis XVI, who supported the French Revolution and even voted to

guillotine his relative the king. In fact, the duke even changed his name to the non-royal Philippe Égalité – although all that trendy common-causing was for naught, as Philippe, too, was guillotined in 1793.

As Bane says mockingly of the fat cats he defeats, “Peace has cost you your strength!” Only, finally, does Batman rouse himself: “I’m not afraid. I’m angry.”

Of course, today, we aren’t living in the world of the Dark Knight – there is no billionaire Batman coming to save us. Yes, we have an actual rich mogul in the White House, but he hasn’t worked out as many had hoped. Moreover, other real-life billionaires who have proffered themselves as political saviors – including Howard Schultz, Tom Steyer, and Mike Bloomberg – have all fizzled.

So today – just as Mick Jagger also sang in “Sympathy for the Devil,” that half-century-old tune – “Heads is tails.” Yes, up is down, and down is up, as we grope our way to discover, or recover, a proper moral order.

In the meantime, across this afflicted land, only the dark *night* is rising; there’s as yet no dawn on the horizon. So on this darkling plain, with no super-hero to save us from the ignorant clashes, maybe the only thing we can do is to light a beacon of hope for ordinary heroes – including ourselves – each to do what he or she can to set the world to right.

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