By PATRICK HALL
The Wilson Post

Director and co-writer **Christopher Nolan** concludes his Batman trilogy with a finale that maybe falls short of masterpiece “The Dark Knight” but delivers such an outstanding conclusion, it’s only fault is being less-than perfect.

In “The Dark Knight Rises,” which picks up eight years after 2008’s “Dark Knight,” Gotham City is without organized crime and believes Batman responsible for District Attorney Harvey Dent’s (**Aaron Eckhart**) death.

Thus Bruce Wayne (**Christian Bale**) is a recluse in his mansion, visibly incapable of adjusting to a life without Batman. Trouble brews as the unstoppable mercenary Bane (
Tom
Hardy
) moves in with an elaborate plot to turn Gotham into a chaotic mob-rule “society.”

At almost 3 hours long, “Rises” begins with scenes that jump around introducing Bane, new gung-ho Gotham Police officer John Blake (**Joseph Gordon**-**Levitt**) the mysterious "cat burglar" Selina Kyle (**Anne**
Hathaway
), businesswoman Miranda Tate (
Marian Cotillard
) and the usual suspects we already know: butler Alfred (
Michael Cane
) and Police Commissioner Jim Gordon (
Gary Oldman
).

Once Bane’s plot begins to unfold, things pick up, but that’s not to say there’s a lack of action in the first hour. The opening scene, where Bane nabs a nuclear physicist from a plane in mid-air is visually stunning.

But it’s also the point where many will begin to feel thrown off by Bane’s voice. Wearing a protective mask over his face, Bane’s dialogue in the beginning sounded too much like a voice over. Some audience members may have difficulty understanding his lines.

But the villain draws Batman back into the world after he attacks a stock exchange. When the two meet mano-y-mano for the first time, Batman stands no chance, especially after being a recluse for eight years.

After dumping Bruce Wayne, near death in proverbial hell, Bane unleashes his scheme on Gotham, turning it into an isolated city where he and a surprising returning cast member are absolute law.

It’s up to Bruce Wayne to claw back from the brink and stop him.

The political hints and subtle references from “Batman Begins” and “The Dark Knight” are much more outright as Bane and his plot are reminiscent of a 99 versus the one-percent. But it seems Bane’s soulless plot transcends any specific current event but more plays on the fears of terrorism completely destroying organized society.

Every unethical and dangerous decision made by Batman and Gordon at the end of "The Dark Knight" comes back to haunt them and contributes to the city's chaos under Bane's rule. The film also continues to place every character in serious moral dilemmas.

New characters Kyle and Officer Blake are strong additions and Hathaway and Gordon-Levitt give admirable performances. Hardy is given the unfortunate task of following up **Heath Ledger ’s**
legendary performance in “Dark Knight” but gives us a villain who is more singular in his purpose and more physically imposing.

The film is definitely the most emotional of the three and raises the stakes to an unbelievable level. The film is dark and very bleak, with an apocalyptic feel that turns up the tension in the second half.

Nolan has been asking some heavy ethical questions as well as the basic question of whether Batman is necessary. On the surface his answer appears to be yes, but as Batman points out “a hero can be anybody.”

Some of the plot’s twist and turns were a bit flat and at times predictable, but the ability of Nolan and his brother **Jonathan**, who helped in the writing, to bring their trilogy full circle, is masterful. So many third and final chapters fall flat or find huge pitfalls, but "Rises" is virtually devoid of any.

Bane tests the limits of society while pushing the police and Batman to their absolute darkest and most desperate time. All the while, Gordon, Blake and the police never lose hope, and neither does Batman.

“Rises” is truly a brutal fight between two opposing ideas. On the one hand you have the despair of Bane, who believes Gotham has no redeeming qualities and on the other is Batman and the Gotham Police, who still have hope in their city and will lay down their lives for its people.

“Rises” ends with incredible catharsis and enough emotion to bring some tears to the eyes of even the most hardened of audiences.

Nolan has given the world a trilogy that smashed through genre barriers and soared over any hurdle that may come with selling a movie based on comic book characters. It’s not so much about comic book characters as it giving us characters that are so real, complex and relatable.

Will there be another Batman film? You could bet your life on it.

Should there be another Batman film?

After what Nolan has created for us, probably not.

"The Dark Knight Rises" is rated PG-13 with a runtime of 2 hours 44 minutes. You can find showtimes at www.roxy10.com

Staff Writer Patrick Hall may be contacted at phall@wilsonpost.com