

Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight" is a haunted film that leaps beyond its origins and becomes an engrossing tragedy. It creates characters we come to care about. That's because of the performances, of course. Heath Ledger's Joker is a screen presence so powerful that he takes over the movie.

"The Dark Knight" is not a simplistic tale of good and evil. Batman is good, yes, The Joker is evil, yes. But Batman poses a more complex puzzle than usual: The citizens of Gotham City are in an uproar, calling him a vigilante and blaming him for the deaths of policemen and others. And the Joker is more than a villain. He is a Mephistopheles whose actions are fiendishly designed to pose moral dilemmas for his enemies.

The special effects are extraordinary. They focus on the expected explosions and catastrophes, and have some superb, elaborate chase scenes. The movie was shot on location in Chicago, but it avoids such familiar landmarks as Marina City, the Wrigley Building or the skyline.

It is a film that understands the allure of darkness, sees how it can efficiently spread, and then presents us with the facts regarding the realities of honor, strength, and influence.