



# Nick Prescott's Reviews

## **The Prestige**

Talent: Christian Bale, Hugh Jackman, Michael Caine, David Bowie, Scarlett Johansson, Andy Serkis, Rebecca Hall.

Date of review: Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 2006

Writer/director/editor: Christopher Nolan

Classification: M

Duration: 130 minutes

We rate it: Five stars.

The Prestige is a film that will generate strong reactions for different reasons: some cinemagoers will find it, as I did, one of the most fascinating, exhilarating and compelling films of the year; others may find its dialogue-heavy, convoluted narrative too much to cope with on first viewing. The Prestige is indeed a challenging and thought-provoking film, but this, to me, is one of its primary assets, and is the mark of a sophisticated and intelligent piece of art. With the holiday season and its peppering of by-the-numbers, yawn-inducing blockbusters just around the corner, The Prestige is that most beautiful of contrasts: a stunningly well-conceived film that reminds us of the great power of storytelling itself.

A film about two Victorian-era stage magicians and their intense, life-altering rivalry, The Prestige tells an intoxicating story in masterful and constantly surprising style. Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman star as two magicians working on the London stage at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Ambitious and talented performers, both men want to earn the title of the most accomplished magician in England. They begin their careers working together, but after a tragic accident that irrevocably alters the relationship between the two men, they become bitter rivals. As their separate attempts to conceive of the perfect magic trick become more dangerous and more complex, both men are driven to extremes of behaviour that will draw them towards other complex and mysterious figures; ultimately, the pursuit of the perfect illusion will have unimaginable consequences in the real lives of both men.

The Prestige is absolutely a film that demands not to have too much of its narrative given away before audiences step inside the cinema. The above detail is all I'm prepared to give; I would assure you, however, that what follows the film's unusual setup is as vividly performed, compelling and surprising as any screen narrative in recent memory. Nolan mixes period detail about the performing of illusions with intriguing ideas about the frontiers of science and the complexities of human relationships; the film is as intoxicating in its depiction of trickery as it is evocative in

its examination of loneliness and deceit. Accordingly, as well as the two fictional magicians, the story's characters include the real-life figure of Nikola Tesla, the brilliant and eccentric scientist, played with astonishing charisma by David Bowie, while Scarlett Johansson and newcomer Rebecca Hall play the woman in the magicians' lives.

Christopher Nolan, the ferociously talented director of *Memento*, *Insomnia* and *Batman Begins*, has here taken his inspiration directly from an acclaimed novel written by fellow Englishman Christopher Priest. When Nolan read the novel a number of years ago he felt it could be fashioned into a fascinating film. He was absolutely correct, though the directors capable of successfully translating such a complex and devilishly surprising narrative to the screen are few and far between; Nolan is quite evidently one of them. Here it is as a controller of a complicated narrative that Nolan shines; his trademark visual panache is given a more subdued voice here, as is his penchant for fragmentation and dizzying editing. *The Prestige* is a story that needs to be told in a very deliberate and measured way, and Nolan does so beautifully. With minute precision and an innate understanding of just how much information to release to his audience and when, Nolan has pulled off a breathtaking sleight-of-hand with *The Prestige*. A perfectly fashioned film that delivers so many beautifully timed surprises and staggering reversals that it functions as a magic trick in and of itself, *The Prestige* is the thinking-person's blockbuster.

Nick Prescott