

The Dark Knight Rises Pre-Cog Story Map or **“How I would write the Dark Knight Rises screenplay”**

By Daniel Calvisi

I have not seen *The Dark Knight Rises* nor have I read the screenplay. This speculative Beat Sheet is an exercise in story analysis. Using the existing film clips and publicity content, including the three trailers, the theatrical prologue footage, the film’s [IMDb page](#) and various pre-release interviews with the creative team, I’ve broken down the story using the Story Maps method as I predict Nolan will structure the narrative, given the dramatic elements and his filmography.

The structure of *The Dark Knight* (mapped in [my book](#) in four acts) has been closely referenced for comparison, and I settled on a five-act structure for *Rises*, mainly because it seemed likely that there would be a section in the film wherein Bruce Wayne was out of commission and the remaining characters had to act without him, thus a “bridge” act was needed where Gotham would be on its own under the iron grip of Bane, possibly to be united by new characters like Catwoman and John Blake, before Batman returned and saved the day in the final act.

It is clear that this third film in Nolan’s trilogy is about endings. Will Batman die, retire, or continue to fight crime in Gotham City? Will Bruce Wayne finally find inner peace? You can read my take below.

Batman is a classic character that comes with a lot of traditional themes and dramatic “rules.” Since this is the final chapter, I expect to see many of these rules broken, to most effectively surprise the audience, escalate conflict and raise the stakes. For example...

- Batman has always had physical strength and power. *This must be taken from him.*
- Batman has always acted alone. *He will be forced to rely on others.*
- Batman has always protected Gotham City, asking for nothing in return. *He must get help from the citizens of Gotham.*
- Bruce Wayne has always used Wayne Enterprises as his “cover.” *He will now embrace it, bring it into the public eye and leave his playboy persona behind him.*
- Batman has never revealed his identity. *He must do so, now, to save Gotham City and insure the legacy of Batman and Thomas Wayne.*
- The League of Shadows was responsible for Batman’s birth. *They must be there for his end.*

Nolan has always built his stories around powerful themes. In *The Dark Knight Rises*, the central themes of Nolan’s saga will continue to be challenged, to a point of breaking/resolution.

- **Identity.** Can Bruce Wayne live without Batman? Which persona is his “true disguise?” This often includes a duality with his villains – how are they his dark shadow?
- **Fear.** Bruce overcame his personal demons long ago and has taken on all enemies with no hesitation. Bane will be the first enemy he truly fears.
- **Trust in loved ones.** Bruce has not trusted a woman since Rachel’s death. He will put his trust in a new loved one.
- **Never kill.** Bruce vowed years ago never to kill another human being. Will he break that rule, and, if so, what would justify that decision?
- **Legacy.** This will be the controlling theme of *The Dark Knight Rises*. This story is about how we choose to live and die, and our legacy left behind for others.

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

Screenplay by Jonathan Nolan and Christopher Nolan

Story by Christopher Nolan & David S. Goyer

Directed by Christopher Nolan

Running Time: 152 minutes

BASIC STORY MAP

PROTAGONIST: BRUCE WAYNE/ BATMAN, 40, vigilante and wealthy businessman

Skill: Physical strength and incredible technology

Misbehavior: His outlaw status

Flaw/Achilles Heel: His trust in Miranda Tate/ His fear of Bane

EXTERNAL GOAL: To defeat Bane and to save Gotham City

INTERNAL GOAL: To trust in Miranda as a partner/ To secure his family legacy

MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT: Bane

THEME: Legacy

CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION: Can Bruce Wayne unite a torn Gotham City as an outlaw and secure his family's legacy?

ENDING: Bruce reveals his identity to Gotham before sacrificing himself to defeat Bane.

ARC: Bruce Wayne goes from retirement and believing he's found love to being broken by Bane to saving the city and restoring hope for future generations.

LOGLINE: Bruce Wayne is forced out of retirement by the terrorist known as Bane and must overcome his outlaw status to stop Bane from destroying Gotham City.

FULL STORY MAP

STORY ENGINES

ACT 1: Bruce struggles to retire from both Wayne Enterprises and Batman as unrest builds in Gotham City.

ACT 2: Bruce puts his trust in Miranda Tate and investigates an anarchist group until a larger threat emerges: the terrorist known as Bane.

ACT 3: Bane unleashes a large-scale attack, leading to a fight in the sewers where Bane defeats and imprisons Bruce.

ACT 4: As Bane keeps Gotham under siege and chaos reigns, an underground movement starts to spring up, invoking the symbol of The Batman.

ACT 5: Bruce and his allies take on Bane for the final fight. Bane kills Miranda and Batman reveals his identity to Gotham City before taking his final action.

THE BEAT SHEET

(note: this is not a complete scene list)

ACT ONE

OPENING (EXTERNAL "A" LINE: BANE): DR. PAVEL is being transferred by the CIA on a plane, having been recently rescued by agents of the fugitive known as Bane. Bane reveals himself to the head CIA AGENT and his commandos board the plane, take out the CIA men and rescue Bane and Pavel, leaving a corpse that will be presumed to be Pavel.

OPENING (EXTERNAL "B" LINE: BATMAN & GOTHAM CITY): Batman attempts to make a sting on a group of criminals known as The Resistance, and just as he discovers they may have more noble intentions than petty crime, he is intercepted by an entire police tactical team that has been sent to apprehend him. He injures his leg before he uses some new technology to escape. Alfred must give him medical treatment and a cane to temporarily help him walk.

INCITING INCIDENT (EXTERNAL "B" LINE): At home in the rebuilt Wayne Manor, Alfred begs Bruce to retire Batman. He appeals to Bruce's sense of family -- From the trailer:

ALFRED
You are as precious to me as your
own mother and father. I swore to
them that I would protect you, and I
haven't.

Bruce tells Alfred he's already begun his exit strategy.

STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (INTERNAL): Wayne Enterprises, board meeting. Bruce announces his intentions to turn the company into a philanthropic organization, giving all proceeds to charity. New board member MIRANDA TATE will be his point person as she has a history with charity organizations. At Bruce's request, she will route the money to where it needs to go: to help the struggling citizens of Gotham City, beleaguered by a brutal recession. Bruce is questioned by his board, and he invokes the name of his father, without whom none of them would be wealthy men. He walks out.

SMF (EXTERNAL "B" LINE): On "Harvey Dent Day," GORDON gives a speech as he is eyed by NIXON, a pencil pusher from the rat squad who is being groomed to be the new Police Commissioner.

Nixon vilifies Commissioner Gordon to the press, for Gordon's failure to apprehend the fugitive murderer known as The Batman.

SELINA KYLE is introduced robbing a rare pearl necklace. She is an expert cat burglar, enjoys the danger. In her escape, she shows her prowess with acrobatics and martial arts.

Batman meets with Gordon on roof, after Gordon sent him a signal via a private, secure call device that has replaced the Bat Signal. Gordon has bad news: he can no longer protect him; Batman is on his own. They say their goodbyes. How I would end the scene:

GORDON
One last thing. Will I ever find out
who you are under that mask?

BATMAN
For your sake, I hope not.

GORDON
I suppose that's a dangerous bit of
information, for both of us. For the
city.

BATMAN
If it ever comes to that, you'll be
the first to know.

END OF ACT ONE TURN (INTERNAL): Miranda wishes Bruce a happy 40th birthday. Bruce, troubled, tells her he's now at the age that his father died. Bruce and Miranda kiss. She's the first woman he's trusted since Rachel.

DECISION (INTERNAL): Bruce puts his love and trust in Miranda Tate.

DECISION (EXTERNAL "A" & "B" LINE): Bruce Wayne publicly endorses Nixon and speaks out against Batman, as a way to insure he will never be tied to Batman. It hurts him to betray Gordon, but it must be done. He has made the decision to retire Batman.

END OF ACT ONE TURN (EXTERNAL "A" LINE): In an unknown location, Bane uses Pavel to synthesize his "venom," the gas that keeps him alive. (setup: Bane can't be without his mask for more than a few seconds.) Pavel's health is declining from exposure to the gas. He begs Bane to let him go, but Bane has a new project for him. Bane: "The fire is coming."

ACT TWO

Wayne Enterprises' annual swanky Masquerade Ball. Bruce is the only one *not* wearing a mask. Selina Kyle has snuck in; she steals a dance with Bruce. He sees her pearls and flashes to his mother's death. [Alternate: They *are* his mother's pearls that she's stolen from Wayne Manor or Wayne Tower.] Selina gives him a chilling warning about a coming class war.

Bruce announces that Wayne Enterprises will become a philanthropic organization, dedicated solely to helping his beloved city. He somberly mentions his father's legacy, has a QUICK FLASH to a moment from his childhood -- From *Batman Begins*:

THOMAS WAYNE
All creatures feel fear.

YOUNG BRUCE WAYNE
Even the scary ones?

THOMAS WAYNE
Especially the scary ones.

Selina listens to Bruce's passionate speech and perhaps has a change of heart about him.

Bruce announces his new CEO, Miranda Tate... but she's missing. Later, Miranda manages to sneak up on Bruce, enjoying her reveal as the temptress in red. She doesn't seem concerned that she left him in the lurch earlier.

FIRST TRIAL: Suddenly, the party is under siege by members of The Resistance. They kidnap a few VIPs, issue a warning. Selina uses the distraction to case the place, grabbing a few interesting items for herself.

FIRST CASUALTY: Bruce leaps into action, tries to stop them but to no avail --there's only so much he can do as Bruce Wayne in a designer suit. He saves Miranda and they embrace, brought closer by the trial of the attack.

Batcave – Bruce investigates The Resistance, finds out that Selina Kyle is one of the leaders.

Gordon puts together a task force to investigate The Resistance, one of whom is JOHN BLAKE, a young, trustworthy beat cop who has proven his integrity to Gordon.

COMBAT: Bane's commandos blast open Arkham Asylum prison, battle the police and Batman as they liberate hundreds of convicts.

Bane amasses an army in an underground lair. Pavel works like a slave on a large device.

Gordon gets tip that Bane may attack the Gotham Rogues football game, where the Mayor and several thousand citizens will be watching the big game. Gordon moves his men into position around and under the stadium. John Blake is pulled away to guard Nixon.

MIDPOINT (INTERNAL): Miranda finds records of the long-buried Applied Sciences Division of Wayne Enterprises. She sees plans for several weapons, including the Tumbler.

MIDPOINT (EXTERNAL): STADIUM ATTACK – Bane blows up the football field, sealing all exits – the Mayor is captured and Gordon is buried under rubble. John Blake rescues Gordon. Bane takes the field and issues his call for the citizens of Gotham to rise up. In three days, they must join him to burn down City Hall or their fate will be sealed. He executes the Mayor in front of everyone.

ACT THREE

CONVOY CHASE SEQUENCE – Batman speeds after Bane’s convoy, which includes two camo Tumblers. Batman’s Tumbler turns into “The Bat,” an armed hovercraft! Batman takes out the Tumblers but Bane escapes in the main vehicle.

Nixon, acting Police Commissioner, orders all police to mass at City Hall to put down the impending attack. He has no strategy but brute force; it’s a recipe for disaster.

Gordon, recuperating in a hospital bed, activates his device to call Batman. Bruce Wayne arrives, enters the room, surprising Gordon. In an emotional moment, he reveals his identity as Batman and Gordon charges him to save the city.

ATTACK ON CITY HALL – Bane’s army of citizens, criminals, commandos and Resistance members fights with police in front of the court house. Bruce is back in Batman gear, fighting Bane hand to hand. This leads to an underground fight – Selina watches in horror as...

END OF ACT THREE TURN (EXTERNAL “A” & “B”): Bane defeats Batman and tears off his mask, learning his true identity. (Selina sees Bruce’s face, as well, confirming her instinct that he’s a good man, but she’s unsure if he survived the fight.)

Bruce wakes up in Bane’s underground lair. Bruce asks, why not kill him? Bane tells him his punishment must be more severe and he throws him off the edge of a giant pit. Bruce is left to die in the pit.

Bane blows the bridges, sealing Gotham City. Riots and chaos reign as the threat of nuclear destruction keeps all in fear. Martial law is no help as the city turns on itself.

ACT FOUR

As Bruce rots in the pit for days, Selina Kyle stokes the fires of an underground movement invoking the symbol of The Batman, scrawled in white chalk around the city. John Blake joins her.

When Selina Kyle shows up at Wayne Manor, Alfred calls an old friend: LUCIUS FOX. With Bruce dead or out of commission, they need a new hero to rally the people. Fox outfits Selina Kyle with a cat-like suit and trains her on the Batpod motorcycle.

DECLARATION OF WAR/ASSUMPTION OF POWER (INTERNAL): Lucius searches through Wayne Enterprises records and makes a shocking discovery. He and CATWOMAN confront Miranda Tate in her office. She’s a cipher, living under an alias. Who is she and why has she been secretly funding Bane’s operation with company money? She won’t tell them her secret, but she tells them that she knows Bruce is still alive and if they want him to live, they won’t stop her from her plans. When Catwoman attempts to grab her, Miranda pulls out some bad-ass moves, besting her and escaping! Lucius and Catwoman are pissed, to say the least.

DECLARATION OF WAR/ASSUMPTION OF POWER (EXTERNAL): Bruce builds his strength, attempting to climb up the steep rock walls of the pit, but he can’t make it. A rope is thrown down to him. He climbs up to find an unlikely ally: an older man, a PRIEST. He takes Bruce around the underground lair. A doomsday cult works while chanting “Rise.”

Suddenly an attack – a crew of commandos repels into the lair – but they’re not Bane’s men, they are the LEAGUE OF SHADOWS! Bruce watches in horror as he sees their leader remove her mask: Miranda Tate, dressed in ninja garb. She sends her men off to find Bane while she talks to Bruce.

END OF ACT FOUR TURN (INTERNAL): Miranda Tate reveals her true identity: Talia Al Ghul, the current leader of The League of Shadows. She’s known his identity as Batman the entire time, infiltrated Wayne Enterprises as a long con. She tells her story:

EXTENDED FLASHBACK: YOUNG RA’S (aka Ducard) was a lost man until he was indoctrinated into the League of Shadows in Tibet, eventually being given the title of Ra’s Al Ghul, the demon. RA’S has a secret relationship with a woman, who gives birth to his daughter, TALIA. Ra’s raises Talia in secret, teaching her in the ninja ways, swearing her to allegiance to the League of Shadows as a sleeper agent. Talia falls in love with a man, an unstable yet powerful League member, and when Ra’s finds out, he tries to kill the man while on a mission, leaving him for dead. After Ra’s dies and Talia assumes the mantle of her father, the man returns, now known as “Bane,” able to live only with a breathing apparatus. When Talia stops him from overthrowing her, Bane forms his own rogue segment of the League and becomes obsessed with conquering Gotham City as a sick means of proving he’s better than Ra’s. [Note: Bane’s backstory contains father-son themes, built around the goal of destroying Gotham -- a dark mirror of Bruce trying to maintain his father’s legacy of saving Gotham. They also share the same lover, Miranda, and surrogate father, Ducard.]

END OF ACT FOUR TURN (EXTERNAL): Talia was unable to stop Bane from developing a thermonuclear device. He believes that if he dies while nuking Gotham, he will achieve immortality and the true title of Ra’s Al Ghul. *He will become a legend.*

Talia asks Bruce to help her defeat Bane, and she promises the League of Shadows will leave Gotham City forever. Bruce must decide if he can trust one demon to defeat the other.

END OF ACT FOUR DECISION (EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL): Bruce knows where Bane has taken the bomb, the ideal ground zero to do the maximum damage. They need a plan, and more help.

ACT FIVE

Bruce suits up in a modified suit that Lucius designed to help Bruce with his injuries. Lucius gives him a “kill switch” that will shut down the nuke, but he must get close enough to the bomb to insert the device.

TRUE POINT OF NO RETURN (EXTERNAL): Batman and Catwoman fly into action in The Bat, while James Gordon and John Blake assemble the underground resistance now known as the “Bat-Army.”

BIG BATTLE -- Bane’s army fights The League of Shadows, Batman, Catwoman, Gordon, Blake and the Bat-Army in a final battle.

Batman, Talia and Bane are separated in a final struggle over the nuke. Caged in as others look on from behind bars, Bane gets the upper hand on Batman, ready to break his neck.

TRUE POINT OF NO RETURN (INTERNAL): Talia redeems herself by saving Batman, but Bane kills her. Bane begins the countdown on the nuke.

The other forces watch helplessly as the timer ticks down and a wounded Batman is our only chance at stopping Bane. Several young people capture the fight on video and the entire city watches live on their various video devices.

The fight is brutal, taking its toll on both Bane and Batman, but Bane still manages to keep Batman away from the bomb.

CLIMAX (EXTERNAL & INTERNAL): Just when Batman looks like he's given up, he turns to the cameras and removes his mask, revealing his identity to Gotham City and the world. He utters a final phrase, the dying words of his father, "Don't be afraid."

Bruce tears off Bane's mask, which incapacitates Bane but exposes Bruce directly to the poison gas. Bruce deactivates the bomb! But he collapses, begins to cough up blood. Bane, suffocating, crawls on his knees toward Bruce, tries to wrestle his mask away from him. Bane's brute strength begins to overpower Bruce, until Bruce wraps him in a head lock and throws Bane's mask away, to land right next to Batman's mask on the ground...only a foot away.

Cameras roll and the crowd watches, stunned, as both Bruce and Bane choke out. Their two bodies go limp, falling next to one another like mirror images, as citizens all over Gotham weep for their fallen hero.

The video goes viral. Bruce has become a legend.

EPILOGUE: A ceremony – Bruce Wayne is laid to rest on a televised ceremony, as James Gordon gives a speech about Bruce being Gotham's true savior. We see Bruce, embalmed, in the coffin as the lid is closed – it's lowered into the ground as the city watches – everyone is in tears...except Alfred, who looks curiously annoyed.

Bruce Wayne is celebrated as the symbol of Gotham City, replacing Harvey Dent and restoring the hope and honor of a once-proud city. Thomas Wayne's legacy has been upheld.

Later – Alfred cracks open an identical coffin, to find Bruce, alive, breathing from an oxygen tank! They switched coffins – Batman's last act of deception. Dissolve to:

SOMEWHERE IN ASIA - Alfred drops Bruce off and they say goodbye. Bruce, face scarred from the venom, but truly at peace, walks off into the mountains. Meanwhile...back in Gotham City...

John Blake, now a Lieutenant, works with Catwoman to keep Gotham City safe. The bat symbol is scrawled all over town.

FADE OUT.

Good Luck and Happy Writing,

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