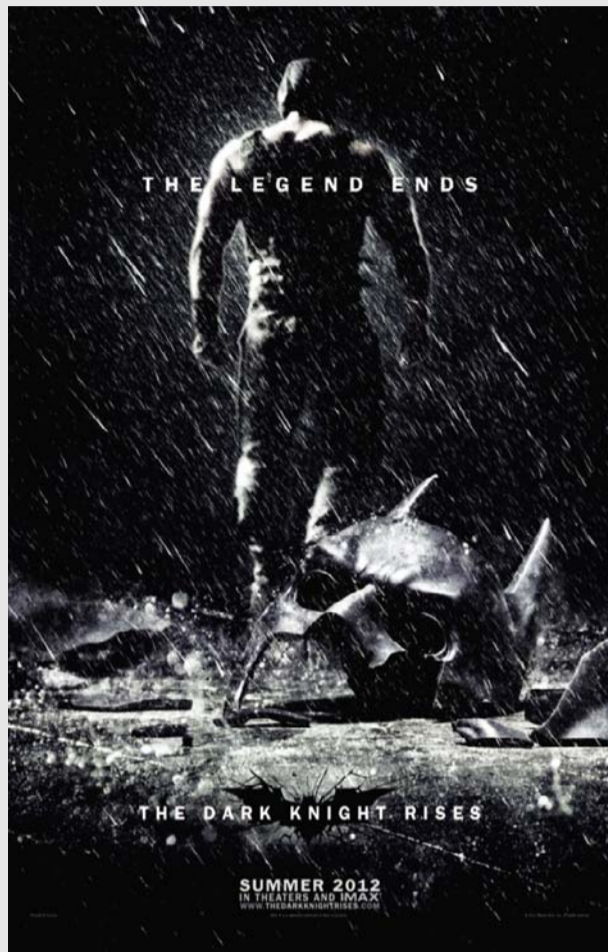


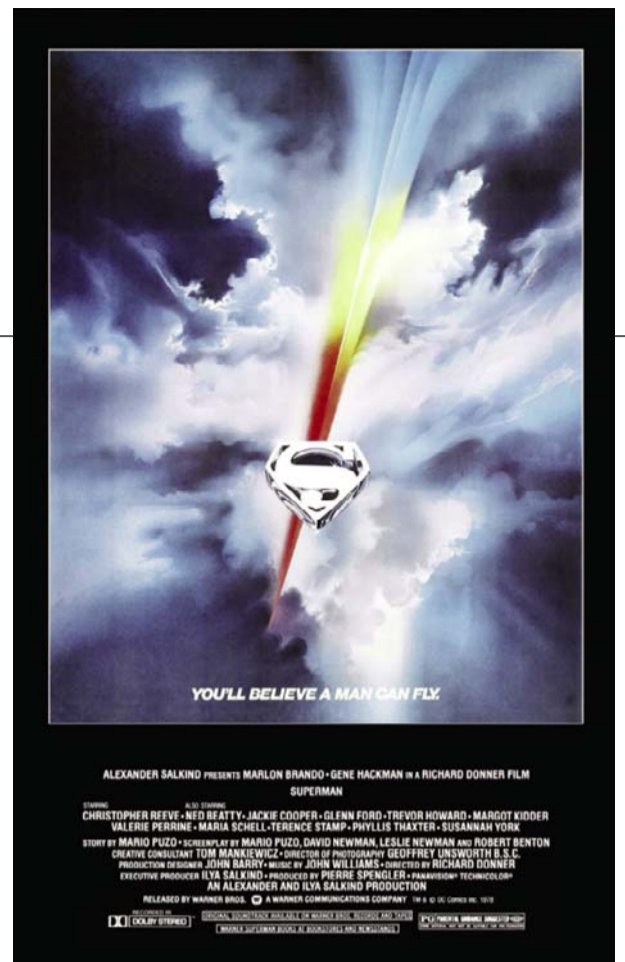
THE DARK KNIGHT RISES (2012)



With 2012's *The Dark Knight Rises*, Christopher Nolan was faced with the task of coming up with a compelling closing chapter to a blockbuster trilogy - the first two entries of which ranked among the best-reviewed superhero movies of all time. Under all that pressure, it's commendable that Nolan emerged with something as solid as *Rises*: even if it didn't quite reach the same lofty heights achieved by its predecessor, it offered Christian Bale's Batman one last round of hard-hitting action before wrapping up this era of the franchise, with a bit of socioeconomic subtext woven into the plot for good measure. For some, just being forced to say goodbye to Nolan's vision of the series was an untenable disappointment - to say nothing of any of the nits worth picking with a storyline that saw Batman being driven to the brink of destruction in an epic confrontation with the fearsome revolutionary known as Bane (Tom Hardy).

SUPERMAN (1978)

"You'll believe a man can fly," promised the posters for 1978's *Superman*, and they were right in more ways than one. The special effects were impressive for the era, but more importantly, the movie benefited from a talented director in Richard Donner, a solid screenplay derived from a story by *Godfather* author Mario Puzo, and a great cast anchored by Christopher Reeve, whose looming physique and chiseled good looks combined with his Juilliard-trained acting chops to help create the most perfect Superman ever to grace the screen (so far). While Gene Hackman's rather ineffective Lex Luthor (coupled with the



buffoonish Otis, played by Ned Beatty) was far from the most imposing foe our hero would face, the movie didn't lack for dramatic

stakes - and with Margot Kidder playing Lois Lane, it even managed to mix a little feminism in with its romance

SUPERMAN II (1981)

After putting together what seemed like a foolproof plan for a speedy *Superman* follow-up - hiring director Richard Donner to shoot much of the sequel concurrently with the first film - Warner Bros. watched with growing dismay as production slowed to a crawl, finally coming to a halt when Donner's feuds with producers Ilya and Alexander Salkind led to his firing from the project. Things grew more complicated when new director Richard Lester came on board, and - needing to film at least 51 percent of the movie in order to obtain a director's credit - reshot many scenes from a movie that had already been substantially filmed. Those are just a few of the many challenges *Superman II* needed to overcome before it finally arrived in theaters in 1981; amazingly, all that behind-the-scenes chaos didn't have much of an adverse impact on the original theatrical cut, which broke the \$100 million barrier at the box office while enjoying almost as many positive reviews as its predecessor.



THE DARK KNIGHT (2008)

Having already brought an end to the candy-colored, Schumacher-wrought nightmare that gripped the *Batman* franchise in the late 1990s, Christopher Nolan and Christian Bale had fans primed for a successful second act - but even after the smashing success of *Batman Begins*, few could have guessed just how popular *The Dark Knight* would be in the summer of 2008. A sprawling superhero epic that

somehow managed to make room for jaw-dropping visuals, a compelling storyline, and stellar performances, *Knight* climbed out from under months of intense speculation - not to mention the shadow cast by Heath Ledger's shocking death - with a worldwide gross in excess of \$1 billion, a towering stack of positive reviews, and a posthumous Best Supporting Actor Oscar for Ledger. (www.rottentomatoes.com)