



*Dunkirk* is as elegantly simple as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* was elegantly complex.

It is a masterpiece of nonlinear storytelling and awe-inspiring cinematography.

And it is the only movie I have ever seen that was actually better in the IMAX format.

That's not to say I have anything against IMAX (okay, okay, to be fair, IMAX and I have had a somewhat antagonistic relationship since we met in 2005, but we had an amiable breakup and we're on civil terms today). I'm just not one to automatically assume bigger and louder makes for better storytelling.

Except in this case.

Christopher Nolan, whom everyone knows is one of my top five favorite directors, shot *Dunkirk* in 70mm (most movies are shot in 35mm). But that's not all.

Close to three quarters of the movie was shot using IMAX MSM 908 cameras (scenes with dialogue and those shot in close quarters were shot with Panavision 65mm cameras, largely due to the fact that IMAX cameras are gigantic, cumbersome, and super noisy).

This means you can watch the movie on a regular screen, but you won't get the entire picture. The footage shot with IMAX cameras has an aspect ratio that's just as wide as the widescreen films you're used to, but much taller (standard 70mm film has five sprocket holes per frame, whereas IMAX film has 15).

The outcome is that the breathtaking pictures Nolan captured with those IMAX cameras can only be appreciated on an IMAX screen.

And it is so worth it.

I watched the film on both a standard screen and in an IMAX theater. I loved the movie in the regular theater, which tells you that (unlike James Cameron's *Avatar*, which was entertaining only when seen in 3D) *Dunkirk* is a winner either way.

But boy was that IMAX experience stunning!

Now that I'm finished gushing over the technology involved (if you geek out over fancy film tech like I do, you can visit [Gear Patrol's article](#) "Meet the Cameras That Filmed Nolan's Latest Masterpiece, 'Dunkirk'" for more details), I'll move on and review movie itself.

It's brilliant.

Go see it.

#dropmic

Okay, okay.

In May, 1940, German troops trapped approximately 400,000 British and French soldiers on the beach at Dunkirk. With the Germans behind them, and the sea before them, these troops were stranded with little hope of survival. Over 330,000 of those men were rescued against all odds due not only to the efforts of the British navy and air force, but to civilians who risked their lives to pilot 700 to 800 small vessels (fishing boats, pleasure yachts, etc.) across the channel to transport the soldiers home.

Nolan plunges the audience into this event in the same way the individuals who experienced it were plunged into it – there are no narrators or complex explanations of who is who and what is what. In fact, I didn't even catch the names of most of the characters. Names didn't matter. Survival mattered. Heroism mattered. A tiny plane in a vast, unending sky mattered.

The film contains almost no dialogue (as evidenced by the fact that only about a quarter of it was filmed using those quieter Panavision cameras!), and it's perfect that way. Those who speak do so because it is necessary. When it is unnecessary, they are silent. Which makes the whole thing feel even more real.

The narrative is divided into three segments, one that takes place over the course a week, one that takes place over the course of a day, and one that takes place over the course of an hour. Although these storylines intersect, they occur in their own timeframes, giving the viewer a unique perspective of how the event was experienced by the various participants.

Each of the three storylines has its own level of suspense, its own compelling characters, and its own impact on the audience.

If you have not seen *Dunkirk* yet, get out and see it in an IMAX theater if at all possible. While it will still be a good movie on DVD, it will not be the spectacular experience Nolan designed it to be. And you want to experience that. Trust me.

Final Grade: A