Tenet marks Christopher Nolan’s return to high-concept sci-fi thrillers



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John David Washington stars in Christopher Nolan’s forthcoming film *Tenet*.
A pair of international spies must prevent the outbreak of World War III in the first trailer for *Tenet*, a forthcoming science fiction thriller from Director Christopher Nolan (*Memento, The Dark Knight*), who also gave us the mind- and reality-bending futuristic thriller *Inception* in 2010. Their secret weapon: a futuristic technology called time reversal.

Hardly any details about the film leaked out during production. No character names are listed on IMDB, and co-star

Robert Pattinson has said that he was only allowed to read the script once, while locked in a room, when considering his role. Nolan wrapped principal photography in September after shooting in seven different countries, including Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Norway, and India. (Apparently the crew foiled a suicide attempt while shooting a scene near the Gateway of India in Mumbai.) A brief teaser was shown to audiences who went to see *Hobbs and Shaw* in theaters this summer, and anyone who has already seen *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* in an IMAX theater has likely seen a special nine-minute prologue as a sneak peek.

The trailer sets up the premise immediately with a shot of two men rappelling up a building, in seeming defiance of the laws of physics. “We all believe we’d run into the burning building,” a voiceover tells us. “But until we feel that heat, we can never know.” A man (John David Washington) is undergoing what appears to be a grueling trial to join an elite international team of spies, ending with a choice: give up his colleagues, or die. He chooses death and wakes up in a hospital to learn he has passed the test (“Welcome to the afterlife”).

- John David Washington (BlacKkKlansman), son of Denzel and former football player, stars as a spy recruited to thwart WWIII.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- A final test
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Waking up in a hospital to learn he passed the test.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Clémence Poésy (Fleur Delacour in the Harry Potter films) plays a scientist. You can tell by the lab coat she’s wearing.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- A mysterious artifact.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.

- Michael Caine is a welcome addition to any film.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Hard to tell from a still, but this boat is moving backward in time.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Hey, it’s Kenneth Branagh!
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Robert Pattinson driving backwards on a freeway.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Rappelling *up* a building.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.
- Whatever happened here, hasn’t actually happened yet.
  YouTube/Warner Bros.

The man’s new assignment: prevent World War III and save the world—not from nuclear holocaust, but from “something worse.” He’s given one code word, “tenet,” to open the necessary doors—and yes that is a palindrome, meaning it reads the same backward and forward. We see glimpses of backward movement in time: a ship’s wake in reverse and a car un-crashing on a busy freeway during a chase scene. “You have to start looking at the world in a new way,” the man is told. “Don’t try to understand it. Feel it.”

Fresh off his Oscar-nominated World War II drama, *Dunkirk*, Nolan seems to be returning to his high-concept sci-fi roots with *Tenet*. He explored memory and identity in *Memento* and expounded on those concepts in *Inception*, which set up an elaborate bank heist in the world of dreams within dreams within dreams. *Inception* also played with physics in the dream realm in some eye-popping, conceptually interesting ways. Who could forget that hallway fight scene or Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt)—faced with a freefall microgravity situation on one dream level—exploiting the equivalence principle in an elevator to “kick” his colleagues out of their dream states? So if anyone can pull off a film about being able to selectively reverse time, it’s Nolan.

The film also features Kenneth Branagh (*Murder on the Orient Express*), Michael Caine (*Inception, Interstellar*), Clémence Poésy (Fleur Delacour in the *Harry Potter* films), Himesh Patel (*Yesterday*), Elizabeth Debicki (*The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*), Martin Donovan (*Ant-Man*), Aaron Taylor-Johnson (*Kickass*), and Indian film stars Dimple Kapadia and Denzil Smith.

Tenet opens in theaters on July 17, 2020.

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