

# INSIGHT

## QUESTIONS WITH CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

INTERVIEWED BY REBECCA BREDHOLT



Image courtesy of Francois Duhamel © Touchstone Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures.



Before he directed “Batman Begins,” before “Insomnia,” and even before his Academy Award-winning film “Memento,” director/writer Christopher Nolan produced “Following.” Born and raised in England, Nolan studied English Literature at University College London. “Following,” shot on a \$12,000 budget — most of which was Nolan’s — won the Tiger Award at the 1999 Rotterdam Film Festival. Nolan speaks about his experiences shooting “Following,” as well as his 2006 release “The Prestige.” This year, he also finished writing the Batman sequel, “Dark Knight.”



TOP RIGHT: Christopher Nolan and Christian Bale in “The Prestige.” ABOVE: Nolan directed “Batman Begins” and his Academy Award-winning film “Memento.” Image courtesy of Warner Bros. Ent.

**RB:** How did you produce “Following” on a \$12,000 budget?

**CN:** I tried to construct a story that could be done with friends shooting on locations that were available. It’s crude, and proudly so. We developed an aesthetic that worked with the resources we had. In stage acting you have months of rehearsals and then it’s live, so if you mess up your lines, you have to just keep going. We spent six months rehearsing before shooting anything. The whole film was done in first or second takes. We shot in as tight a ratio as possible in black-and-white 35 mm.

**RB:** How did you choose the locations?

**CN:** We never had permission to shoot anywhere. Locations we used were friends of friends. I knew we were going to use my parent’s house. We used one of the actor’s flats, which actually had a Batman sticker on the front door. We used rooftops where we could because you can open up a film that way without dealing with bureaucracy.

**RB:** Where did you get the idea for the film?

**CN:** A combination of things. I wasn’t working at the time. I just got the idea of following people around because, when you have nothing to do, you just go outside and watch people. I got into the dynamics of how in a city, you erect barriers, you separate yourself. But if you pick someone out from a crowd, it starts to get interesting.

**RB:** How did you get the film to the festivals?

**CN:** We started to submit a rough cut, but we were out of money. I had takes that I was able to show to people like Peter (Broderick, who Nolan met at the SXSW Film Festival). It’s a great thing to have your own script so if you get an option you have something ready to go. It’s really an advantage. The whole film was done on Avid at 16 mm. You have to blow it up to 35 mm for the festivals, which is where [Broderick] came in [with the financing for that].

**RB:** How do you get people to do you favors for a no-budget film without getting yourself into problems?

**CN:** There was no paperwork on [“Following”]. There were no expectations. You just need to be respectful. Many no-budgets fail because people argue over millions that will never come.

**RB:** How did you get the cast?

**CN:** We used film students and friends. I wrote the lines for Jeremy Theobald specifically, since I already knew he was going to be the lead actor. We all had full-time jobs already. We tried shooting on Saturdays and Sundays, but then realized it was too much. We needed at least one day of rest. We had a rotating crew. Two people were doing sound so you don’t burn through the help. David Julyan did an amazing score with one synth. He’s got a great feel for ambient tones. It took about 14 months to shoot and about three months to edit.

**RB:** Will you ever do another black-and-white film?

**CN:** Yes, I’m colorblind, so that would be nice. Actually, I think it has to be the right story. If you do some color and some black and white, I think your appreciation for black and white is always being refreshed.

**RB:** Can you talk about “The Prisoner?” (A feature based on the British TV show by the same name.)

**CN:** I could, but I’d be pulling it out of my ass. We’ve got the same writers from “Blade Runner,” so I know it’s going to be fantastic.

**RB:** You edited your own trailer for “The Prestige?”

**CN:** Yes. We’ve been working on it for about six years now. Wally Pfister was the director of photography for this film. He did a great black-and-white, low-budget film . . . We met at a film festival. A director has to have a DP that he trusts. The role of photography is so much more than beautiful framing. The DP plays an important role in storytelling as well.

**RB:** Can you tell us about the chronology of your storytelling?

**CN:** I try to tell a story the way a conversation naturally unfolds. Or the way newspaper stories are written. It’s not chronological. It takes about 20 minutes to get into a story. I attempt to teach the audience the structure, even with “Batman Begins.” For me, you need to give people time to find their footing before you start jumping around. ■