

## Stunning, Creative Vision of ‘Looper’ with Joseph Gordon-Levitt

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 6, 2012 - 9:41pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It’s so refreshing to see a talented filmmaker that has been allowed to bring his unique vision to the screen without compromise. You know the feeling when you’re watching a product of a marketing focus group or producer interference and when you’re seeing something fresh, new, and personal. We too rarely get the latter. Whatever you may ultimately think of it, Rian Johnson’s “Looper” is undeniably not a focus group project. It is personal, dark, daring, weird, and refreshingly unique. It is also one of the best sci-fi films of the last several years.

Without spoiling too much, “Looper” is really two movies (and, to be fair, it’s the first half that easily surpasses the second in terms of sheer force of ingenuity). Actually, it may be three or four. It’s a film not unlike “Inception” in the way Johnson always stays ahead of the viewer in terms of storytelling. He gives you just enough road map to stay on the trail but he’s leading the way the entire time and you don’t know for sure what’s around the next bend. It’s amazingly unpredictable in terms of not just plotting but character and style. There have been very few sci-fi films in the last two decades that were this confident. It brings to mind films by Steven Spielberg (“Minority Report”) and Christopher Nolan (“Inception”) — incredible company for Johnson to keep.



Looper

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

In one of many elements that separate “Looper” from so many cookie-cutter sci-fi adventures, Johnson wastes no time throwing you into his high-concept world. It’s sink or swim. We’re not only introduced to Joe (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) but a near future in which the economy has collapsed to the point that homeless people clog the streets and telekinetic powers have advanced (although not beyond a bar pick-up trick of floating quarters just above your hand). In this bizarre-but-familiar world that reminds one of “Minority Report” (in that it’s clearly the future but also grounded in our current day), Joe is a very wealthy man. He has made his money as a Looper, a highly-skilled, highly-covert assassin.

Joe and his fellow Loopers (including Paul Dano) don’t operate like normal hit men. Thirty years from now, time travel has been invented and quickly made illegal. Becoming a product of the black market, pulling a Marty McFly became an occupation of the mob. They take targets, send them back in time, and a Looper kills them on sight. The money for the job is strapped to the victim’s back. He disposes of a body that isn’t even supposed to exist. The Looper profession is so underground that the men who kill know that they will one day have the unenviable task of taking the hood off their kill to see their own eyes, thus closing their “loop” and giving them their name. At that point, they know they only have 30 years left but they’re rich and retired.



Looper

*Photo credit: Sony Pictures*

Joe’s world starts to unravel after his buddy Seth (Dano) refuses to kill his future self and close his loop. Joe learns that someone is closing all the loops in the future on a reign of terror. And before you know it, future Joe (Bruce Willis) is fighting back and running away from his younger self. From here, “Looper” becomes a bizarre chase movie in that Johnson never quite underlines where our loyalties should lie. Do we want Joe to catch his older self and close the loop? Or do we want the older Joe, who is fighting to return to the love of his life, to succeed and save the future? And when a single mom (Emily Blunt) and her son (Pierce Gagnon) get involved, the narrative spins off in another unexpected direction altogether.

“Looper” is always spinning in a new direction. Whether it’s the ingenuity of Seth’s fate, the AMAZING flash-forward that details how young Joe turns into old Joe (which is a master class in visual storytelling), or the tension when one of the hired guns (Garret Dillahunt) of Joe’s former employer (Jeff Daniels) catches up to him, you’re never ahead of Johnson’s storytelling. It’s the kind of film that sci-fi fans will watch over and over again, dissecting its themes, references, and plot threads. The first half feels like noir while the second becomes practically a “High Noon” Western. And yet it’s all so tonally consistent. There’s a bit of narrative sag in the middle when Johnson hits a few similar beats as Joe hides out at a farmhouse but it’s a minor complaint.





Looper

Photo credit: Sony Pictures

On a performance level, “Looper” works all around. It takes some time to get used to Gordon-Levitt’s prosthetic makeup that’s designed to make him look more like a young Bruce Willis but that doesn’t lessen the impact of his performance. It’s a remarkably non-flashy turn for a protagonist in an action sci-fi movie. Joe is disciplined and by-the-book and JGL never over-plays his character, letting the story do its job instead of stealing focus. Willis is similarly solid but he does get a few great scenes to show off his acting chops, particularly a spectacular diner exchange between the Joes. Emily Blunt is typically engaging and Daniels rules.

As great as the cast is in “Looper,” this is Rian Johnson’s accomplishment on every level. It’s rare these days to walk out of a modern sci-fi blockbuster and think not of the visual effects or action scenes but the incredible screenplay. It’s so daring, dark, and weird that my first thought when it was over was “How did that get made?” Props to Film District and everyone who was willing to bet on this project instead of trying to soften its very-sharp edges for a wider audience. The bet has paid off with one of the best sci-fi films of the last decade.

*“Looper” stars Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Bruce Willis, Emily Blunt, Piper Perabo, Paul Dano, Pierce Gagnon, Garret Dillahunt, Noah Segan, and Jeff Daniels. It was written and directed by Rian Johnson. It opens on September 28, 2012 and is rated R.*



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [16]  
Content Director  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [15]

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