

# TMP Episode 4

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Hello everybody, and welcome to The Movie Plaza, the podcast where I Alicia Plaza watch, analyze and re rank IMDb's Top 100 Movies Watch list today for episode four, let's talk about memento. 5s Hello again and thank you for listening to episode four of my podcast on number 54, memento. If you're someone who enjoys film analysis, critique and discussion, or just looking for new ways to watch or talk about movies, then you're in the right place. Today's episode is going to be a bit different than normal, as we're going to be doing the show segments backwards, which is fittering considering the movie. We'll still start with an overview, but then we'll jump right into the Plaza Pops ranking portion, where I give the movie a one to ten score based on plot, characters, cinematography, and overall watchability entertainment value. After that, we'll discuss the movie's chronological structure and how it affects our perception of the events and characters, as well as how it mirrors the main character's condition. Then is the breakdown of events. Because of the film's unique structure, where it alternates between two timelines that meet at the end, I've opted to tell the breakdown in chronological order as opposed to how it is shown in the film. This means that there will be major, major spoilers right off the bat. So if you want to watch the movie and not have it spoiled, you can feel free to skip ahead. There are timestamps on the website to help you. I personally would recommend this if you haven't seen the film just because the twist will blow your socks off, but it's up to you. The episode will close with few words, followed by a preview of the movie for next week. So without further ado, let's get into the overview. 2s Memento, directed by Christopher Nolan, is a mystery and thriller film that was released in 2000. Rated R for violence, language and some drug content, the movie clocks in at 1 hour and 53 minutes and was Christopher Nolan's second film that really put him on the map as a director. He later went on to direct films such as Inception, Interstellar and The Dark Knight Rises, many of which made it onto the top 100 watch list. So we'll definitely be revisiting his work later in the episodes. Memento has stars such as Guy Pierce, who plays our main character Leonard Shelby, and Carrie Ann Moss, who plays Natalie. But what really sets it apart from others is the disjointed movie structure. IMDb summarizes the film as a man with short term memory loss who attempts to track down his wife's murderer, and the structure of the film reflects that. Keep this in mind when we get to our analysis of the movie structure as well as the chronologically correct breakdown of events. But for right now, let's jump right into the Plaza Pops ranking portion 2s today. Let's start with the characters. Our main man, Leonard, the insurance agent turned forgetful wife Avenger is by far the most fledged out and complex character within the film. We see a lot of dimension within him and through his thoughts are able to draw on deeper philosophical questions regarding memory and its fragility, as well as forcing us to draw the line between right and wrong. 1s In addition to this, he is also a really visually interesting character with his wide array of tattoos in different fonts and styles all over his body that serve as a reminder of his facts of life. And there are other fairly interesting characters as well, like Teddy and Natalie. But besides that, the other characters were just a bit more lackluster. For most of them, this is fine. I mean, the movie isn't about them and they fulfill their role just fine, so it's not too big of a deal. But I do wish his wife was fledged out a bit more, especially because their love must have been crazy for him to want to adventure like this. And the only really memorable thing about her is the fact that she has diabetes and likes to read. There are definitely more scenes containing backstory with his wife and ways he tries to remember her that don't get mentioned in the breakdown, but it still doesn't feel like quite enough. Memento also doesn't pass the Bechtel test and I do partially care about it. On one hand, almost every interaction is happening between Leonard and someone else, so there aren't many opportunities for that to happen. On the other hand, there just aren't as many named women in the film. And there are moments when I feel like they could have been naturally incorporated, as opposed to some of the male side characters that wouldn't have altered anything in a significant way. It may seem like a small thing, but it's a matter of representation. Speaking of, I couldn't tell you if there was a single person of color in this film, so that's something. I'd give this category a seven out of ten. 1s Next up, we have the plot. Now I love memento. I think the concept is genius and the execution is remarkable. It's giving crime, love, murder, mystery, moral ambiguity and more in under 2 hours. The whole thing is bound to keep you on the edge of your seat wondering what's going to happen next, and I found the twist to be genuinely surprising. Honestly, if it were up to me, I would give the plot a ten. But it's not up to me. It's up to the little movie goblin that

lives in my head. And he says there's too many plot holes for it to be a ten. I will say that the plot holes aren't glaring. The film does make a lot of sense, especially considering the wonky timeline. But undoubtedly you're going to leave with some questions, most of which pertain to Leonard and his condition. Like what exactly happened between the time of the incident that caused Leonard's memory loss and the time that we see currently. Why is Leonard so set on revenge? Wasn't this guy just some regular insurance agent? And of course, there's more questions pertaining to Sammy Jenkins, Natalie Leonard and just the overall time line. Like I said, it's nothing too bad, but it is going to bring the score for this category down to a 7.5 out of ten. **2s** Onto cinematography. You've heard me mention it already, and I'm going to get into a lot more during the movie structure analysis as well as the breakdown, but this film is really unique. It's got the dual mix timeline thing going on and is extremely creative. The tone of the color scenes really match the vibe of the film. It's not overly saturated or busy and has an almost nostalgic or hazy feel to it, which matches the story being told. Couple that with the black and white scenes and the way that certain shots make you feel like you're right in the middle of the action and it's really cool. It certainly stands out as opposed to what you would typically imagine from a crime noir film. With that being said, it's not Christopher Nolan's best work of cinematography, though it is sure to stand out amongst others, so I'd give it an 8.5 out of ten. **2s** Finally, entertainment value and overall Watchability Memento is an R rated movie, and the primary reason for this is the severe language followed by violence, though that bit is fairly mild, not nearly as bad as a lot of what you see on screen today. There's some brief partial nudity and mentions of rape, and also a scene where Leonard hires an escort, but no sex is shown. And so all of it is pretty moderate and I would think tolerable for most people, I mean, if you're cool with 75 uses of the F bomb, then you're probably fine. For example, I was 14 when I first watched this movie in my high school psychology class. My mom had to sign a waiver allowing me, of course, and that was all fine and dandy, but this movie is definitely not suitable for young children. That's okay, though, because in terms of entertainment value, this one ranks pretty high. The whole film just flew by because I was so engaged with the storyline and with figuring out what was going on, and that remained true the second and even the third time I watched it. Even though there are some questions to be had, it's one of those where enough is answered to satisfy you, but just enough is left over to keep the film on your mind and the twist. Man, oh, my gosh. If I could go back to being 14 and relive that moment in my high school class where it all begins to click and you can just hear everyone's baby little bird brain exploding, I totally would. And maybe I'm guessing it, and it's just extra special to me because of the circumstances in which I saw it, but I would give this category a 9.5 out of ten. That brings the final Plaza Pop score to **3s** an 8.125 out of ten, making it our new number three on our re ranked list. Below it Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. And above north By Northwest. Moving on, let's get into some analysis of Memento's movie structure. **2s** As I mentioned before, the film alternates between two different timelines that come together at the end, like the last piece of a puzzle to reveal the big twist. The first timeline is in black and white, and it represents the first scenes of the chronological story. These scenes move forward in time and mainly consist of Leonard on the phone in his motel room, explaining the story of Sammy Jenkins to a man on the other side. Not only does Sammy Jenkins serve as the backbone of the story by laying out the conditions of Leonard's amnesia, but it also gives the audience a solid and consistent story to refer back to. This is needed because the other timeline is not as straightforward. That timeline scenes are in color and occur in reverse chronological order, meaning that the last moments in the chronological timeline happen at the beginning of the film. I like to say that each scene represents a chunk of Leonard's memory and ends where the last color scene began. So as an example, let's say in one color scene we see Leonard opening up a present. This doesn't actually happen in the movie, it's just an example. The next scene would be in black and white, reflecting an earlier point in the timeline, and then the next scene in color may show someone giving Leonard the present and will end with him opening it. So each scene picks up where the last one left off, but in reverse order. This makes for a super interesting and unique watcher experience. But the real question is, why would Christopher Nolan choose to do this? To that I have two answers, the first being paraphrased from Nolan himself. As we know, our main character Leonard suffers from anterograde amnesia, meaning he is unable to form new short term memories following the incident that gave him this condition. Every few moments, he completely forgets everything that has led up to his current situation, causing him a sense of disorientation and forcing him to rely on context clues to get through life. By telling the story in reverse chronological order, it puts the audience in the same boat as Leonard, forcing us to rely on context clues and only giving us slightly more information than Leonard would have. We know where he's going, but we don't know where he's been. And that's interrupted by the black and white scenes that lay the foundation and alternatively, show us where he's been, but not where he's going. It's

honestly brilliant. <sup>1s</sup> The second reason is because it alters our perceptions of the characters on screen. If you're like me, then the first time you watch memento, you'll probably think that most of the characters are just flat out shitty people. We see them lie, cheat, and manipulate others, including poor old Lenny, who forgets everything. As the film progresses, it only appears to get worse. You think you know what's happening until suddenly you get to the end. The whole story comes together, and you realize that your perception of these characters may have been off. I could compare the experience to looking through a microscope in biology lab or something. It's like you think you know what you're supposed to be looking at, but you just can't get the focus right. Then suddenly the lens becomes clear and you realize that what you're looking at is not what you thought at all. And you're definitely going to fail your upcoming test because what the? <sup>1s</sup> I digress <sup>1s</sup> all that to say that I would highly encourage you to watch memento twice if you get the opportunity, or if you choose to skip the breakdown of events to watch the movie, be sure to revisit it so you can compare and contrast your character perceptions. When you come back, feel free to also leave a comment or reach out with your thoughts. I'd be really interested to hear what you guys think. You can contact me through email or the comment section found on my website [themovlzapodcast.com](http://themovlzapodcast.com), but onto the breakdown. Skip to the closing now to avoid spoilers. <sup>2s</sup> The chronological story of Leonard actually begins with a man named Sammy Jenkins. Before the incident that caused Leonard to lose his short term memory. He was married to his wife and was an insurance claims investigator. This means that he would look into people's claims for insurance and then make the decision whether or not to grant it to them. Sammy Jenkins was one of those people who Leonard was investigating as he claimed to have a form of short term memory loss that didn't allow him to make new memories. He was able to remember everything before his supposed incident. But now, every few moments, he forgets everything, including where he is, how he got there, or even what he's doing. Although he convinced a lot of people, Leonard himself was not convinced, claiming that every time he saw Sammy, he could see a fleeting look of recollection in his eyes. So he sent him to have some tests done that would prove he was lying. The tests were to show conditioning because it was believed that although I may not be able to form new memories, their minds should still respond to conditioning through repetition, which Sammy did not do. So Leonard proved he was a lying, con man and denied him of his insurance. And that was that. What happens next isn't as clear, but this is my interpretation of the events. Sometime after that, in Leonard's life, he's living with his wife, who's a diabetic, and one night they get attacked in their home. Leonard was sleeping when he heard a sound from the bathroom that caused him to wake up. He went to check on it and found a man over his wife who had been raped and was trying to strangle her with the shower liner on the floor. He attacked him. But then a second man came and hit him hard in the head from behind, causing him to slam across the mirror and fall on the floor next to his wife. This is the last memory that he has of his wife and what Leonard believes to be the way his wife died. However, neither of them died. But instead Leonard woke up with the condition Sammy Jenkins was faking severe and retrograde amnesia. This means that Leonard can only remember things before in leading up to the incident, but is now incapable of forming new memories. Every few moments when he has a lapse in attention or concentration, it is if he completely restarts. I believe that what happens next is Leonard and his wife make a claim. And similarly to Sammy, their claim is denied on the idea that Leonard's condition is not physical, but rather psychological, giving the impression that it's something he can snap out of, which isn't possible. This is super hard on his wife, who's having a difficult time adjusting to this new Leonard. If she knew that the old Leonard was gone, then she could move on. But The Thought That He's Still In there and she could possibly free him, in a sense, is what causes her to try to test Leonard as a means to get him to break out of it. She tests him in small ways at first, but her final test is the most extreme. She asks Leonard to give her an insulin shot for her diabetes, as she always does. This is something he still remembers how to do, so he does it without hesitation. <sup>1s</sup> But then she waits a few moments and asks him to do it again. And he does. She knows that Leonard loves her and would never do anything to hurt her, so she thinks he must break out of it. She waits a few moments and asks him to do it again. And he does. He gives her the insulin shot each time she asks. So his wife overdoses on insulin and dies at the hands of Leonard. And just like that, he forgets. So take the memory that he has of being attacked and mix it with a guilty, conscious and unreliable memory and you get Leonard's new reality. The jumbled collection of memories condenses into a story, one in which Leonard's wife died the night she was attacked, and that second guy that hit him from behind and got away. He must be the killer. Leonard goes to the police, where he meets Officer John Gammell, aka Teddy, but due to his condition and the fact that he killed his wife, of course there's nothing they can do for him. And he gets sent away, leaving Leonard with nothing but his need for revenge on the man who did this to him and his wife. He tattoos this as well as the only thing he knows that a John G raped and

murdered his wife onto his chest. So he will always remember and goes on to live his life. However, Teddy the cop can't seem to get Leonard out of his head and seeks him out, hoping to help him in whatever way he can. He helps Leonard find the guys who originally attacked his wife and lets him kill them, taking a Polaroid after the act of Leonard pointing to an empty space on his chest, presumably where he will tattoo the fact that he avenged his wife. Teddy was sure Leonard would remember, but he doesn't. And just a few moments after, he forgets and is left with the same sense of vengeance. So I guess Leonard chooses to alter the facts and give himself a new mystery to solve. He never gets a tattoo, throws out information in the police file on the killers, and blacks out certain information so that he still has an objective. Still having pity on him, Teddy continues to help Leonard find his John G. Even feeding him new information so that he always has a new person to find and a purpose for living. We don't know how many times this happens, but that brings us to the beginning of the black and white scenes in the movie. We see Leonard in a motel room covered in tattoos, and he gets multiple calls from Teddy. Leonard doesn't know who it is, though, and tells him the story of Sammy Jenkins. That's when Leonard notices a new tattoo on his body saying to never answer the phone. So he hangs up immediately and makes a request to the front desk to hold any calls he receives. Use. <sup>1s</sup> Sometime later, the front desk attendant comes to his door with an envelope saying the person on the phone is a cop and Leonard should pick up the phone. When Leonard opens the envelope, it is the bloodied photo of him that Teddy took. So the next time the phone rings, he picks it up. If you haven't gathered it, Teddy is a crooked cop. So on the phone, he's feeding Leonard information on people that he would also benefit from having them gone. His new target is a drug dealer named Jimmy. So he feeds Leonard the fake fact that his target is a drug dealer. They agree to meet up, and when they do, Leonard takes a Polaroid photo of him, referring to him as Officer Gammel. Not wanting to get caught up in his crooked cop stuff, teddy tells him to just write Teddy and his number on the photo. Then Teddy tells Leonard where to go to find this guy and gives him the keys to his truck. Leonard drives to the reclusive and abandoned building, believing he'll find his guy, and waits for someone to show up. And someone does show up. The drug dealer, Jimmy G. Leonard attacks Jimmy, who pleads for his life, offering the drug money in his car. But Leonard doesn't want money, just revenge. So he kills Jimmy, changes into his clothes, and takes a Polaroid photo for later recollection. The only hiccup was that as he died, Jimmy mentions Sammy Jenkins. And how would he know who that is? This tips Leonard off that he wasn't the right guy. So after Leonard kills Jimmy, he forgets and then looks at the dead body like, oh, my gosh, what did I just do? He searches through the photos in his hands and sees a photo of Teddy, as well as the motel he's staying at. He goes outside, and Teddy's there. So he calls to him for help, saying there's a dead guy inside and explains his condition. Also, to test him, he asks if they have met before, and Teddy says no, flashing his ID. And walking inside as Officer Gammel. But Leonard knows that they have met before because he has that photo of Teddy. So when he gets inside, he attacks Teddy and demands answers. Teddy tries to say that he got his guy, but Leonard won't believe him. So instead, he tells him the truth. He tells him about the accident, how he's mixed the stories of him and Sammy Jenkins in his mind so that it was Sammy that killed his wife, not Leonard who killed his wife, about how he already got revenge. He says he's been helping him and that it's okay that Leonard lies to himself to be happy. It's okay that he chooses to forget his life and give himself some sense of purpose or meaning. There are so many John G's in the world. Hell, even Teddy is a John G. So there will always be more people for Leonard. To find mind, but it's not enough. Unlike for most people, the truth will not set Leonard free because he's bound to forget it. Though. As he leaves, he burns the photo of Jimmy and takes the remaining bullets from his gun and plants them in Teddy's truck. He then writes down Teddy's license plate on his other car, not the truck, and writes on the back of the Polaroid photo of Teddy do not believe his lies. Effectively planting the seeds for his new investigation. The one where Teddy is his John G. He leaves the truck and hops in Jimmy's car, speeding away as he drives into the city. For a moment, he closes his eyes. He chooses to believe his own reality. And then, just like that, the moment passes. He opens his eyes, and that's as if he is a new man. He looks down and sees the license plate fact in his hand and then sees a tattoo shop. The car comes to a screeching stop outside, and in he goes to get the license plate tattooed as a fact. While he was in there, teddy must have noticed his car outside and entered the shop in a panic. He brought new clothes for Leonard and tells him that he has to get out of town because if he keeps going around in those clothes and with that car, people are going to suspect something. So Leonard takes the clothes into a separate room to change, but after reading the note on the Polaroid, decides to leave them there. He searches through his pockets and finds a cup coaster from the Bar Ferdies with a note on the back that reads, Come by after. Assigned by Natalie, Jimmy's girlfriend. <sup>1s</sup> This note was of course meant for Jimmy, but Leonard doesn't know that, so he decides to follow it. He pulls up to the bar in Jimmy's car, dressed in Jimmy's clothes, and Natalie comes

out to greet him. But when she sees it's not Jimmy, she's confused and goes back inside. Leonard also goes inside the bar and says to her that he's looking for a woman named Natalie. At some point, Jimmy must have heard about Leonard and his condition through the grapevine, so Natalie is also vaguely familiar with him, though she doesn't believe him at first. She asks what happened to Jimmy because obviously Leonard's wearing his clothes and driving his car. But Leonard doesn't know, so he can't tell her, only able to tell her about the note in his pocket and about his condition, including his last memory of what he believes is his wife dying. Still not completely believing him, Natalie tests him by spitting in beer and then having Leonard and another patron spit in it as well. Natalie tries to serve this to him a few moments later, and he drinks it without hesitation. This is when Natalie decides to help him in his situation, but also help herself. They leave together back to Natalie's home, where he takes a picture of her before she goes out again. When she returns, she is capital P, pissed off because while she was out, this man named Dodd tried to get her. Dodd was the dude Jimmy was supposed to bring the money to, and because Jimmy's missing, he's now, after her upset, Natalie yells at him, saying that all she knows is Jimmy went to meet some guy named Teddy with a lot of money and never came back, and suspects that Leonard must be involved. So now Natalie asks Leonard to kill Dodd for her, and he refuses, but she won't let that happen. She flat out tells him that she's going to use him to get what she wants, and there's nothing he can do because he won't ever remember this conversation. She continues to provoke him until he lashes out and hits her. Then, taking all of the pens in the room with her, she walks out to her car and waits. Leonard desperately searches for a pen to write this down and tries to keep the moment in his mind, when suddenly he hears a car door close. And just like that, it's all gone. Natalie walks in the house crying with a bloodied nose, and Leonard immediately asks her what happened. She makes up a story that Dodd beat her up after Leonard told her to go talk to him. She plays on his emotions, and, feeling sympathetic, he agrees to help get rid of him, telling her to write down what Dodd looks like and where he can find him. As he walks out of the house, his memory restarts and he enters his car, where Teddy was waiting to surprise him. At first, Leonard doesn't recognize him, so Teddy reintroduces himself, and again he insists that Leonard needs to get out of town and says that he can't trust Natalie, forcing him to write on her photograph do not trust her. However, as soon as Teddy leaves the car, Leonard checks his photographs, reads the note about Teddy, and proceeds to cross a note off of Natalie's photograph, then drives away. As he's driving, a car pulls up behind him and starts honking his horn. The Leonard is not sure why the car pulls up next to him, and inside is Dodd, the man. After Natalie, Dodd pulls out a gun and tries to shoot Leonard. So Leonard drives away and ends up pulling over at a trailer park, where he hops out and continues running on foot. As he's running, he forgets again. So the next time he notices Dodd, he assumes that he must be chasing him before quickly finding out it's the other way around. So he escapes, checks his notes, and then decides to head to the motel room that Dodd is staying at to get the jump on him. Remember, he got this information from Adele. He breaks into Dodd's motel room, grabs a bottle of liquor as a weapon, and sits in the bathroom to wait. When you guessed it, he forgets again. In so naturally, because he's in a bathroom, he decides to take a shower, during which time Dot arrives and enters. Leonard is prepared and attacks him as soon as he opens the shower door, eventually hitting him over the head with the bottle and then taping his unconscious body up in the closet. Not knowing exactly what just happened, he sorts through his photos, finds Teddy and his number, and calls him up, asking him to come to the motel because he needs help. When he puts the phone down for a moment, he drifts off to sleep because he's completely exhausted. This means that when he wakes up, he has no idea where he is and is surprised to see a bloodied, taped up man in the closet. Good thing Teddy just arrived and is knocking at the door. Even though Leonard doesn't remember why he's here, he ends up showing Teddy Dodd in the closet, and together they come up with the plan to threaten him and force him to leave town, essentially solving Natalie's dilemma. The only problem is, he's no idea who Natalie is or why he would attack someone for her, so he decides to pay her a visit and confront her. Natalie explains that Leonard agreed to take care of Dodd for her and has nothing to do with his investigation. But there's a persistent and nagging thought in Leonard's mind that someone's trying to get him to kill the wrong person. He opens up about the hardships of his condition, how difficult it is to remember everything from before but nothing from now, to have lost someone he loves and not be able to make it right. Natalie again feeling sympathetic for him, clearly a common theme, tells him that she lost someone close to her as well and offers to help Leonard. So he writes on her photo that she also lost someone and will help him out of pity. Sometime later, Natalie says to him that she has a friend who can run the license plate on his tattoo to see who owns the car. After he leaves her place, he once again gets stopped by Teddy, who takes him to a diner. Teddy still is trying to get Leonard to leave town on account of what he did to Jimmy, but Nosi's sticking around because of what Leonard believes is unfinished business and he still wants to help him.

During their discussion, we get a better idea of how serious it is to Leonard that he avenges his wife's death. It is his only driving factor in life, and we realize that without it, he essentially has nothing to live for. Fast forward a bit and he leaves the diner to reunite with Natalie about the license plate. When they meet, she tells him that she had her friend run the plate, and the name that came up was none other than a John G. Just the man he's looking for. Leonard looks at the photo of the driver's license and we see that it's John Gammel, aka Teddy. Leonard compares all of his supposed facts, and it lines up. So he writes on the photo of Teddy that he's the one, and to kill him. Leonard checks the photo of the motel he's staying at in his pocket. He returns there and talks to the man at the front desk, telling him to let him know if Teddy calls and shows him the photo. The man says, looks like he's already here. And speak of the devil, guess who comes walking through the door but Teddy. He asks where Leonard wants to go, and Leonard says that he got a new lead on a place and takes him to the same spot where he killed Jimmy. I assume he knows about this place because of Natalie. He checks the truck that is still there and finds the bullets from before loading them into his gun. He lures Teddy inside, where he has a lapse and memory again, but he checks his photos and sees the note to kill him. So he attacks Teddy, and even though Teddy tries to reveal the truth to him, Leonard kills him anyway and then stands back to take a Polaroid photograph. This is the same moment as the opening scene of the film, where we see a Polaroid photo in reverse. So while technically the beginning of the film, it's also the chronologically correct conclusion, the end. So that was everything for episode number four on Memento. You can currently find Memento on HBO Max, but if it's not there, be sure to check out your other streaming services. Additionally, I'll be releasing a bonus episode on Memento within the next couple of days, where I sit down with my high school psychology teacher, Mr. Mummert, to discuss more about Leonard's condition, including if it's real and how it works. After that, the next episode that you can expect from me will be episode number five on movie number 61, Wally. As always, you can find me on all major streaming platforms, as well as my website, [Themoviplazapodcast.com](http://Themoviplazapodcast.com), or The Movie Plaza on Instagram. Be sure to leave a like or comment and share this podcast with your friends. Again. That's the [movieplazapodcast.com](http://themoviplazapodcast.com) or the movie plaza on Instagram. Bye.