

# Was it all a dream?

## Inception Movie Reviews

By Kenneth Turan

There are two ways to react to “Inception.” The first way is to sit there, your mouth slightly open, watching all the reality-tweaking scenarios on-screen — and then, after 15 minutes, throwing up your hands and walking out.

The second way is to sit there, your mouth slightly open, watching all the reality-tweaking scenarios on-screen — and, at the end, putting your hands together in applause and making plans to come back.



Count me in the second camp.

It’s just grade-A filmmaking. There are plenty of explosions, sure, and fight scenes, and gadgetry. There’s Leonardo DiCaprio as the hero, Marion Cotillard as the femme fatale and enough globe-trotting locations to fuel two 007 films. But it also takes place in the mind — or, rather, in several minds at once, as our heroes pursue their prize through dreams within dreams. In fact, by the climax, the action is occurring in at least four separate and simultaneous realities. To quote our old friend Neo — “Whoa.” As in “Memento,”

though, the fractured storytelling is not only in service of the story, it’s the only way to tell the story. Our hero Cobb, you see, is a thief of the subconscious — hired by corporations to slip into a business rival’s dreams and steal an idea. Or, in this case, plant an idea. It’s a risky strategy, but then this is a risky film. Audiences have become used to being passive creatures, especially during the summer; “Inception” demands you pitch in, too. If you want to enjoy the movie, you have to be part of the team. It’s a great team, too, starting with DiCaprio.

And the film’s ending — it doesn’t really conclude — is just ambiguous enough to leave you wondering. Which is Nolan’s point. “You create the world of the dream,” Cobb says early on, explaining how he does it. “You bring the subject into that dream, and they fill it with their secrets.” It’s a good clear description of how Cobb

does what he does — getting inside our minds and tricking us into helping. And it’s a job Nolan knows by heart.

By A.O. Scott

So “Inception” is not necessarily the kind of experience you would take to your next shrink appointment. It is more like a diverting reverie than a primal nightmare, something to be mused over rather than analyzed, something you may forget as soon as it’s over. Which is to say that the time — nearly two and a half hours — passes quickly and for the most part pleasantly, and that you see some things that are pretty

amazing, and amazingly pretty: cities that fold in on themselves like pulsing, three-dimensional maps; chases and fights that defy the laws that usually govern space, time and motion; Marion Cotillard’s face.

The accomplishments of “Inception” are mainly technical, which is faint praise only if you insist on expecting something more from commercial entertainment. That audiences do — and should — expect more is partly, I suspect, what has inspired some of the feverish early notices hailing “Inception” as a masterpiece, just as the desire for a certifiably great superhero movie led to the wild overrating of “The Dark Knight.” In both cases Mr. Nolan’s virtuosity as a conjurer of brilliant scenes and stunning set pieces, along with his ability to invest grandeur and novelty into conventional themes, have fostered the illusion that he is some kind of visionary.

But though there is a lot to see in “Inception,” there is nothing that counts as genuine vision. Mr. Nolan’s idea of the mind is too literal, too logical, too rule-bound to allow the full measure of madness — the risk of real confusion, of delirium, of ineffable ambiguity — that this subject requires. The



unconscious, as Freud (and Hitchcock, and a lot of other great filmmakers) knew, is a supremely unruly place, a maze of inadmissible desires, scrambled secrets, jokes and fears. If Mr. Nolan can’t quite reach this place, that may be because his access is blocked by the very medium he deploys with such skill.

And the limitations of “Inception” may suggest the limits not only of this very talented director, but also of his chosen art form at this moment in its history. Our dreams feed the movies. The movies feed our dreams. But somehow, our imaginations are still hungry.

By Stephen Whitty

Dreaming is life’s great solitary adventure. Whatever pleasures or terrors the dream state provides, we experience them alone or not at all. But what if other people could literally invade our dreams, what if a technology existed that enabled interlopers to create and manipulate sleeping life with the goal of stealing our secret thoughts, or more unsettling still, implanting ideas in the deepest of subconscious states and making us believe they’re our own?

Welcome to the world of “Inception,” written and directed by the masterful Christopher Nolan, a tremendously exciting science-fiction thriller that’s as disturbing

*Christopher Nolan’s mind-bending, intelligent, exciting and disturbing sci-fi extravaganza, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, blends the best of traditional and modern filmmaking.*



as it sounds. This is a popular entertainment with a knockout punch so intense and unnerving it’ll have you worrying if it’s safe to close your eyes at night.

For “Inception” is not only about the dream state, it often plays on screen in a dreamlike way, which means that it has the gift of being easier to follow than to explain. Specifics of the plot can be difficult to pin down, especially at first, and guessing moment to moment what will be happening next, or even if the characters are in a dream or in reality, is not always possible. But even while literal understanding can remain tantalizingly out of reach, you always intuitively understand what is going on and why.

Shooting “Inception” in six countries, preferring to do elaborate stunts in camera whenever possible but expert at utilizing computer-generated effects when necessary, Nolan and his team (including production designer Guy Hendrix Dyas, special effects supervisor Chris Corbould, visual effects supervisor Paul Franklin and stunt

coordinator Tom Struthers) have come up with some unforgettable set pieces. As detailed in a thorough cover story in American Cinematographer magazine, the standout imagery includes: a 60-foot-long freight train that barrels down the middle of a city street, shot in the vicinity of 7th and Spring in downtown L.A. with a replica of the train engine placed on the chassis of an 18-wheel tractor-trailer; a 100-foot hotel corridor built so it could rotate through 360 degrees to mimic a zero-gravity experience; and a mind-altering CGI scene that has a Paris street roll up and over itself like it was some kind of a tapestry instead of a steel and concrete boulevard.

Speaking of Paris, it’s one measure of how wide-ranging Nolan’s influences are that he used the classic Edith Piaf song “Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien” as a key plot element. The pleasure of “Inception” is not that Nolan, as the song says, regrets nothing, it’s that he has forgotten nothing, expertly blending the best of traditional and modern filmmaking. If you’re searching for smart and nervy