

An Analysis of “Inception”

A Cinematic Masterpiece

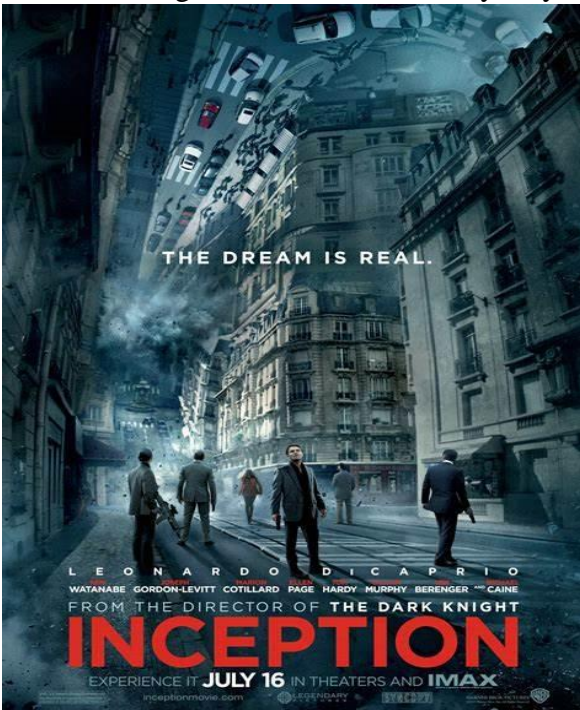
By Bailey Johnson

“So . . . do you want to take a leap of faith . . . or become an old man, filled with regret . . . waiting to die alone?”

- Saito (Ken Watanabe), a quote that defines *Inception* (2010).

Score: 4.8/5 Stars

Inception (2010), directed by Christopher Nolan, is quite a compelling movie to watch. The story follows a professional thief who steals information by infiltrating the subconscious of his victims through their dreams. This mystery action film will draw you in,



Promotional Poster for *Inception*

captivate you for the entirety of its 148-minute running time, and leave you questioning everything you know.

From the time I was twelve until I turned seventeen in 2019, my Saturday nights

were spent watching movies with my brother and my dad.

I owe a lot of my love for watching movies to my dad.

From *Signs* (2002) to *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship*

Inception:

Directed by: Christopher Nolan.

Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Ken Watanabe, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Marion Cotillard, Elliot Page (then Ellen Page), Dileep Rao, Cillian Murphy, Tom Hardy, and Michael Caine

Rating: PG-13

Genre: Action, mystery, Sci-fi, thriller.

Running time: 148 minutes

Released: July 16th, 2010

Music: Hans Zimmer

Distributed by: Warner Bros Pictures

of *the Ring* (2001), each weekend brought something different, a brand-new adventure, and a deeper love for cinema. My dad had seen all of Nolan's films when each of them were released, which eventually led him to show them to my brother and me. When I first watched *Inception*, I did not know what to think. To be honest, it was a little hard to follow at first. I had to get used to the characters and Nolan's signature style of non-linear storytelling. By the climax of the film, I was completely engrossed in the story. The music score was riveting, everything was falling apart, and the resolution left me ecstatic. Each time I return to *Inception* --- which has now been over twenty times --- I grow to like it even more.

Background Information on the Film:

Christopher Nolan is well known for his masterful filmmaking. With eleven critically acclaimed movies under his belt --- such as the *Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012), *the Prestige* (2006), and *Interstellar* (2014) --- along with numerous awards across his directorial career,



Inception characters left to right: Arthur (Gordon-Levitt), Eames (Hardy), Cobb (DiCaprio), Ariadne (Page), Yusuf (Rao), and Saito (Watanabe).

Nolan is no stranger to success. His films have grossed over five billion worldwide. *Inception*,

released July 16th, 2010, did not disappoint the high expectations placed upon it. The film made a worldwide total of \$836.8 million at the box office, \$292,576,195 domestically in the United States, and \$533,560,993 internationally. In addition to this, *Inception* was the fourth highest-



Mal Cobb (Cotillard) left, and Arthur (Gordon-Levitt) right.

grossing film of 2010, and it won four Academy Awards (Best Cinematography, Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing, and Best Visual Effects). The film was written and directed by Nolan, with Leonardo DiCaprio brilliantly leading the cast

alongside Tom Hardy, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Elliot Page (then Ellen Page), Cillian Murphy, Ken Watanabe, Dileep Rao, Marion Cotillard, and Michael Caine. The cinematography of the film is also quite impressive. Nolan aimed for mostly naturalistic camera techniques. The shots of the film are precise, and the transitions are seamless. These techniques add a great deal to the storytelling. *Inception* works cinematography, effects, and strong writing together to tell a fascinating story.

Plot:

The words of Saito, one of the film's main characters, set the stage for the overarching conflict of the film, "So . . . do you want to take a leap of faith . . . or become an old man, filled with regret . . . waiting to die alone?"

The film centers around Dom Cobb, a thief who specializes in a particularly rare type of theft, stealing the secrets of others by infiltrating their dreams. Thievery was never Cobb's intent,

but his traumatic past has left him an international fugitive without a choice. Early in the film Cobb and his partner in crime, Arthur, work to invade the mind of Saito, their latest target.

Things quickly go awry when Saito realizes that they are dreaming in the middle of the operation. The dream collapses and crushes any hope of obtaining information from Saito.

Although Cobb and Arthur's initial aim of extracting information from Saito ultimately fails,

Saito is a powerful businessman, who the

company Cobb and Arthur were hired by

to extract information from. Saito is

impressed with Cobb's ability to

orchestrate multiple levels of dreams or

'dreams within dreams.' He gives Cobb

an offer to return home to the United

States to his children at the expense of one

last job since. Cobb is unable to return to

the United States because he was framed for murdering his wife. Yet Saito holds that he can get

Cobb cleared, all that he asks is that Cobb perform inception on a business competitor, Robert

Fischer, who is about to inherit his father's enormous corporation. Robert's corporation is the

last one standing against Saito's energy company. However, inception is much deeper than

simply extracting secrets. It involves breaking into a person's mind and planting an idea. Cobb

and his team must not only plant an idea in Robert's mind, but they must do it in such a way that

Robert is convinced to take the idea and believe it to be of his own invention. If they succeed it

could be the perfect crime. Cobb's way home is just inches out of reach. All that lies between



Robert Fischer (Murphy) front left, and Dom Cobb (DiCaprio) back right minutes prior to the heist.

him and what he wants most, to see his children again, is this one last job and the ever-increasing difficulty of keeping a grip on reality. I will leave the plot summary at that to not spoil the film.

Positive Elements:

Even though he is living the life of a thief, you cannot help but root for Cobb. He never intended to end up the way that he is. Always on the run, he did what he could to survive. As you progress through the film you learn that Cobb had to flee the United States and leave his two young children, James, and Philippa, with their grandparents. The movie refers to this fact throughout the film with random shots of his children playing from a distance. However, he is never close enough to see their faces because the day he left them he missed his chance to say goodbye. Everything Cobb does, from accepting the job offer to performing inception is with the



Arthur (Gordon-Levitt) on the ceiling in a fight at the climax of the film.

hope that he will be able to make it back to his kids. He wants to make things right and be their dad again. In addition to this, Ariadne (Page), Eames (Hardy), Arthur (Gordon-Levitt), Yusuf (Rao), and Cobb (DiCaprio), all have a strong sense of camaraderie and shared purpose when they are attempting to perform inception. They watch out for each other and protect each other at all costs.

Negative Elements:

Along with the strong points of the film are several weaknesses. The story could potentially be a bit hard to follow at the beginning. The opening scene of the film is closely connected with the end. Thus, with the context of the whole movie, the opening scene makes sense. Yet, the non-linear storytelling could be a bit confusing for viewers at first. In addition to this, there is quite a bit of gunfire and violence, which could be potentially disturbing for younger viewers. The film also has heavy language, which can be a bit jarring.

When you look at the objective of Cobb's team in simple terms, they are committing a sophisticated form of crime. Although Cobb is trying to get back to his kids, he is ultimately still going about the job illegally. In addition to this, the client, Saito, ultimately wants the group to sabotage his rival's company for his selfish gain because his company will prosper if they



Left to right: DiCaprio, Gordon-Levitt, Murphy, Cotillard, Caine, Page, Nolan, Watanabe, and Hardy at the London premiere of Inception in 2010.

perform inception successfully. On several occasions, Cobb lies to his team for his own benefit, including downplaying the dangers of the mission and hiding his own psychological distress from his past which endangers fellow members of the team.

Overall thoughts:

Inception expertly crafts together mystery, action, and adventure. The characters are in a race against time, reality, and the impossibility of their task. Christopher Nolan tells the story with such precision and care that the climax of the film is breathtaking. So, if you have two hours and twenty-eight minutes to spare, invite a couple of friends over one Saturday night and turn on *Inception*. This cinematic masterpiece is well worth the watch.

About the Author:

Bailey Johnson is an undergraduate student at East Tennessee State University. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with family, watching movies with friends, and playing tennis.
