

Following 'The Dark Knight,' Nolan's 'Inception' is a Mind-Stupefying Masterpiece

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – After thinking it'd take "a couple months" to ink, director Christopher Nolan (of "The Dark Knight" fame) took eight years to painstakingly write the "Inception" script. And you can tell. It's his first pure masterpiece.

"Inception" is a rare summer blockbuster that lives up to the hype and bucks the typical formula. Like "The Usual Suspects," you can't miss a second or you'll fall behind. Still, considering the hype for his "The Dark Knight" in 2008 (which arguably featured the most aggressive and successful viral networking campaign of all time), "Inception" went beneath the hype radar as compared to that monolithic blockbuster.



Ken Watanabe (back) in "Inception".

Image credit: Steven Vaughan, Warner Bros.

Almost exactly two years after "The Dark Knight" hit theaters and obliterated box-office records, the film has now grossed more than a whopping \$1 billion on a production budget of \$185 million. And while "Inception" is piggybacking off of the success from "The Dark Knight"

by selling it as coming “from the director that brought you ‘The Dark Knight,’” there’s little comparison.

That said, it’s no surprise why the cinematography looks similar – and similarly masterful – in the two films. Veteran Wally Pfister was again enlisted as cinematographer for “Inception” after shooting other Nolan films including “The Prestige,” “Batman Begins,” “Insomnia” and “Memento”.



Joseph Gordon-Levitt (back) in “Inception”.

Image credit: Steven Vaughan, Warner Bros.

Like in “The Dark Knight,” “Inception” again focuses on sweeping metropolis shots. Musically, both films have similarities, too, as both have original music composed by Hans Zimmer. But “Inception” stands on its own for Nolan in that it’s his first feature debut that is a completely original work since 1998’s “Following”. All other Nolan films since then are either remakes or based on comics, short stories or novels.

“Inception” alternates between the real world and the dream world while confusingly blurring the line between the two. Characters in the film are often confused about which is which and sometimes even prefer the dream world – which has “The Matrix”-style similarities – over the real world.



Leonardo DiCaprio (left) and Marion Cotillard in “Inception”.

Image credit: Steven Vaughan, Warner Bros.

In fact, lovers Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Mal (Marion Cotillard) even spend 50 years in a dream while growing old together. But the heart of the film centers around Cobb’s nearly unachievable feat to create “inception” – in order to send himself “home” and deal with a catastrophe – by planting an idea into the head of the wealthy Robert Fischer Jr. (Cillian Murphy) and allowing it to manifest naturally. The film even tackles the captivating concept of a dream within a dream within a dream (i.e. to the third level).

Now while the story that is “Inception” is entirely dissimilar to Nolan’s either-you-love-it-or-you-hate-it “Memento” from 2000, “Inception” immediately brings “Memento” to mind in that they are both aggressive mind bogglers. And “Inception” isn’t marketing the line “where the scene of the crime is your mind” for funsies. Rather, the film masterfully attacks your brain through a symphony of sights, sounds, plot twists and action.



Leonardo DiCaprio in “Inception”.

Image credit: Steven Vaughan, Warner Bros.

You never know what's coming next. This film is as challenging to predict as when our economy would emerge out of a recession during those gloomy days. If you're not relentlessly kept on the edge of your seat for this mystery/thriller, that's because you'll have already fallen off.

The imagery in "Inception" uniquely calls to mind M.C. Escher-style "impossible" mazes. Even the labyrinthine style of the film's logo resembles the logo for Syncopy, which is Nolan's production company.

While the contemporary sci-fi action film is "set within the architecture of the mind" (as Nolan cryptically described it during the film's production when all other details of the plot were kept clandestine), Nolan enlisted Ellen Page of "Juno" fame as his maze builder.



Ken Watanabe (left) and Marion Cotillard in "Inception".

Image credit: Melissa Moseley, Warner Bros.

Page took the role of Ariadne after Evan Rachel Wood turned it down and considerations were made for Emily Blunt, Emma Roberts and Rachel McAdams. While Page's job was to design the layouts of dream sequences, she also had the important role of earning a deeper understanding into Cobb's psyche. She witnessed his pain of lost love with Mal that was actually haunting him behind closed doors.

The film is lengthy, but you wouldn't know it. These 148 minutes fly by and keep you engaged with very little lull time. You can literally feel Nolan's blood vessels popping in his brain as he deliberately and patiently weaved this story of mental madness with endless intrigue and boundless imagination.

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The only potential downside to the complexity of this story is that, unfortunately, it'll be over some people's heads.

It'd be unusual for someone to fully grasp each and every plot point of this fast-paced, brainy movie.

Instead, we're left absolutely content with grasping as much as we possibly can while we coast along every frame of this thrill ride all the way through its flawless cliffhanger of an ending.

"Inception" from writer and director Christopher Nolan stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Ellen Page, Marion Cotillard, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Tom

Hardy, Ken Watanabe, Cillian Murphy, Tom Berenger, Michael Caine, Dileep Rao, Pete Postlethwaite, Lukas Haas, Tai-Li Lee, Claire Geare and Magnus Nolan. The film, which is rated “PG-13” for sequences of violence and action throughout, has a running time of 148 minutes. “Inception” opened nationwide on July 16, 2010.



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