Perish (in) the Thought: "Inception"

Written by Mike Schulz Sunday, 18 July 2010 16:07



Inception, the latest offering from the director of *Memento, The Prestige, Batman Begins,* and *T he Dark Knight*

, is, I think, my new favorite of Christopher Nolan

s screen works. Considering the breadth of the compliment, I briefly considered letting my review stand with that one sentence, but I suppose a few more paragraphs are in order.

Besides, there's that "I think" caveat in there, and it's important to stress that this opinion is based on only one viewing of Nolan 's trippy, dream-world thriller; a few more

like a dozen more

should either affirm my conviction that

s it

s the writer/director

s masterpiece (to date) or reveal it to be as featherweight and inconsequential as ... well, as a dream. I

 $\ensuremath{\mathsf{m}}$ betting on the former, though. Based on the previews and Nolan

s formidable track record, I expected *Inception*

to be a visually arresting, satisfyingly knotty entertainment, and it is. But I absolutely did not expect the film to be as spectacularly gripping as it is, nor as unexpectedly *emotional*

as it is. Replaying the verbal notes I recorded during a Friday-afternoon screening, I was almost shocked to discover I didn

t whisper a single one during the movie

s entire last hour, and trust me, it takes a considerable cinematic achievement to get me to shut up for that long a time.

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I'm not sure where to start with *Inception*'s plot, or whether I should *bother* to start, since one of the movie

's many

joys lies in Nolan working against traditional Hollywood-product principles by forcing you to pay careful attention to the unfolding of his well-crafted tale; your gradual understanding of *Inception*

S

complexities keeps you continually engaged and alert. (In a wonderfully perverse touch, he has a majority of early, plot-establishing exposition delivered by the heavily accented Japanese actor Ken Watanabe, causing you to work even

harder

to grasp what

s being said, and what it means.) In basic outline, the film is a high-tech crime caper, featuring a team

led by Leonardo DiCaprio

•

s Cobb

that

s able to enter a mark

1

s subconsciousness and steal his secrets for profit.

Inception

, however,

finds Watanabe hiring these dream-state scavengers for an altogether different purpose: the implanting of a new idea in the mind of a business rival

s son (Cillian Murphy), one that will, theoretically, lead to the dissolution of the young man

s family business.



And that's about all you're gonna get from me; needless to say, mistakes are made, plans go awry, lives are endangered ... you know the drill. Except you really don

t. Beginning with

Inception

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Perish (in) the Thought: "Inception" Written by Mike Schulz Sunday, 18 July 2010 16:07 s opening reel, Nolan playing with shifts in locale and perspective to make Memento look like a model of linear clarity frequently stages the action on several planes of dreamscape existence simultaneously, with figures in one character s subconscious routinely drifting into another, and then another, and then another . (At one point, Ellen Page s team upstart asks, Whose subconscious are we going into, exactly? , and it s a fair question. Page s character asks lots of fair questions through the course of the movie, and the actress lovely, low-key naturalism and easy wit often make you forget that asking questions is just about her only function here.) Yet somewhat miraculously, Nolan ensures that you never get stymied by the whose-mind-is-it-anyway? plot contortions. Inception s story may be Byzantine, but Nolan s story telling is remarkably lucid; a few overly busy and generic shoot-outs aside, the narrative proceeds with such force and drive that long minutes pass where you re all but certain you

ve forgotten to take a breath. Leaving the auditorium, I was

that nearly two-and-a-half hours had passed.

astounded

3/5

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As much as I love *Inception*, I do have a few gripes, chiefly that the movie's dreams don't much

e dreams. Barring such occasional diversions as the freight train barreling through traffic or the elevator ride through DiCaprio

s subconscious

or the already-near-legendary scene of Joseph Gordon-Levitt contending with a zero-gravity environment

the imagery is lacking the tantalizing strangeness we generally associate with the unconscious; we don

t seem to be traveling from one dream to another so much as one CGI-enhanced movie set to another. (The mind boggles at what David Lynch might

ve done with this script.) And while Nolan

s achievement oftentimes had me smiling with pleasure, the movie could

ve stood to be a bit less dour; the chuckle elicited after Page and Gordon-Levitt share an

impromptu kiss might be the only one

Inception

provides.

But complaints of this sort feel rather petty in an entertainment that gives you so damned much to enjoy, and even (heaven forbid!) to talk about afterward. The sight of a Parisian street folding on top of itself, as though we're watching a book being closed from within. The juicy, uncanny parallels between DiCaprio 's arcs here and in Shutter Island. The

haunting, moving Marion Cotillard, daring us to

care

about this matryoshka doll of a summer blockbuster.

Inception

may be a contraption, but it

s a bold, glorious, beautiful contraption, a movie about dreams that, in nearly every way imaginable,

is

a dream.

