

# Inception (2010, starring Leo DiCaprio) Decoded<sup>1</sup>

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There's dozens of inconsistent, incredulous and/or contradictory events in Dom's "reality" (see the enumerated list below). And since this is an intricately-crafted puzzle film, they can't all just be careless errors in scripting, storyboarding and/or continuity. Rather they are the clues & evidence the film-makers left **to prove that everything the viewer sees is actually Dom's dream-state**. The 747 airplane caper, Mombasa, the Tokyo bullet train, totems. All dream-state, not reality. There's no dream-machine briefcase or dream-sharing techniques; those far-fetched concepts are just another part of Dom's imagination.

DOM'S "REAL" REALITY: The 'dream' the viewer is watching, that being the entire film, is what is occurring in the depths of Dom's mind as he lay unconscious during the last moments before his own death. Dom is trying, in his confused dream-state, to mentally cope with his own life's major events, regrets & failures ... and, from that, trying to decide whether it is worth fighting for his own life ... or to passively accept his own death.

The viewer can (at least partially) surmise what Dom's REAL life was and is based on the heavily recurring themes that continually invade his dream-state: Falls/leaps/leaps of faith/descent, trains, regret/dying with regret, death/suicide, Dom&Mal remaining together, distortion of time within dream-state, elevators, hotel rooms, intravenous drug use, hospitals as well as fathers & their children. (also listed in detail below.) They are themes that are invading Dom's dream-state from his REAL reality-at-the-moment, as well as from his past.

Dom's real life is, to a great extent, dream-manifested in the background of his inception target Fisher. Dom could never please his father, and it drove him to obsessively pursue building an industrial empire. They reconciled on the father's deathbed, the father wishing for youth so as to have the chance to be a better father to Dom. The reconciliation resolved Dom's father-issues. However Dom bore much regret regarding his dead wife Mal. Over time, he had increasingly neglected her and the marriage while he grew his empire. She eventually committed suicide, jumping from the window of the hotel room where they once celebrated anniversaries, the location chosen to clearly communicate why she did it. Dom's feelings of guilt (represented as his being charged with murder) drove him to dismantle his empire, to use his fortune to travel the world (perhaps in search of solace). And finally, in Mombasa, to discover that solace ... within heroin. Train is urban-slang for heroin.

Eventually, Dom overdosed in a Tokyo hotel room. Attempts were made to revive him: slapping his face, dunking him in a tub filled with cold water and other such 'falls' and 'kicks.' Dom was taken to the hospital. There, attempts at defibrillation and stimulants fail. (The dream-trains are perceptions of the stimulant-injections and, sometimes, memories of past heroin episodes.) Dom is waxing and waning over various levels of consciousness, such manifesting in his dreams as elevator rides, movement between different levels of dreaming

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<sup>1</sup> Most of this writing was originally authored in or around July 8, 2011.

as well as other kinds of falls, leaps & descents. More descents than ascents, as Dom slips deeper into unconsciousness, one layer of confused dreaming covering the next, Dom's perception of reality growing ever dimmer.

Part of Dom's subconscious mind was fighting back, trying to warn him within his unconsciousness that what he was beginning to perceive as "reality" was not actually real at all. In Paris, Professor Miles said "Come back to reality, Dom, please." Mal continually argued to Dom that he had become mixed up about where "reality" was. In the Mombasa back-room, Dom was shown a room filled with others for whom "the dream has become their reality,' after which he was asked "who are you to say differently?" And Dom's Mombasa "reality" was also invaded by a complex maze of streets and chases, the same stuff as in the dream levels. Dom's daughter told him that Grandma says he was never "coming back." Dom kept professing that he (somehow) knew exactly what broken rules caused one to lose touch with reality. Dom's subconscious dredged up Ariadne's name from Greek mythology, she being the woman who helped Theseus back-track his way out of the Maze of the Minotaur. Dom obsessively spun his top-totem trying to find his true reality, even though logically the device couldn't possibly detect it for him (as discussed below). And the dominant overriding theme in all of what happened to Dom was that he was struggling to find a way back home.

As Dom drew closer to death, he wrestled with possibility of struggling to live. Mal wanted Dom to come back to life, to 'reality,' as the viewer continually sees. In life, he would 'be with' Mal. His memory of her, that is. And his regrets & guilt about her as well. Death would absolve him of all that. His life otherwise empty (and addicted), it is these memories & regrets of Mal ... they are all that he has left to beckon him to want to return to life.

But Dom also had another even deeper regret, also seen from the cage-elevator place where he tried to mentally contain his regrets. The regret that he and Mal never had children. Perhaps he ignored her request for children, too busy with business. Now he has come to face the regret that he never had the chance to be a father ... and a better father than his own father was to him. The regret that he had grown old, only to die alone.

In the end, Dom decided that he and Mal had already had a life together of sorts ... and that they grew old together, at least in his own dream. But the children he never had, he had never even seen their faces, they were nothing but the vaguest of a notion to him. So Dom decided against returning to life, where he would continue to live alone, only with his memories of Mal. Instead he chose to let life & its reality slip away, to die in his dream-state, so as to be with his dream-children ... who never were. The top-totem no longer mattered to him since he had decided to abandon any quest for living in any reality of life. Dom (or any of us) has no way of knowing how long his mind will perceive him as being with his children, how slow the time will pass in his dream, whether the moment of death will seem just an instant away or seem a lifetime away. But for however long the perception lasts, Dom can love them unconditionally, fully and without distraction.

Dom chose death which, for him, was the path of no regret.

## **Inconsistent, Incredulous And/Or Contradictory Events In Dom's "Reality"**

1. In the first-class airplane cabin, everyone is "in on it" except Fischer, who is "the mark." That includes the stewardess, who ends up operating the dream-briefcase. So why didn't SHE just put the mickey in the drink in the first place?
2. Dom, while in the "reality" of the Mombasa bathroom tossing water on his face, sees Mal.
3. Dom, while in his Tokyo hotel room, hears the freight train from his dreams ... while the top-totem wobbles to a stop indicating "reality."
4. A totem is said to detect reality versus someone else's dream - because only the owner knows the totem's unique physical properties. (The example of the loaded die is given). Ok, but totems ... or Dom's top ... won't detect reality versus ITS OWNER'S dreams. The owner can dream correctly about his/her own totem, since he/she knows its properties. And Dom's top-totem can't even really detect the dreams of others, since it does not possess any unique, hidden property that only Dom knows. ANYONE would typically dream that a spinning top would slow and tip over. (And given that, why would it spin eternally in a dream?) So the top-totem isn't really capable of differentiating between reality and dreams of any kind. So what gives with Dom constantly spinning his top as a reality-check?
5. Early on, it's said that 5 real minutes is 1 hour of dream time, a factor of 12x. Yet, with the MORE POWERFUL sedative, the back-room Mombasians only get a factor or 10x. Then, when planning the airplane dream, the same powerful sedative is said to have a factor of 20x.
6. Saito just inexplicably appears in Mombasa at just the right time.
7. Saito buys an entire airline. The CEO of his major competitor is actually willing to fly on it.
8. Saito makes a phone call. Ten minutes later Dom's murder warrant has absolutely evaporated.
9. Why can't the children simply be brought to another country for Dom to see them? Or why can't he sneak into America to see them? How about a video phone call? No photographs? Why is it that there's absolutely NO way for Dom to actually see them in any way? (Because they never REALLY existed, that's why.)
10. Why wouldn't the police be able to forensically deduce that Mal did actually jump off the other building after Dom told them? Wouldn't someone likely have seen her jump? Isn't there some evidence about how she got into that other room? Couldn't it be forensically deduced that the wrecked hotel room was a set-up?
11. Dom and Mal spent 50 dream-years building an entire world in Limbo, growing old together, but Mal doesn't remember a second of it.

12. The daughter on the phone sounds much older than the daughter that we see Dom see.

13. In the "reality" of the airplane, Fischer never once recognizes Saito, his major business competitor.

14. Under the powerful sedation, someone in Limbo "couldn't even think about trying to escape until the sedation eases" and that might seem like "decades—it could be infinite." It's also said that one would be "trapped ... for a lifetime" after which one's "mind could be completely gone." Yet Saito & Dom get out of Limbo and back to "reality," before most any of that happens.

15. Fischer is killed within the snow hospital level and he ends up in Limbo, since that is what happens to anyone who dies while under this more powerful sedative. But Dom and Ariadne follow and find Fischer, not by dying and going to Limbo, but just by hooking up to the dream briefcase and traveling to the next lowest level.

16. While in "reality," Dom can only remember that singular glimpse of his children, over and over again. He can't even remember their faces. He has no picture of them. Why can't he recall their faces? Because, in REAL REALITY, there aren't any kids.

### **Reoccurring Themes**

FALLS/LEAPS/LEAPS OF FAITH/DESCENTS. Mal's suicide dive. Ariadne returns to airplane. Guy pushed off Escher stairs. Elevator blown down chute. Dom pushed into tub. Cut ropes to escape avalanche. Collapsing buildings in Limbo. Fisher pushed into abyss by Ariadne. Van dropping into river. Dom rappelling at Japanese castle. Riding in Dom's cage elevator.

TRAINS. Dom & Mal suicide on train tracks, seen twice. Dom hears freight train while in Tokyo apartment. Dream staged in Japanese bullet train compartment. Fischer picked up in cab outside New York train station. Deafening train when Dom first goes under in Mombasa. Train seen off one cage elevator floor. Recurring "you are waiting for a train" riddle. Freight train barrels down a New York street.

REGRET/DYING WITH REGRET. Three times Saito refers to being a regretful old man waiting to die alone. Piaf's "No Regrets" French cabaret song. Dom's cage elevator dream stores the moments he regrets; the train & the hotel room are among them. The elder Fisher on his deathbed regrets his son's lack of initiative.

DEATH/SUICIDE. Dreamers killing themselves to return to reality. Suicide of Mal. Deaths of Saito, Fischer. Shooting of Arthur in head. Elder Fischer dying in hospital level, in boardroom and in "reality." Saito is expecting someone to come to kill him.

FATHERS & THEIR CHILDREN. Elder and younger Fischer. Dom's and his two children. Professor Miles and his child by marriage Dom. Saito disparaging his dying alone-that would be without children. Elder Saito meets young Dom.

ELEVATORS. The elevator in the hotel room dream level. The cage elevator dream where Dom stores his regrets. The skyscraper elevator in Limbo.

HOTEL ROOMS. The hotel room dream level. The anniversary hotel room Dom stores in the basement level of his cage elevator dream.

INTRAVENOUS DRUG USE. Dream machine dosing everyone via IVs in their arms, on multiple dream levels. Also in what appears to be an opium den in Mombasa.

HOSPITALS. The hospital dream level. The hospital where elder Fischer resides and dies.

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