**THE FILMS OF CHRISTOPHER NOLAN**

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Some of the most complex, interesting, and successful films of the new millennium have been directed by Christopher Nolan. His work has included a wide range of genres, from period pieces like *The Prestige*, science fiction films like *Inception*, the brooding *Batman* trilogy, and the space epic *Interstellar*. He is not afraid to take on some incredibly complicated subjects, including aspects of theoretical physics, the theory of relativity, wormholes, 4 dimensional tesseracts, and using experimental military technologies to penetrate people’s private dreams to plant ideas that will influence their actual behavior. The challenge for the viewer is how much we are willing to accept any or all of this as credible. Is Nolan pulling our legs, or is he offering us some unique insights into the nature of existence?

**Reality and Illusion** is a major theme of Nolan’s films. He finds film to be the perfect medium to explore these ideas, since much of what we see in films these days are illusions created using advanced techniques, to convince us that what we are seeing is real. People love to be entertained, even if somewhere in the back of our minds we know that this is probably an illusion. And it is also hard to distinguish between “cinematic reality” and “theoretical reality.”

**Deception** is another theme. People are not always who they may appear to be on the surface. The capacity of human beings to be both selfish and duplicitous always makes for interesting screen characters, and you almost always see these characters in Nolan’s films.

**Ethics and Morality.** Everything is not just black and white, right or wrong. Just because we can do something, does that mean that we *should* do it? Should we be invading dreams? Should we be sending people on what may be suicide space missions? Who is Batman defending? The Rich, or actually The People? Bane seems like a bad guy on the surface, but is he really more of a leader for The People against the oligarchs? What *really* motivates people to do the things they do?

**Identity: what motivates us to be who we are?** This is different for different people, so that is one reason why this concept is interesting to explore in different films. Some people want to be heroes and save the world. Some just want to be admired and praised. Some are motivated by the desire to bring justice to the world. Some want to destroy the world, as revenge for their own hurt and pain.

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[Batman](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000288/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): A hero can be anyone. Even a man doing something as simple and reassuring as putting a coat around a young boy's shoulders to let him know that the world hadn't ended.

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**BATMAN: THE DARK KNIGHT RISES**

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In Part 3 of Nolan’s Batman Trilogy, Batman has chosen to be a recluse for the 8 years since the second film and the death of Rachel, the woman he loved. He also publicly took the rap for the crimes of Two Face, the murderous alter ego of Former Police Commissioner Harvey Dent. James Gordon has taken over as Police Commissioner after the death of Harvey Dent, and chosen to conceal the true evidence about him.

Two new villains are on the scene to cause trouble in Gotham City. We first meet Bane in a scene on an airplane where he kidnaps a nuclear scientist, whose expertise he will need to make a bomb later in the film. Bane is a menacing character who breathes through a respirator, bearing some resemblance to both Hannibal Lector and Darth Vader. He claims that the rich and powerful are his enemies, and that his purpose is to liberate the people from their tyranny.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRCM0jWEQjQ> Introduction to Bane and the Plane

Alfred warns Bruce about pursuing Bane, but to no avail.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpO1q2-zQBs> Bruce getting back to the world (with Alfred)

Selina Kyle is secretly Catwoman; her initial motivation is to obtain access to some special computer software that will erase her entire criminal history. To this end, she steals Bruce Wayne’s fingerprints and sells them to Philip Stryver, Wayne’s business rival. He double crosses her, but she alerts Gordon and the police, who pursue him into the underground sewers.



There they meet Bane, whose base of operations is in the sewers.

Bane’s men kill all of the cops who pursued Stryver into the sewers, except for Commissioner Gordon, whom they bring to Bane. When searching him, they find his un-submitted resignation speech, where he admits to covering up Dent’s crimes. Gordon later escapes, but Bane now knows his secret.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDdX6meXcY4> Light It Up; Batman saves Gordon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDuetklFtDQ> Bane vs Batman; you think darkness is your ally

Bane and his men attack the Gotham Stock Exchange, and use Wayne’s fingerprints to make a stock transaction that bankrupts Wayne’s company, which was planning a nuclear fusion project that was abandoned after Wayne realized the nuclear core material being used was also weapons grade. There is some dark humor and irony in the choice of the stock exchange being the target; this film was made in 2012, a few years after our own Wall Street people crashed our economy and forced the US Government to bail them out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nppON29OZ_4> Hitting the Stock Exchange

[Trader #1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1412974/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): This is a stock exchange. There's no money you can steal.

[Bane](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0362766/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Really? Then why are you people here?

Wayne now also realizes that his company is vulnerable to a takeover by Daggett, the company that employs Bane. So Wayne asks Miranda Tate (Marion Cotillard), one of his Board of Directors members, to take over from him as the Chair.

With Selina Kyle’s help, he goes after Bane … but she leads him into a trap.

[Selina Kyle](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0004266/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): There's a storm coming, Mr. Wayne. You and your friends better batten down the hatches, because when it hits, you're all gonna wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us.

Bane defeats Bruce Wayne, and then transports him to this horrible, remote prison with circular walls. He leaves Wayne after sharing these thoughts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvwTx1UWswQ> in the prison: they look up at the light and imagine climbing to freedom

[Bane](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0362766/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Home, where I learned the truth about despair, as will you. There's a reason why this prison is the worst hell on earth... Hope. Every man who has ventured here over the centuries has looked up to the light and imagined climbing to freedom. So easy... So simple... And like shipwrecked men turning to sea water from uncontrollable thirst, many have died trying. I learned here that there can be no true despair without hope. So, as I terrorize Gotham, I will feed its people hope to poison their souls. I will let them believe they can survive so that you can watch them clamoring over each other to "stay in the sun." You can watch me torture an entire city and when you have truly understood the depth of your failure, we will fulfill Ra's al Ghul's destiny... We will destroy Gotham and then, when it is done and Gotham is ashes, then you have my permission to die

Other inmates tell him that only one person has ever escaped this prison – the child of Ra’s al Ghul, the martial arts mentor of Bruce Wayne as a young man. Wayne assumes this child is Bane.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjffIi2Pl7M> Prison Escape (talking with the Blind Prisoner)

[Blind Prisoner](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0310622/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): You do not fear death. You think this makes you strong. It makes you weak.

[Bruce Wayne](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000288/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Why?

[Blind Prisoner](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0310622/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): How can you move faster than possible, fight longer than possible without the most powerful impulse of the spirit: the fear of death.

[Bruce Wayne](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000288/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): I do fear death. I fear dying in here, while my city burns, and there's no one there to save it.

[Blind Prisoner](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0310622/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Then make the climb.

[Bruce Wayne](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000288/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): How?

[Blind Prisoner](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0310622/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): As the child did. Without the rope. Then fear will find you again.

Meanwhile, Bane has used the nuclear physicist to create a bomb out of the fuel in the abandoned reactor. Bane lures the cops into the sewers, and then traps and imprisons them. He heavily damages the football field in the local stadium, and announces to the crowd that he has seized power, by virtue of the nuclear bomb that was built.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9xNy5z8PIA> Bane Speech at the Stadium

[Bane](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0362766/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): We take Gotham from the corrupt! The rich! The oppressors of generations who have kept you down with myths of opportunity, and we give it back to you... the people. Gotham is yours. None shall interfere. Do as you please. Start by storming Blackgate, and freeing the oppressed! Step forward those who would serve. For and army will be raised. The powerful will be ripped from their decadent nests, and cast out into the cold world that we know and endure. Courts will be convened. Spoils will be enjoyed. Blood will be shed. The police will survive, as they learn to serve true justice. This great city... it will endure. Gotham will survive!

Bane reads Gordon’s resignation speech, releases prisoners, and starts trying and sentencing all of the wealthy people in the city for their crimes against humanity.

Wayne finally escapes from the prison, and enlists the aid of Catwoman to fight Bane.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l6OwzED-Oc>

Batman frees the trapped police officers, and then confronts Bane, demanding to know the location of the trigger. But he is then stabbed in the back by Miranda Tate – literally and figuratively. She reveals that she is actually Talia, the daughter of Ra’s Ghul, and that Bane is her Guardian.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHB6b0JKfUA> Slow Knife cuts the deepest

She tries to detonate the bomb, but it fails, so she leaves to go find out why. Just as Bane is about to kill Batman, Catwoman arrives and kills him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTajQik08X8> Catwoman saves Batman

The two of them pursue Talia. She dies in a truck crash, but not before activating the bomb and flooding the reactor chamber where it could have been potentially neutralized. Batman flies the bomb out and over the ocean, where it detonates, seemingly killing him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2cydZgUaqE> Bomb Chase Scene; part of bridge blows up

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohQY7kpOc50> A hero can be anyone.

Batman is hailed as a hero. He secretly did survive the explosion. Wayne and Selina Kyle are now together as a couple and far, far away from Gotham City.

**Reality and Illusion:** The Dark Knight Rises is an illusion by definition. It’s based on a comic book after all. But equally obvious is that Nolan wanted to give more depth to this story and these characters than had been done in previous film versions.

Bruce Wayne is an Aristocrat, an Oligarch if you will. A very wealthy man, CEO of his own company, leading a secret life of bringing justice to the ordinary citizens of Gotham City. Bane seems like a cross between a Populist and an Anarchist. His attacks on the Stock Exchange and the Football Stadium have some pointed symbolism in an era in which the Wall Street speculators almost crashed our entire economy in 2008, and in an era when the citizens are providing public tax dollars to build sports palaces like Mercedes Benz Stadium and SunTrust Park. He puts the rich people on trial, and says he wants justice for the little people. But really he wants to bring the entire system down, which is what an anarchist wants to do. Don’t fix it. Blow it up.

**Deception**: There is plenty of this in *The Dark Knight Rises.* Miranda Tate never reveals until the end that she is actual Talia, the daughter of Ra’s Ghul. Commissioner Gordon deceived all of Gotham City about the crimes of Harvey Dent, and let Batman take the rap for this for over 8 years. Selina Kyle initially betrays Bruce Wayne by leading him into a trap, where he is captured and imprisoned by Bane.

**Ethics and Morality:** The lines on this get very blurred in this film. The original comic book is very black and white – Batman represents good, and his criminal opponents are all bad. In this film, we are confronted with the shades of gray, including things like the police almost always siding on the part of the wealthy and the powerful, and rarely standing up for the interests of the regular people. Catwoman only takes things from those who can afford to lose them, and whom she can outrun. Bane presents himself as the Champion of the Downtrodden, but his true agenda is the total destruction of Gotham City.

**Identity: what motivates us to be who we are?** Why does Batman want to be a hero? Is he motivated more by revenge for what the criminals did when they murdered his parents, or are his actions more philanthropical, and meant to try and balance the odds in a city where the power seems to always rest with the rich and powerful?

**THE PRESTIGE (2006)**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4gHCmTQDVI> Trailer

2 rival magicians take their feud to a deadly conclusion in this wonderful and dramatic period piece, set in London in the 1890’s. The film opens with Robert Angier performing “The Real Transported Man” trick to a rapt audience. His rival, Alfred Borden, sneaks under the stage to try and figure out the secrets behind how this trick is being done. He sees Angier fall through the trap door into an enclosed water tank, and watches him drown. Borden is seen by John Cutter (Michael Caine), who is Angier’s Engineer. He tells the police that Borden pushed the water tank under the trap door, so Borden is later arrested and tried for murder.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjLciwRVAA0> Opening Scene

In prison, Borden is visited by a Lord Caldlow; he offers to care for Borden’s young daughter Jess, in exchange for Borden revealing the secrets of all of his magic tricks to him.

Flashbacks then explain the series of events that led to this shocking final act.



Angier and Borden had both once worked for Milton the Magician, along with Julia, who was Angier’s wife. In Milton’s Water Tank Trick, Julia is bound in ropes and has to free herself in the tank while running out of air. Borden convinces her to let him tie her up with a more difficult slip knot, which she agrees to. But then she drowns when she cannot untie the knot. Cutter smashes open the water tank, to the horror of the onlookers, and this event took place 60 or so years before anything was ever known about CPR. Angier never forgives Borden, and their feud continues to escalate after they leave Milton and establish separate and competing acts.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La4G6finBFc> The Drowning Scene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lOaRlKHaOc&list=PLaLXkti9EqZ7DEwrB2BliHLSaD8fcQUce&index=16> Funeral; which knot did you tie?

Borden loses two fingers when Angier sabotages his bullet catch trick. In return, Borden sabotages Angier’s bird cage trick. An audience member is badly injured, which in turn almost destroys Angier’s reputation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTmPV3AhhnQ> The Hand Shooting Scene

The two keep spying on each other; Angier steals “The New Transported Man” trick from Borden, but to pull it off, he has to hire an actor who looks like him to fool the audience, and he is not satisfied with this. He is desperate to figure out how to do this trick the way that Borden does, and extorts information from one of Borden’s assistants that it has something to do with the inventor Nikola Tesla (David Bowie).

Angier seeks out Tesla, who is in the United States. The rumor is that Tesla had created some kind of machine for Borden that can apparently create a replica of the human body at a certain distance away from the machine.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfKg1Bq9qqw> I want Tesla to build a similar machine for me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88_6SQKuTHk> David Bowie as Nikola Tesla

The new machine creates a spectacular success for Borden; this takes us back to the beginning of the film, where Angier sneaks underneath the stage to see how this trick is being done, and sees Borden drowning in the water tank. Cutter sees Angier and turns him in to the police.



Borden is found guilty at his trial, and sentenced to hang. An interesting fact overlooked at the trial is that Cutter says he did not actually see Borden move the water tank under the trap door. It had over 500 pounds of water in it, and it was not on wheels, so moving it would not have been possible for one man. When asked, Cutter just shrugged, looked at Borden, and said “Ask him how he did it. He’s the magician.”

Borden accepts Lord Caldlow’s proposal to care for his daughter, and turns over his book of secrets to him. Caldrow then visits Borden in prison….and Borden recognizes that Caldrow *is* Angier, just in a different disguise. How can this be, when he saw him drown, and was just convicted of his murder? Borden is hanged, after uttering his last word: “Abracadabra”.

Cutter learns that Caldlow has also bought the Tesla Machine; he visits him to plead with him to destroy it. When he realizes that Caldlow is actually Angier and faked his death to get revenge on Borden, he is sickened, but still agrees to help him dispose of the machine. At the theater where they plan to do this, Cutter also discovers a bunch of water tanks, all containing decomposing clones of Angier, created by Tesla’s machine when doing this trick. (!)

Cutter leaves; another man enters the theater and shoots Angier. The man reveals himself as Borden (!). It turns out there were twin brothers who alternated being Borden, and one of Borden’s assistants. The depth of this deception extended to maiming the other twin’s two fingers after the bullet stop trick accident, and not even telling this true story of the twins to the two women who loved these different brothers – one of whom suspected something was amiss and had committed suicide.

Angier dies, and the twin leaves the theater to go pick up Jess. Cutter offers an epitaph about how we really prefer to be fooled rather than understand the secret behind the magic, but this rang as hollow to me as the entire ending of this film did.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHKan75x7GI> The ending

[Cutter](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000323/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Now you're looking for the secret. But you won't find it because of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to work it out. You want to be fooled.

**HERE IS HOW THE MAJOR THEMES RELATE TO THIS FILM**

**Reality and Illusion** are at the center of this film. They are the essence of a good magic trick. The audience wants to be entertained; they want to believe in the illusion. Magicians in this time period were the premiere “Masters of Illusion”. But then as now, the viewer has to believe in the magic. I don’t know what the thinking was for the conclusion, but it crashed and burned for me. The illusion was broken. I did not believe for one second that Tesla’s machine could create duplicate human beings in the middle of that trick, and still leave behind a corpse to drown in the water tank.

**Deception** is also a central theme of this film. The tricks are deceiving. The two magicians don different disguises to infiltrate and sabotage the shows of their rival. The last “reveal” of their having been twin Angier brothers was an ongoing deception that lasted the entire film, and the fact that the brothers kept this from the two different women they loved was also very deceiving.

**Ethics and Morality:** The competition between the two magicians destroys them and most of the people around them. The secrecy, the theft of secrets, and the constant attempts to both one up and to sabotage each other end up being self-destructive as well. The ethics of both creating and operating a machine that could create clones of human beings, and the choice to immediately drown either the clone or the original human are so horrifying as to even defy credibility.

**Identity:** Both of the central characters of this film are looking to external sources for validation of who they are, whether that be the applause of the crowd, or staying one step ahead of the other. Angier loses his sense of identity when Julia dies, and the hatred that then drives him is not a healthy substitute. The Borden Twins seem morally lost in retrospect; maintaining their deceptions and even switching identities to fool those closest to them means that they have no real idea of who they are.

**INCEPTION**

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This inventive and challenging film was a spectacular success for Nolan, and grossed some 820 million dollars worldwide. It was also nominated for 8 Oscars, and won 4 of them. The plot is incredibly complicated, requires you to totally immerse yourself in the dream world of this film, and to just accept this world as at least potentially true.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBRftVH2pCs> Opening Scene



Dom Cobb (Leonardo di Caprio) and Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) specialize in extracting information from people’s dreams that can be valuable in the world of corporate espionage. They are hired to go after Saito (Ken Wantanabe), a Japanese executive – but it turns out that he hired them, because he wants to see if they can perform an “Inception” for hire, as opposed to an extraction. This would mean planting an idea in someone’s subconscious.

Saito wants Cobb to convince the son of his dying competitor to break up and sell their company after the old man dies. If Cobb agrees to do this, Saito promises to use his influence to clear Cobb of the charge of murdering his wife, something that would then allow Dom to return to the US and be with his children.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3-a58Wt2tk> Explaining the Dream World

Cobb agrees, and puts his team together. Eames (Tom Hardy) is a conman. Yusuf (Dileep Rao) specializes in sedatives. Ariadne (Ellen Page) is a beautiful young architecture student who will design the dream landscapes. While practicing merging her dreams with Dom, Ariadne realizes that he is still fixated on his dead wife, Mal, who is a very visible presence in his dreams. Mal committed suicide, but Cobb is in legal trouble because the authorities think that something he did in their dream experiments drove Mal to take her own life.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yshUmxuEjE> Ariadne Learns how to Build Dreams



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PA4wrMqP0SY> Mombasa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG22TcpjRnY> City Bending…Ariadne. What happens when you start messing with the physics?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldn4JkJsBsE> Café Scene

When old man Fischer dies in Sydney, his son Robert accompanies the remains back to Los Angles. On the flight, the team sedates Robert and starts invading his dreams on different levels. One team member stays behind on each level to ensure a successful eventual return to the normal state of consciousness.

The first level of the dream is a rainy day in LA. The young Fischer has received training on how to fight extraction, so his armed imaginary bodyguards attack the team after they kidnap the young man. Saito is wounded. The team take him and Fischer to a warehouse. Eames creates a projection of Peter Browning, Fisher’s godfather, who suggests that he reconsider his father’s will. Yusuf drives the van, while the rest of the dreamers get more sedatives and head for the second level.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCXWtQUypN0> Train/Car Scene

This is a hotel dreamed by Arthur, Fischer’s father. Cobb tells Fischer that he was kidnapped by Browning, and that he (Cobb) will protect him. He persuades him to accompany him to the third level of the dream. This is a hospital near a snowy mountain.

Yusuf, on the first level, is still being pursued by Fisher’s bodyguards. He deliberately drives the van off a bridge; this removes the gravity on Arthur’s level, and causes an avalanche on the third level.

Mal emerges; she kills Fischer. Dom kills Mal. Saito dies. Both Saito and Fischer fall into Limbo. Eames sets an explosion at the hospital. All of these events are going to have to synchronize for this experiment to work.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAbbJT0ZXmk> Hallway Dream/Van/

Dom tells Ariadne about Sal, and their experiments with sharing dreams. They constructed a whole world for their dreams that was so wonderful that Mal did not want to return. When Dom got her to return to the real world anyway, she thought she was still dreaming. To get back to real world, she shot herself. But she was already awake without knowing it, and thus had just committed suicide. Dom got blamed for this legally, so that is why he left the country.

Ariadne kills Mal’s projection in the dream, and wakes up Fisher, who then accepts the idea that has been planted in his head. Cobb goes into Limbo to find Saito, bring him back, and make him keep his promises. He makes a phone call, and Dom is soon thereafter reunited with his children.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeN-jDGQlpQ> Ending Scene – time

**Reality and Illusion**: this film requires that you accept both the idea that dreams have multiple levels, and that technology could exist that would allow a team of specialists to actually enter your dreams, to either get information or to implant it. The crazy visuals of the dream world are actually a pretty cool illusion that most of us can accept, since our own dreams also often involve other worldly actions like flying. The idea that we could get lost and end up wanting to stay in the dream world is another concept that is a stretch for most of us.

**Deception:** Saito deceives Cobb when he originally hires him. Cobb’s team deceives Richard Fisher, when they all invade his dream world on the flight from Sydney to Los Angeles.

**Ethics and Morality:** The ethics of dream invasion should strike most of us as morally wrong, at least in most cases. Certainly the idea of a paid espionage team engaging in these activities seems over the line.

**Identity:** Cobb’s sense of self-identity is one of the plot elements in this film. He built a dream world with his late wife, Mal. He loves her deeply, and the one place he can still be with her is in this dream world. Her death fills him with a tremendous sense of grief. On the other hand, they had two children in the “real” world, and those two children need him. He really does need to make a choice, and that choice defines this film.Nolan sees parenthood as a choice that helps human beings learn to value something beyond their own personal needs.

**INTERSTELLAR**

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This film continues Nolan’s exploration of theories of relativity and how they affect our conceptions of the nature of both time and reality.

These can be difficult concepts for many of us to understand. But our reality here on Earth is created around concepts of time related to the rotation of the earth (24 hours per rotation = one earth day), and the revolution of the earth around the sun (365 days = one year). Einstein was the first to articulate that these concepts would be different in space, and not measured in the same way.

Matthew McConaughey plays Joseph Cooper in this film, a widowed farmer and former NASA pilot. The future of Earth is in danger because of crop failures. Cooper lives with his teenage son Tom, younger daughter Murphy, and his father-in-law.



Cooper and Murphy realize that there are patterns in the dust on the floor of their home; something is trying to communicate with them, because they figure out that these patterns represent the coordinates of a secret NASA research facility. When they investigate, they find that it is run by Cooper’s former professor, Dr. Brand.

He reveals that 12 volunteers left the Earth some 48 years ago, after a wormhole opened up near Saturn providing access to a distant galaxy with some possible habitable planets. 3 of the volunteers sent back encouraging data; their names were Miller, Edmunds, and Mann. Now that the situation on earth has grown more ominous, it is imperative that a future home for the human race be found.

Cooper agrees to pilot a spaceship to go check out the reports, and to take 5,000 frozen embryos with him to colonize the best of the alternatives. Brand stays behind to work on a new theory of propulsion that would allow a mass exodus from Earth. Murphy is very upset that her Dad has agreed to leave her and go on this mission.



The crew of the spaceship also includes Dr. Amelia Brand, the professor’s daughter, two scientists named Romilly and Doyle, and the robots TARS and CASE. In this scene, they go into the worm hole, in search of a path to the galaxy and the planets explored some 50 years before.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ln2SG> The Worm Hole



The first site they check out is Miller’s, a planet very close to Gargantua. They are aware that they have very limited time to explore the planet, because just one hour on its surface will equal 7 years on earth. They discover the wreck of Miller’s spacecraft and retrieve his data, just shortly before a tidal wave kills Doyle and drowns the engines on their spacecraft. By the time they return to the Endurance, 23 years have passed on earth.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7OVqXm7_Pk> Miller’s Planet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoGL0ANplcQ> The Escape

In a very emotional scene, Cooper listens to the 23 years of messages that have come in from his son. You can feel him becoming more distant and more detached, increasingly unsure that his messages are getting through or even that his father is still alive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoLkabPK3YU> Years of Messages

Back on earth, Murphy is now a scientist and working with Dr. Brand. As he is dying, he shares with her that he has never believed the plan for a mass exodus was feasible, and she relays this information to the spacecraft. But Murphy actually does believe the plan was feasible, and continues the work.



The remaining crew of the Endurance chooses next to check out Mann’s planet, since he is still transmitting. He tells them the planet is habitable, despite an atmosphere full of ammonia and extremely cold temperatures.

But this is a deception and untrue; Mann’s real motivation is to be rescued and get out of this place. He tries to kill Cooper, does steal his shuttle, and races back to the spaceship. Romilly is killed by a booby trap set by Mann, but Amelia rescues Cooper and they head back to the spaceship to try and catch Mann before he leaves them stranded.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFSGwbbezYw> Brand saves Cooper (sync is slightly off)

Mann is killed in a docking attempt that also heavily damages the Endurance. Cooper and Brand are able to use their lander vehicle to stabilize and bring the wildly spinning ship back under control.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSW47_Qm7YY> Docking Scene

CASE warns them that the ship is being sucked in by the gravity of Gargantua, so they must figure something out before that accelerates and destroys all of them. Cooper uses some extra fuel to propel the craft into a slingshot maneuver around Gargantua that will let them both escape the gravitational pull and to head towards the last planet they need to check out. One downside of this plan is that the proximity to that star means that more years will pass on Earth. Plus they also calculate that the main spacecraft must shed some weight in order to pull off the slingshot maneuver. Brand and CASE continue the journey on the Endurance, while Cooper and TARS jettison in the lander and reenter the wormhole to head back to Earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdSz12Glhlw> The Black Hole

But Cooper finds himself inside a “tesseract”, a 4 Dimensional cube within a cube; in this case, it also resembles the bookshelves in Murphy’s bedroom. Cooper realizes that this is how he can communicate with her, so he sends her the data she needs to solve the problem involving the mass exodus from Earth. He realizes that he can manipulate the second hand on Murphy’s old watch to simulate Morse Code as a way of communicating with her.





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJio07EtKYc> Landing in the Tesseract

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtTkcM9BfXM> Quantifiable Connection

Cooper then awakens inside a gigantic space station orbiting Saturn. He reunites with Murphy, who had used his data to solve the problem, but who is also now much older and near death. The Space Station is named after her. Murphy convinces him to leave and rejoin Amelia, who is establishing a new human colony on the third planet.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRT0GGTWYnM> Cooper Station

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP0dv9OjBHQ> Ending Scene

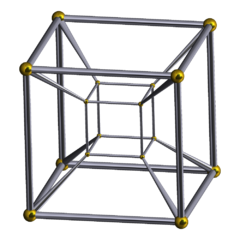
**Reality and Illusion:** Research tells us that the concepts in this film were based on the work of Kip Thorne, a renowned Theoretical Physicist.

In this film, the theory that time speeds up near a star like Gargantua has a huge impact on how you experience this film, assuming that you are willing to believe that this could really happen. Romilly remains on the Endurance while Cooper and Doyle explore Miller’s planet. He has aged 23 years when they return. A few hours for them translated into 23 years of loneliness for him, circling in a stationary orbit waiting for them to return. He is noticeably older and grayer when they return, and the idea that could have lived for 23 years in this kind of isolation is disturbing.

We also get a sense of this impact when Cooper listens to 23 years of messages; his son grows more distant and finally just gives up in the need to find some closure to his very real emotional loss. His daughter won’t even leave messages. She’s still angry at him for leaving, but at least maintains her belief that he will come back to her. Listening to these messages is a devastating experience for Cooper; he lost the chance to see his children grow up and become adults. Again, assuming that you believe this to be possible, the impact is very strong.

When he finally does return to Murphy, it is another powerful moment. She is on her deathbed; in fact, she postponed her death in cryo-sleep for several years just so that she could have this moment of reunion with her father before she died. He has not aged at all; she has gone from age 10 to now being very elderly and frail. It is another emotional experience, but one that requires our buy-in for it to be real. That may be easier for some people vs others.

The idea of the 4 Dimensional Tesseract is another stretch for our belief systems, but we have to buy into this one also, in order to accept this unorthodox method of communication between people on these different planes of reality.



**Deception:** The biggest deceiver in this film is Mann, who lies about the conditions on his planet in order to get the team to come rescue him. And instead of feeling gratitude when they do, he attacks them, steals a shuttle, and tries to leave them behind. Every film needs an antagonist like this, but you do have to wonder what motivated a man like this to volunteer for such a risky mission in the first place.

**Ethics and Morality:** If the elder Dr. Brand truly never believed that the mass exodus plan he was working on was feasible, he crossed both a moral and an ethical line by not sharing that with Cooper, particularly when trying to persuade Cooper to pilot the mission to find out what had happened to the explorers sent through the wormhole some 50+ years earlier.

**Identity:**

Sources:

<https://lifeandillusion.wordpress.com/2012/07/22/the-themes-of-christopher-nolan/>