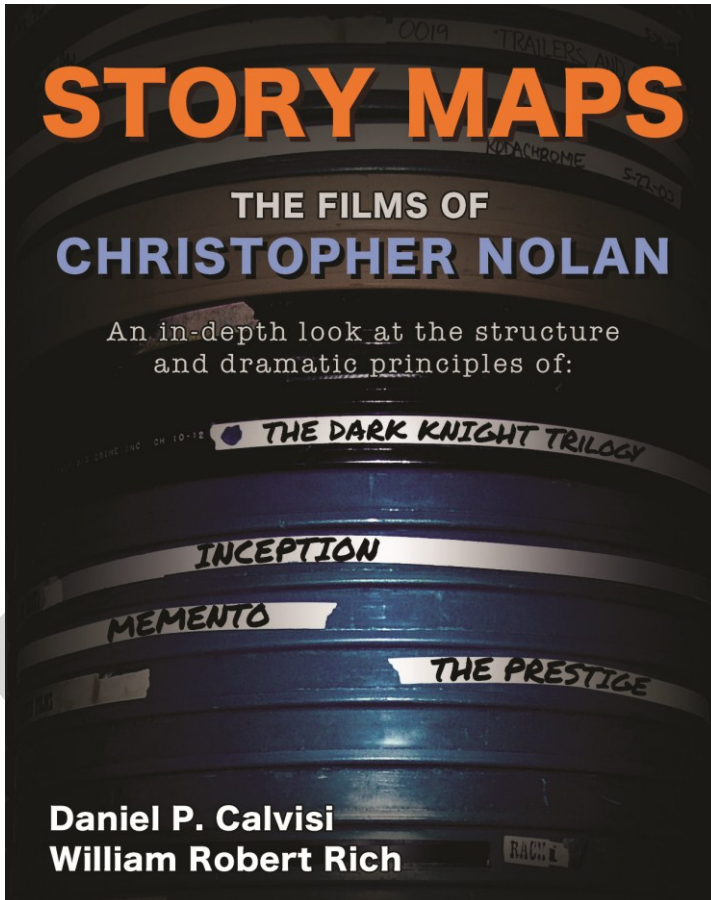


Excerpt



STORY MAPS:

The Films of Christopher Nolan

by Daniel P. Calvisi

&

William Robert Rich

ACT FOUR SCREENPLAYS

SCREENPLAY HOW TO

Copyright © Daniel P. Calvisi and William Robert Rich 2013

Published by Act Four Screenplays and Screenplay How To

actfourscreenplays.com | screenplayhowto.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

ISBN-10: 0983626650

ISBN-13: 978-0-9836266-5-7

Cover Design: [Colin Spain](#)

Memento copyright © 2000 Newmarket Films.

Batman Begins copyright © 2005 Warner Bros. Pictures.

The Prestige copyright © 2006 Touchstone Pictures & Warner Bros. Pictures.

The Dark Knight copyright © 2008 Warner Bros. Pictures.

Inception copyright © 2010 Warner Bros. Pictures.

The Dark Knight Rises copyright © 2012 Warner Bros. Pictures.

All DC Comics characters and the distinctive likeness(es) thereof are Trademarks & Copyright © 2013 DC Comics, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Every film should have its own world, a logic and feel to it that expands beyond the exact image that the audience is seeing.

-Christopher Nolan

SAMPLE

About the Authors

Daniel P. Calvisi is a story analyst, screenwriter and the author of *Story Maps: How to Write a GREAT Screenplay* and *Story Maps: Booster Pack #1*. He lives in Los Angeles. See ActFourScreenplays.com for more about Story Maps and how you can work with Dan.

William Robert Rich is a story analyst, screenwriter, and the Founder and Editor of ScreenplayHowTo.com. He is currently based in Austin, Texas.

CONTENTS

I.	<i>Introduction to Story Maps</i>	1
II.	<i>Christopher Nolan Biography</i>	3
III.	<i>MENTO (2001)</i>	6
IV.	<i>Memento Chronological Scene List</i>	27
V.	<i>BATMAN BEGINS (2005)</i>	42
VI.	<i>THE PRESTIGE (2006)</i>	56
VII.	<i>THE DARK KNIGHT (2008)</i>	73
	<i>Introduction to our Inception analysis</i>	85
VIII.	<i>INCEPTION (2010)</i>	86
	<i>Introduction to William Robert Rich's Inception Story Map</i>	100
IX.	<i>THE DARK KNIGHT RISES (2012)</i>	112
X.	<i>Story Map Worksheet</i>	131
XI.	<i>Learn More From Dan Calvisi</i>	136
XII.	<i>Helpful Links</i>	137
	<i>Appendix I. Christopher Nolan Filmography</i>	138
	<i>Appendix II. Christopher Nolan Major Awards and Nominations</i>	140

I. Introduction to Story Maps

Story Maps: The Films of Christopher Nolan is a companion book to my flagship title, *Story Maps: How to Write a GREAT Screenplay*. If you are not familiar with the Story Maps method, then you can learn more about it and also purchase the book on my site, ActFourScreenplays.com, as well as from major e-book vendors.

The Story Maps structure can be found in almost every big Hollywood movie you know and love, and most of today's smaller independent films, as well. Films of every genre and budget level use this template, much of which comes from what is known as "classical three act dramatic structure." This dramatic form has been written about exhaustively; however, I've added many more details that you won't find elsewhere, that I first discovered working as a Story Analyst for major studios and production companies in the film industry, and honed over the years as I worked with hundreds of writers as a teacher and a consultant.

I believe the most important learning tool in the craft of screenwriting is written analysis of movies and screenplays. If you're an aspiring screenwriter, utilizing Story Maps will help you understand how professional screenwriters structure their stories. A Story Map unlocks the building blocks of the narrative. In breaking down your favorite movies into their main dramatic elements and a beat sheet, as we've done here with the Nolan films, you can clearly see *how* the filmmakers tell the story. As Christopher Nolan is one filmmaker that has never chosen to tell a story in the most obvious, logical or straightforward manner, the act of story mapping his films is a huge challenge; one that we relished, at least at first, before we realized how much work would be involved!

The Story Map can also be used to construct a new narrative – you can use the Worksheet in the back of the book to get started. Keep in mind that the Story Map is a form, not a formula. It does not dictate your choices or tell you *what* to write; it provides a framework to hold your choices. Writing from a well-developed Story Map is not just about hitting page points, but using what I call *Active Storytelling*, which is making your scenes and your characters' actions advance the story and bring about change while maintaining a cohesion built on theme and escalating conflict. As you will see, these are all attributes of Nolan's stories.

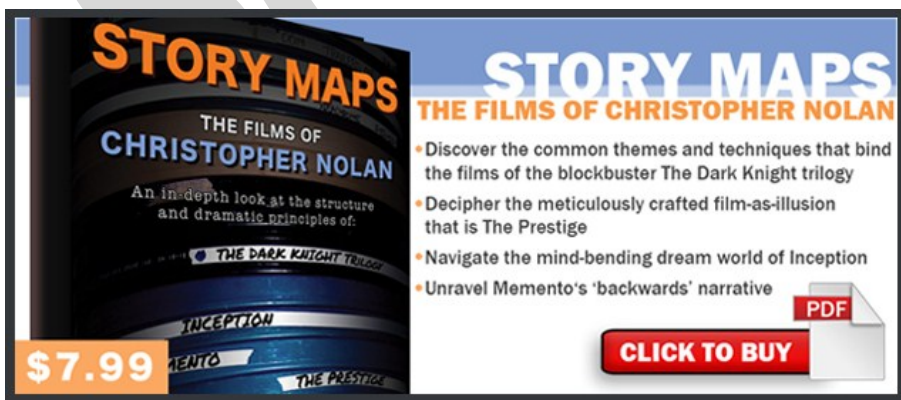
Christopher Nolan is known for his complicated, often brilliant, story structures. He challenges the audience as he entertains on the largest cinematic scale possible, which is much more than most blockbusters can claim, and a big reason why William Robert Rich and I are such big fans. We find something new every time we watch a Nolan film, and even after many, many viewings, we still have questions that haven't been answered.

But that doesn't mean we won't stop trying.

We hope you enjoy the book.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Calvisi



STORY MAPS
THE FILMS OF CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

An in-depth look at the structure and dramatic principles of:

- THE DARK KNIGHT TRILOGY
- INCEPTION
- MEMENTO
- THE PRESTIGE

- Discover the common themes and techniques that bind the films of the blockbuster The Dark Knight trilogy
- Decipher the meticulously crafted film-as-illusion that is The Prestige
- Navigate the mind-bending dream world of Inception
- Unravel Memento's 'backwards' narrative

\$7.99

CLICK TO BUY PDF

II. MEMENTO (2001)

Memento is Christopher Nolan's fractured detective story that put him on the map as a master structuralist.

Nolan is oft-quoted as loving *film noir*, and *Memento* is his film that most closely follows the conventions of the genre. Our narrator is an unlikely hero, essentially a hard-boiled detective, haunted by a crime he was unable to stop, forced to contend with a femme fatale, a crooked cop, and his own crippling infirmity. We never stop wondering, *Who's playing who?*

The narrative is structured in sequences that show us the events leading up to the opening scene, Leonard shooting Teddy. The story is essentially answering the question, "Why did Leonard shoot Teddy?" or "Did Leonard kill the right man?" The sequences begin rather straightforward – each sequence lasts roughly five minutes and returns to the place it started, then is followed by a black and white "interstitial" scene in which Leonard tells us about his past life as an insurance claims investigator and how he navigates his current life. But as the film progresses, some sequences go longer or shorter, and some overlap, challenging us to put together multiple threads. In fact, you may prefer an alternate interpretation of where certain sequences begin and end, especially in the second half of the story, than the one mapped below.

Although *Memento* is known as "the backwards movie," the narrative is not simply a reverse linear progression. As one narrative plays out in chronological order, albeit mixed with flashback, the other presents its sequences in reverse order. In our Story Map, we've labeled the Black & White sequences with letters (A-V) and the color sequences with numbers (1-23). Both sets of sequences are then added to the Chronological list, numbered 1-45, which puts the events of the story in a "true" timeline. Although Nolan initially grounds the narrative in a structure of 5-minute sequences, it eventually begins to make some jumps in chronology. Interestingly, we never return to the exact moment when Leonard shoots Teddy.

The film demands multiple viewings to truly piece it together. Even after many viewings (trust us, we've put in the hours), there are still a few ambiguities that are left up to us to interpret. Teddy's explanation in Act III

seems like it's the whole truth, but there's no way for us to be sure. When Teddy tells Leonard that Sammy Jankis wasn't married and it was Leonard's wife that had diabetes, Leonard strongly objects, and he seems quite certain that he's right. This was a memory from before his wife's murder, so it could be accurate. A match cut shows a flash of Leonard giving his wife an injection, then a flash of him pinching her. Which thing happened? Maybe both, or maybe neither. But if he's correct that she didn't have diabetes, then she probably didn't die by lethal injection, as Teddy is suggesting. Teddy also says that she survived the attack in the bathroom – so how did she die?

Is she even dead?

The final sequence also shows us a quick flash to Leonard and his wife in bed, and tattooed over Leonard's heart are the words "I've done it." Remember, Leonard is brain-damaged, thus completely unreliable, so it's anyone's guess as to the truth behind this moment. As with Nolan's *Inception* and *The Prestige*, there are a few blurry, some might say missing, pieces to the puzzle, and it is up to us to arrange them in the most logical and satisfying order.

To help you keep track of the various pieces of evidence as they pertain to our audience questions, we've included bolded statements at certain intervals in the Beat Sheet. Think of these notes as your "case log" as you investigate the film. (We also provide a chronological version of the events of the film, in a second map to follow the first.)...

[CONTINUED...]

MEMENTO (2001)

Screenplay by Christopher Nolan

Based on the short story, *Memento Mori*, by Jonathan Nolan

Directed by Christopher Nolan

Running Time: 110 minutes

BASIC STORY MAP

PROTAGONIST: LEONARD SHELBY, 30s, insurance claims investigator

Skill: Good detective

Misbehavior: Short-term memory

Flaw/Achilles Heel: Obsession

EXTERNAL GOAL: To find and kill "John G," the man who murdered his wife.

INTERNAL GOAL: To atone for Sammy Jankis' death.

MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT: His condition

THEME: We create our own reality.

CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION: Did Leonard kill the right guy? (Is Teddy actually John G?)

ENDING: Leonard's quest has been his own creation, and he killed Teddy to maintain the fantasy.

ARC: We watch Leonard go from an innocent victim with a crippling mental problem to a man aware of his own conscious choice to create his own reality.

LOGLINE: A man, suffering from a chronic short-term memory loss condition, must make sense of the clues he's left himself to find the man he believes killed his wife.

FULL STORY MAP

STORY ENGINES

ACT 1: Leonard struggles to follow a path laid out for him by his own notes and limited information from Teddy and Natalie.

ACT 2A: Leonard tracks down Dodd for Natalie, as he tells the story of Sammy Jankis.

ACT 2B: Leonard meets Natalie and she manipulates him into doing her dirty work.

ACT 3: Leonard kills Jimmy Grants and is confronted by Teddy, who tells him the truth about his past.

THE BEAT SHEET

(Note: this is not a complete scene list.)

ACT ONE

COLOR 1 (CHRONOLOGICAL 45):

1-2 **Opening image**: We see a Polaroid photo of a dead body at a crime scene, held by a hand. As the hand fans the photograph, the image fades, rather than developing and getting sharper as one might expect.

OPENING: The scene plays out backward, revealing LEONARD (Guy Pearce) shooting TEDDY (Joe Pantaliano) and then taking a photo of his dead body.

BLACK & WHITE A (CHRONOLOGICAL 1):

2 – Leonard wakes up in a hotel room, distraught, with no memory of how he got there.

COLOR 2 (CHRONOLOGICAL 44):

3 – Leonard shows the hotel clerk a Polaroid of Teddy. Teddy then walks into the lobby and greets Leonard as if they were best friends.

3 – Teddy tries to trick him into taking the wrong car, but Leonard figures it out because he has a photo. His clues are his only source of information with which to navigate life.

4 – They drive to a remote, industrial site. On the back of the Polaroid of Teddy, someone has written “Don’t believe his lies. Kill him.”

5-6 – **INCITING INCIDENT (EXTERNAL)** (establishing the structure): Leonard pulls his gun on Teddy, who tries to convince Leonard that he’s got the wrong guy. He wants Leonard to go down into the basement, “to find out what you’ve become.” Leonard shoots Teddy, establishing each new sequence ends by leading up to the beginning of that sequence.

Central Dramatic Question: Why did Leonard shoot Teddy?

BASIC STRUCTURE: We will slowly see the events leading up to Teddy’s death unravel, learning information as Leonard learns it, except for a few instances where we see things he does not (like how Natalie manipulates him). Each numbered color sequence is around 5 minutes long and will be separated by a lettered Black & White (or “interstitial”) scene, which provides key exposition and backstory.

BLACK & WHITE B (CHRONOLOGICAL 2):

6 – *Interstitial:* Leonard explains his condition and his system for remembering by leaving notes for himself and writing on Polaroids. Leonard mentions how Sammy Jankis had no system.

COLOR 3 (CHRONOLOGICAL 43):

8 – Leonard writes “He is the one. Kill him.” on the back of Teddy’s Polaroid.

8-10 – Leonard explains his short-term memory problem to the HOTEL CLERK. He can’t make new memories, so his mind “resets,” wiping his memory at random intervals. His last memory is his wife being murdered. He gives the clerk a photo of Teddy, tells him not to trust him.

10 – Teddy shows up at the hotel.

BLACK & WHITE C (CHRONOLOGICAL 3):

10 – *Interstitial* **INCITING INCIDENT (INTERNAL)**: The phone rings – Leonard answers, “Who is this?”

COLOR 4 (CHRONOLOGICAL 42):

12- Leonard washes up in the bathroom of a restaurant. We see tattoos on Leonard’s arm and one on his hand: *Remember Sammy Jankis*. On his way out, a waiter gives him a manila envelope and a hotel key.

12 – Leonard walks into his room at the Discount Inn, tacks his photos up on his case map on the wall.

13 – Note from Natalie: “Teddy’s real name is John Edward Gammel. On the back of Teddy’s photo, Leonard has already written, “Don’t believe his lies.” He calls Teddy’s number. When Teddy answers, Leonard calls him John Gammel. Teddy’s short with him, says he’ll be right over.

14 – Leonard takes off his shirt, revealing tattoos all over his body. Tattooed “facts” about his wife’s killer coincide with information in the package from Natalie, like Teddy’s driver’s license number. Leonard writes “He is the one” on Teddy’s Polaroid.

15 – Leonard’s chest tattoo reads: “John G. raped and murdered my wife.” Leonard writes “Kill him.”

Teddy lied to Leonard about his real name. He looks to be the killer, but is Natalie reliable?

BLACK & WHITE D (CHRONOLOGICAL 4):

16 – *Interstitial*: Leonard talks on the phone to an unknown party, telling the story of SAMMY JANKIS (Stephen Tobolowsky), a man who suffered from the same memory condition, but didn't have the discipline and drive to deal with it like Leonard.

COLOR 5 (CHRONOLOGICAL 41):

17 – Leonard meets NATALIE (Carrie-Ann Moss) at a diner. She has a split lip. She knows him, but he can't remember her.

18 – **STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (EXTERNAL)**: Natalie gives Leonard a package with info from the DMV on John Edward Gammel/Teddy. Natalie can't talk Leonard out of his revenge plan. "Even if you get revenge you're not going to remember it."

20 – **STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD (INTERNAL)**: Leonard remembers his wife.

21 – Natalie gives Leonard an address of an "isolated place" and his hotel room key, claiming he left it at her place.

BLACK & WHITE E (CHRONOLOGICAL 5):

22 – *Interstitial*: Leonard was an insurance claims investigator. On the job, he developed his skill for reading people, to get to the truth. He would watch their eyes and look for other physical cues. Now, he uses the skill to navigate his life without the benefit of memory.

COLOR 6 (CHRONOLOGICAL 40):

23 – Lunch with Teddy. Teddy claims Leonard told him he might be getting set up. Leonard says his notes are the facts, much more reliable than memories, which are just an interpretation, not the actual record.

25 – The hotel clerk admits he’s taken advantage of Leonard’s condition and rented him two rooms.

27 – Leonard meets Natalie at the diner.

BLACK & WHITE F (CHRONOLOGICAL 6):

27 – *Interstitial*: **END OF ACT ONE TURN (INTERNAL)**: Sammy’s memory problems result from a car accident. As an insurance investigator assigned to Sammy’s accident, Leonard doubted Sammy’s ailment and ordered more tests.

How did Leonard get the same memory problem as Sammy Jankis?

COLOR 7 (CHRONOLOGICAL 39):

28 – **END OF ACT ONE TURN (EXTERNAL)**: Leonard wakes up next to Natalie in her house...

[CONTINUED...]

III. BATMAN BEGINS (2005)

Batman Begins opens on two children playing in the gardens of a large estate. A boy deceives a girl and steals a fossilized arrowhead from her palm. In an attempt to hide, he climbs atop timeworn boards covering a well. The boards break and the boy crashes into the caverns below the well, snapping one of his bones upon impact. The pain is intense, perhaps, like nothing he's ever felt before. He's scared and alone. A noise builds and crescendos out of the hollow caverns in front of him, hissing and squealing like a missile locked on its target. Then it explodes: Hundreds of bats burst from the shadows, swarming and consuming the boy in darkness. This is a film about fear.

Based on a story by David Goyer, Christopher Nolan's take on Batman marks one of the most significant steps in the evolution of the superhero genre since Richard Donner's *Superman* in 1978. We've all seen this movie before in some fashion, probably too many times to count: A hero suffers a tragedy, often as a young man or child, which compels him to fight villainy, ultimately facing off against an enemy hell-bent on destroying the very thing said hero has sworn to protect. Of all the stories that came before, *Batman Begins* may be the first to do it right. Its humanism and harsh realities subtly coerce our emotional investment in Bruce Wayne's journey. He was not granted special powers rooted in the supernatural. His alter-ego's purpose sprang from universal emotions like fear, guilt, and anger.

In all the places *Batman Begins* succeeded, there was an equal opportunity to fail. Take the first act as an example: With a fractured narrative, you're deliberately confusing the audience for dramatic effect, so your choices must be profound enough to compensate for the damage. This is no better illustrated than the juxtaposition between Wayne's childhood and his initiation into the League of Shadows. The order of these scenes implants different dramatic questions into our minds than had the story been told in a linear fashion.

The first glimpse of the adult Bruce Wayne is less than five minutes in and we're already perplexed. Isn't Bruce Wayne supposed to be a rich playboy? What is he doing in a Bhutanese jail? Further, what does the bat incident from his childhood have to do with this? Aren't there more horrific things to haunt your dreams if you're in prison? Then, not five minutes later, when

Wayne is freed from the prison by a mysterious visitor offering a path to serve true justice, he makes his goal clear: He seeks the means to turn fear against those who prey on the fearful. Well, that kind of irony, a convict seeking the means to fight injustice, is what makes a great character. Our expectations have been toyed with and we love it. Those scenes prompt more involvement because we're invested in both the character and story...and it only took nine minutes.

This opening also establishes the use of Nolan's trademark fractured narrative, with multiple lines of action in multiple time frames, as demonstrated in *Memento*. We're essentially seeing three life periods in the first act: childhood Bruce, teenage Bruce and adult Bruce. Keep this in mind as you study the map for *Batman Begins* below, wherein we have made efforts to clearly delineate the flashbacks from the "present" day scenes...

[CONTINUED...]

IV. THE PRESTIGE (2006)

The Prestige could be Nolan's masterpiece. It also may very well be the most complicated film structure of all time. We encourage you to watch the film as you review the map, paying close attention to when and how bits of information are revealed.

Shot in-between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, *The Prestige* is anything but an interstitial film in Nolan's filmography. Other directors might scale down and knock out a character piece between such huge budget franchise films. Leave it to Nolan to tackle a complex period piece on such a scale (a few years later, he mounts an even bigger production when he "wedges" *Inception* between *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*).

..As with any good film narrative, the spine of *The Prestige* is rather simple: two magicians fight for years to learn each other's secrets and ruin the other. One magician hurts the other and the other retaliates. This story could have been told in a linear fashion, but if so, it wouldn't have been as much of a puzzle for the audience – the element of the film itself as an illusion would have been lost.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the story is how well it sets up, preserves and pays off the illusion. It's launched from the very first image, and Cutter's narration, which includes this most vital bit...

CUTTER (V.O.)

...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
know: you want to be fooled.
But you couldn't clap yet.
Because making something
disappear isn't enough. You
have to bring it back.

[CONTINUED...]

THE PRESTIGE (2006)

Directed by Christopher Nolan

Written by Jonathan and Christopher Nolan

Based on the novel by Christopher Priest

Running Time: 125 minutes

...

FULL STORY MAP

STORY ENGINES

ACT 1: Borden and Angier read each other's diaries as we flash back to their professional rivalry as younger men, which leads to tragedy when Angier's wife dies during a show.

ACT 2A: The two men trade revenge tactics on one another.

ACT 2B: The two men compete to have the true Transported Man trick.

ACT 3: Angier seems to defeat Borden when he takes his daughter away, but Borden/Fallon gets the final revenge by killing Angier.

THE BEAT SHEET

(note: this is not a complete scene list)

ACT ONE

1 – Opening image: A series of identical black top hats strewn on the ground of a wooded area.

BORDEN (V.O.)

Are you watching closely?

1 – **OPENING SEQUENCE:** CUTTER performs a magic trick for a little girl -- making a caged canary disappear and reappear – as we hear him in voiceover explain the three stages of a magic trick: The Pledge, The Turn and The Prestige.

1 – ROBERT ANGIER, “The Great Danton,” performs for a packed house, including a disguised ALFRED BORDEN. Borden infiltrates backstage.

2 – Angier disappears in a flash of electricity and falls through a trapdoor into a tank of water. Under the stage, Borden watches him drown.

3 – Cutter testifies in court that Borden murdered Angier by placing the water tank under the trap door. Cutter refuses to give up the secret to the trick in open court. Borden is convicted.

Did Borden kill Angier? If so, why?

6 – In prison, a representative of “Lord Caldlow” offers Borden \$5,000 for his “Transported Man” trick. In exchange, Lord Caldlow will adopt his daughter to keep her out of the workhouse. Borden refuses his offer. He gives Borden Angier’s diary.

8 – **INCITING INCIDENT:** Borden begins to read Angier’s diary, chronicling his journey in Colorado. We flashback to Angier on a train bound for Colorado. Angier reads Borden’s journal, which is written in code, encrypted with a cipher. Each man seeks each other’s magical secrets.

10 – ANGIER IN COLORADO: Angier travels to see Nikola Tesla, but is turned away by Tesla’s assistant, ALLEY (Andy Serkis).

11 – ANGIER AND BORDEN AS YOUNG MEN: Angier and Borden are plants in the audience, called on stage to assist an older magician, MILTON. Angier’s young wife, JULIA, is put into the water tank.

Borden declares he has a great trick that only he can perform. Cutter is skeptical.

14 – Cutter, Milton’s ingeneur, instructs both Borden and Angier to see the Chinese magician, CHUNG LING SOO, and tell him how he does the goldfish bowl trick. As a reward, Cutter will give the winner ten minutes onstage in front of Mr. Ackerman, “the top theatrical agent in London.” This beat shows the origin of their rivalry.

15 – Borden argues with Cutter over the knot he uses to bind Julia...

[CONTINUED...]

Introduction to our *Inception* analysis

Inception is a complicated movie and a complicated screenplay structure that can fit within four or five acts, depending on where one chooses to place act breaks, thus we present two versions of the *Inception* Story Map.

The first map from Dan is broken into the “standard” four act Story Map structure, although the locations of the signpost beats are adjusted for the longer running time of the film, followed by a second map from Rob in five acts.

V. INCEPTION (2010)

Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy is truly an amazing accomplishment, but one must consider that *Inception* was all Nolan. The film was his concept, his script, and under his direction. It's a rare Hollywood popcorn blockbuster that demands we think, chronicle and analyze the story for the full running time, and ultimately postulate the true meaning of the film's ending: *Has it all been a dream?*

As with most Nolan films, the dynamics of the protagonist and the obstacles in his way flow from the theme, which centers on the guilt that rules Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio). This is a story of redemption, of a man who struggles, literally and figuratively, to get home. The focus on this core throughline – Cobb must complete the mission to get Saito to make the call that will reunite Cobb with his children – is what anchors the narrative and allows us to follow the story without massive amounts of exposition getting in the way...

END EXCERPT

STORY MAPS
THE FILMS OF CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

Discover the common themes and techniques that bind the films of the blockbuster The Dark Knight trilogy

Decipher the meticulously crafted film-as-illusion that is The Prestige

Navigate the mind-bending dream world of Inception

Unravel Memento's 'backwards' narrative

\$7.99

CLICK TO BUY

PDF