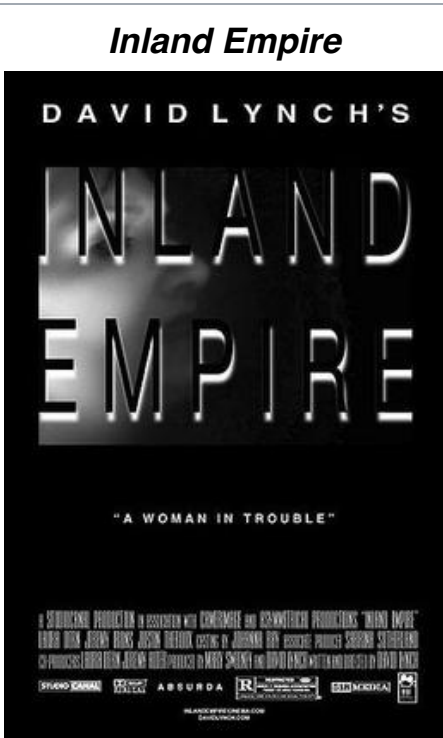


Inland Empire (film)

Inland Empire is a 2006 surrealist experimental psychological thriller film^{[7][8]} written, directed, and produced by David Lynch. It was co-produced by Jeremy Alter and Laura Dern. The film's cinematography, editing, score, and sound design were also by Lynch, with pieces by a variety of other musicians also featured. Lynch's longtime collaborator and then-wife Mary Sweeney co-produced the film. The cast includes such Lynch regulars as Laura Dern, Justin Theroux, Harry Dean Stanton, and Grace Zabriskie, as well as Jeremy Irons, Karolina Gruszka, Peter J. Lucas, Krzysztof Majchrzak, and Julia Ormond. There are also brief appearances by a host of additional actors, including Nastassja Kinski, Laura Haring, Terry Crews, Mary Steenburgen, and William H. Macy. The voices of Haring, Naomi Watts, and Scott Coffey are included in excerpts from Lynch's 2002 *Rabbits* online project. The title borrows its name from a metropolitan area in Southern California.

Released with the tagline "A Woman in Trouble", the film follows the fragmented and nightmarish events surrounding a Hollywood actress (Laura Dern) who begins to take on the personality of a character she plays in a supposedly cursed film production. An international co-production between the United States, France, and Poland, the film was completed over three years and shot primarily in Los Angeles and Poland. The process marked several firsts for Lynch: the film was shot without a finished screenplay, instead being largely developed on a scene-by-scene basis; and it was shot entirely in low-resolution digital video by Lynch himself using a handheld Sony camcorder rather than traditional film stock.^[9]

Inland Empire premiered in Italy at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival on 6 September 2006.^[9] It received generally positive but polarized reviews from critics, with attention centering on its challenging and surrealist elements.^[10] It was named the second-best film of 2007 (tied with two others) by *Cahiers du cinéma*,^[11] and listed among *Sight & Sound*'s "thirty best films of the 2000s",^[12] as well as *The Guardian*'s "10 most underrated movies of the decade".^[13]



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>David Lynch</u>
Written by	<u>David Lynch</u>
Produced by	<u>Mary Sweeney</u> <u>David Lynch</u>
Starring	<u>Laura Dern</u> <u>Jeremy Irons</u> <u>Justin Theroux</u> <u>Harry Dean Stanton</u> <u>Karolina Gruszka</u> <u>Peter J. Lucas</u> <u>Krzysztof Majchrzak</u> <u>Julia Ormond</u>
Cinematography	<u>David Lynch</u>
Edited by	<u>David Lynch</u>
Production companies	<u>Absurda</u> <u>StudioCanal</u> <u>Fundacja Kultury</u> <u>Camerimage Festival</u>

The film was remastered by Lynch and Janus Films in 2022.^[14] It is the final feature film that Lynch directed prior to his death in 2025.^{[15][16]}

Plot

In a hotel room, the Lost Girl—a young prostitute—cries following an unpleasant encounter with a client while watching a television show about a family of surrealistic anthropomorphic rabbits who speak in cryptic statements and questions.

Meanwhile in Los Angeles, actress Nikki Grace auditions for the lead role in the film *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. In her mansion, she is visited by a neighbor who asks about the film and then tells "an old tale": a boy passed through the doorway into the world, causing a reflection that gave birth to an evil that followed him. Then she tells a variation: a girl was lost in the marketplace - "as if half-born" - while the alley behind the marketplace was the way to the palace. The woman is certain that Nikki will get the role and insists that despite Nikki's claims to the contrary, the plot involves murder. The next day, Nikki celebrates winning the role as her Polish husband Piotrek watches on.

During the first rehearsal involving Nikki and the film's lead actor Devon, the actors are interrupted by a disturbance on the set. Devon investigates but finds nothing. Shaken by the event, director Kingsley Stewart confesses that they are shooting a remake of an unfinished German film entitled *47*, based on a supposedly cursed Polish folktale. Production was abandoned after the two leads were found murdered "inside the story".

After filming the first few romantic scenes between their respective characters Sue and Billy, Nikki and Devon begin an affair, despite earlier protestations that their relationship would be strictly professional and despite Piotrek warning Devon of "dark consequences" for "wrong actions". Nikki starts to have difficulties distinguishing between real life and scenes from the film. Entering a door marked "Axxon N." in an alley, she finds herself walking onto the set and causing the disturbance during the first rehearsal weeks earlier. Nikki runs away and enters a prop, which turns into an actual house. Inside the house, Nikki sees her husband going to bed. She hides from him in a closet, where she encounters a troupe of prostitutes.

At this point, various plotlines and scenes begin to entwine and complement each other, with the chronological order and the distinction between characters unclear. Some scenes show her joining the (modern-day) prostitutes, while other scenes depict prostitutes and pimps in a wintry Łódź in the 1930s. She is also shown to live a troubled marriage with her poor husband "Smithy". In another set of scenes, Nikki/Sue is talking to a policeman in a room above a nightclub. She tells him how she was sexually abused in her childhood and how her husband joined a traveling circus from Poland as a gamekeeper. She also speaks of the Phantom, a hypnotist who worked at the circus and then disappeared.

In one scene, Sue confronts Billy in front of his family, professing her love. She is sent away and slapped by Billy's wife Doris. It is now revealed that Doris was the woman who earlier told a policeman that she had been hypnotized to kill someone and found a screwdriver sticking in her own stomach. Doris remembers that the Phantom hypnotized her to kill Sue.

Distributed by	518 Media Absurda (US) StudioCanal (France; through Mars Distribution ^[1])
Release dates	6 September 2006 (<u>Venice</u>) 6 December 2006 (United States) 7 February 2007 (France) 27 April 2007 (Poland)
Running time	180 minutes ^[2]
Countries	France Poland United States
Languages	English Polish
Budget	\$2.9–3 million ^[3]
Box office	\$4.4 million ^{[4][5][6]}

Feeling stalked by the Phantom, Nikki/Sue arms herself with a screwdriver. Walking down Hollywood Boulevard she sees both herself and Doris, and meets with the policeman above the nightclub. Outside, she is eventually stabbed by Doris with her own screwdriver. Nikki/Sue collapses at a bus stop next to two homeless women. One of the homeless women tells all kinds of strange stories about her friend Niko, while the other holds a lighter in front of Sue's face until she dies. Kingsley yells "Cut!" and the camera pans back to show this has merely been a film scene.

Kingsley informs Nikki that her scenes for the film are complete. In a daze, Nikki wanders off set and into a nearby cinema, where she sees not only *On High in Blue Tomorrows* but events occurring in real-time. She follows a man upstairs and enters an apartment marked "Axxon N". Confronted by the Phantom, Nikki shoots him. The Phantom transforms into a grotesque figure before dying. Nikki flees into Room 47, which houses the rabbits on television - though she fails to see them - and then meets the Lost Girl. The Lost Girl escapes from the hotel and into Smithy's house, where she happily embraces her husband and son. Nikki is back at her mansion.

The film ends with a celebration involving the troupe of prostitutes, a one-legged woman mentioned earlier, Niko and her pet monkey, and others. The women dance to [Nina Simone's "Sinner Man"](#), while a lumberjack saws a log.

Cast

- [Laura Dern](#) as Nikki Grace / Sue Blue
- [Jeremy Irons](#) as Kingsley Stewart
- [Justin Theroux](#) as Devon Berk / Billy Side
- [Harry Dean Stanton](#) as Freddie Howard
- [Julia Ormond](#) as Doris Side
- [Diane Ladd](#) as Marilyn Levens
- [Peter J. Lucas](#) as Piotrek Krol / Smithy
- [Grace Zabriskie](#) as Visitor #1
- [Mary Steenburgen](#) as Visitor #2
- [Karolina Gruszka](#) as Lost Girl
- [Krzysztof Majchrzak](#) as Phantom
- [Ian Abercrombie](#) as Henry, The Butler
- [Nae Yūki](#) as Street Woman
- [Terry Crews](#) as Street Man
- [William H. Macy](#) as The Announcer
- [Tracy Ashton](#) as Marine's Sister
- [Leon Niemczyk](#) as Marek
- [Jan Hencz](#) as Janek
- [Jordan Ladd](#) as Terri
- [Laura Harring](#) as Jane Rabbit / Party Guest
- [Scott Coffey](#) as Jack Rabbit
- [Naomi Watts](#) as Suzie Rabbit
- [David Lynch](#) (voice) as Bucky, The Gaffer
- [Nastassja Kinski](#) as The Lady
- [Dominique Vandenberg](#) as Trainyard Worker
- [Ben Harper](#) as Piano Player (uncredited)

Themes and analysis

When asked about *Inland Empire*, Lynch refrained from explaining the film, responding that it is "about a woman in trouble, and it's a mystery, and that's all I want to say about it."^[18] When presenting screenings of the digital work, Lynch sometimes opened with a quotation from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

We are like the spider. We weave our life and then move along in it. We are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives in the dream. This is true for the entire universe.^{[19][20]}

[T]he structure of *Inland Empire* differs from prior Lynch films, *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*. It is neither a [Möbius strip](#) that endlessly circles around itself, nor is it divisible into sections of fantasy and reality. Its structure is more akin to a web where individual moments hyperlink to each other and other Lynch films—hence the musical number that closes the

Lynch's *Darkened Room* has been analyzed by Kristina Šekrst as a precursor to *Inland Empire*, creating the Lost Girl motif, along with sharing the same symbolism of the cigarette-burn hole in a silk slip and the watch.^[21] New York Film Festival official Richard Peña summarized the film as "a plotless collection of snippets that explore themes Lynch has been working on for years", including "a Hollywood story about a young actress who gets a part in a film that might be cursed; a story about the smuggling of women from Eastern Europe; and an abstract story about a family of people with rabbit heads sitting around in a living room."^[18] *The Guardian* critic Peter Bradshaw called the film "a meditation on the unacknowledged and unnoticed strangeness of Hollywood and movie-making in general", adding that Lynch "establishes a bizarre series of worm-holes between the worlds of myth, movies and reality."^[22] Critic Mark Fisher wrote that the film "often seems like a series of dream sequences floating free of any grounding reality, a dream without a dreamer [in which] no frame is secure", but argued that "it is the *film* that is mad, not the characters in it ... it is Hollywood itself that is dreaming".^[23] He also commented that "to see Lynch's worlds captured on digital video makes for a bizarre short-circuiting: as if we are witnessing a direct feed from the unconscious".^[23]

film which contains obvious allusions to everything from *Blue Velvet* to *Twin Peaks*.

Zoran Samardžija, 2010^[17]

Dennis Lim of *Slate* described the film as "a three-hour waking nightmare that derives both its form and its content from the splintering psyche of a troubled Hollywood actress", and commented on Lynch's use of digital video, describing it as "the medium of home movies, viral video, and pornography—the everyday media detritus we associate more with ... intimate or private viewing experiences than communal ones", adding that the film "progresses with the darting, associative logic of hyperlinks".^[24] Scholar Anne Jerslev has argued that the film "constitutes multiple and fractured modes of perception in a world of digital screens".^[25] Jerslev further contends that the film features "formal similarities with a website's hyperlinked layering of screens/windows, constantly disclosing new worlds from new points of view", but according to theorist Steven Shaviro "it also builds on cinematic codes, even as it deconstructs them".^[25]

David Sweeney explores the theme of reincarnation in *Inland Empire*, where actress Nikki Grace relives past lives while working on a remake of a "cursed" film. Sweeney connects this theme to Lynch's interest in theosophy and draws parallels with James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Netflix series *The OA*, highlighting shared motifs of reincarnation and alternate lives.^[26]

Production

Background

Inland Empire was the first Lynch feature to be completely shot in digital video; it was shot in standard definition with a hand-held Sony DSR-PD150 by Lynch himself.^{[14][27]} Lynch stated that he would no longer use film to make motion pictures.^[28] He explained his preference, stating that the medium gives one "more room to dream", and more options in post-production.^[24] Much of the project was shot in Łódź, Poland, with local actors, such as Karolina Gruszka, Krzysztof Majchrzak, Leon Niemczyk, Piotr Andrzejewski and artists of the local circus Cyrk Zalewski. Some videography was also done in Los Angeles, and in 2006 Lynch returned from Poland to complete filming. Lynch then edited the final results in Final Cut Pro in his home office over six months.^[29] He did not work with frequent collaborator and editor Mary Sweeney because "there wasn't a real organized script to go by and no one knew what was going on except him."^[29]

Lynch shot the film without a complete screenplay. Instead, he handed each actor several pages of freshly written dialogue each day.^{[9][14]} In a 2005 interview, he described his feelings about the shooting process: "I've never worked on a project in this way before. I don't know exactly how this thing will finally unfold ... This film is very different because I don't have a script. I write the thing scene by scene and much of it is shot and I don't have much of a clue where it will end. It's a risk, but I have this feeling that because all things are unified, this idea over here in that room will somehow relate to that idea over there in the pink room."^[30]

Interviewed at the Venice Film Festival, Laura Dern admitted that she did not know what *Inland Empire* was about or the role she was playing, but hoped that seeing the film's premiere at the festival would help her "learn more".^[9] Justin Theroux has also stated that he "couldn't possibly tell you what the film's about, and at this point, I don't know that David Lynch could. It's become sort of a pastime—Laura [Dern] and I sit around on set trying to figure out what's going on."^[18] In an NPR interview, Dern recounted a conversation she had with one of the movie's new producers, Jeremy Alter.^[31] He asked if Lynch was joking when he requested a one-legged woman, a monkey and a lumberjack by 3:15. "Yeah, you're on a David Lynch movie, dude," Dern replied. "Sit back and enjoy the ride." Dern reported that by 4 p.m. they were shooting with the requested individuals.^[31]

Financing and distribution

Lynch financed much of the production from his own resources, with longtime artistic collaborator and ex-wife Mary Sweeney producing. The film was also partially financed by the French production company StudioCanal, which had provided funding for three previous Lynch films. StudioCanal wanted to enter the film in the 2006 Cannes Film Festival.^[32] Instead, it premiered at Italy's Venice Film Festival on 6 September 2006, where David Lynch also received the Golden Lion lifetime achievement award for his "contributions to the art of cinema". The film premiered in the United States on 8 October 2006 at the New York Film Festival.^[33] The film received a limited release in the US beginning on 15 December 2006; distribution was handled by the specialist company 518 Media.^[34]

Lynch hoped to distribute the film independently, saying that with the entire industry changing, he thought he would attempt a new form of distribution as well.^[35] He acquired the rights to the DVD and worked out a deal with StudioCanal in an arrangement that allowed him to distribute the film himself, through both digital and traditional means.^[36] A North American DVD release occurred on 14 August 2007. Among other special features, the DVD included a 75-minute featurette, "More Things That Happened", which compiled footage elaborating on Sue's marriage to Smithy, her unpleasant life story, the Phantom's influence on women, and the lives of the prostitutes on Hollywood Boulevard. 15 years after the North American DVD release, The Criterion Collection announced a two-disc Blu-ray scheduled for release on 21 March 2023.

Soundtrack

Lynch contributed a number of his own compositions to the film's soundtrack, marking a departure from his frequent collaborations with composer Angelo Badalamenti.^[37] His pieces range from minimalist ambient music to more pop-oriented tracks such as "Ghost of Love".^[37] Polish composer Marek Zebrowski wrote music for the film, and acted as music consultant. The soundtrack includes the following musical pieces:^[37]

- David Lynch – "Ghost of Love" (5:30)
- David Lynch – "Rabbits Theme" (0:59)
- Mantovani – "Colors of My Life" (3:50)
- David Lynch – "Woods Variation" (12:19)

<i>David Lynch's Inland Empire Soundtrack</i>	
<u>Soundtrack album</u> by Various artists	
Released	11 September 2007
Genre	<u>Soundtrack</u> · <u>ambient</u> · <u>pop</u>
Length	79:26
Label	Ryko · Absurda · David Lynch Music Company

5. [Dave Brubeck](#) – "[Three to Get Ready](#)" (5:22)
6. [Boguslaw Schaeffer](#) – "[Klavier Konzert](#)" (5:26)
7. [Kroke](#) – "[The Secrets of the Life Tree](#)" (3:27)
8. [Little Eva](#) – "[The Locomotion](#)" (2:24)
9. [Etta James](#) – "[At Last](#)" (3:00)
10. [David Lynch](#) – "[Call from the Past](#)" (2:58)
11. [Krzysztof Penderecki](#) – "[Als Jakob erwachte](#)" (7:27)
12. [Witold Lutoslawski](#) – "[Novelette Conclusion](#)" (excerpt) / [Joey Altruda](#) – "[Lisa](#)" (edit) (3:42)
13. [Beck](#) – "[Black Tambourine](#)" (film version) (2:47)
14. [David Lynch](#) – "[Mansion Theme](#)" (2:18)
15. [David Lynch](#) – "[Walkin' on the Sky](#)" (4:04)
16. [David Lynch](#) / [Marek Zebrowski](#) – "[Polish Night Music No. 1](#)" (4:18)
17. [David Lynch](#) / [Chrysta Bell](#) – "[Polish Poem](#)" (5:55)
18. [Nina Simone](#) – "[Sinnerman](#)" (edit) (6:40)

Release

Distribution and box office

The film was screened at several [film festivals](#) around the world, most notably the [Venice Film Festival](#), the [New York Film Festival](#), the [Thessaloniki Film Festival](#), the [Camerimage Film Festival](#), the [Fajr International Film Festival](#), the [San Francisco IndieFest](#), the [International Film Festival Rotterdam](#) and the [Mexico City International Contemporary Film Festival](#).

In October 2006, Lynch bought U.S. distribution rights to the film from StudioCanal, which he will retain in any later deals made. The following month, he announced his intent to self-distribute the film theatrically via his company Absurda and 518 Media, stating, "A conventional distributor is a heartache, and I'm finished with that. With self-distribution, I'm able to shape the outcome of the film so much more." Lynch would also embark on a 10-city promotional tour in January 2007 with a cow, "I ate a lot of cheese during the film, and it made me happy. I'm looking forward to meeting theater owners and getting out among the people with the cow." Lynch signed a service deal with [Rhino Entertainment](#), which distributed the film on home video with [Ryko Distribution](#) on 14 August 2007.^{[38][39]}

518 Media released *Inland Empire* to two theaters in the United States on 6 December 2006, grossing a total of \$27,508 over its opening weekend. It later expanded to its widest release of fifteen nationwide theaters, ultimately grossing \$861,355 at the American box office. In other countries outside the United States, *Inland Empire* grossed \$3,176,222, bringing the film's worldwide total gross to \$4,037,577.^[40] It was released on 20 August 2007 in the United Kingdom, by [Optimum Releasing](#),^[41] 4 October 2007 in the Benelux, by A-Film,^[42] and 6 August 2008 in Australia, by [Madman Entertainment](#).^[43]

Critical reception

On [review aggregator](#) [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film has an approval rating of 72% based on 113 reviews, with an average score of 7.2/10. The website's critical consensus reads, "Typical David Lynch fare: fans of the director will find *Inland Empire* seductive and deep. All others will consider the heady surrealism impenetrable and pointless."^[10] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a weighted average score of 73 out of 100, based on 25 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[44]

Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* classified *Inland Empire* as "fitfully brilliant" after the New York Film Festival screening.^[45] Peter Travers, the film critic for *Rolling Stone* magazine wrote, "My advice, in the face of such hallucinatory brilliance, is that you hang on."^[46] *The New Yorker* was one of the few publications to offer any negative points about the film, calling it a "trenchant, nuanced film" that "quickly devolves into self-parody".^[47] Jonathan Ross, presenter of the BBC programme *Film 2007*, described it as "a work of genius ... I think".^[48] Damon Wise of *Empire* magazine gave it five stars, calling it "A dazzling and exquisitely original riddle as told by an enigma"^[49] and Jim Emerson (editor of *RogerEbert.com*) gave it 4 stars out of 4: "When people say *Inland Empire* is Lynch's *Sunset Boulevard*, Lynch's *Persona* or Lynch's *8½*, they're quite right, but it also explicitly invokes connections to Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*, Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*, Maya Deren's LA-experimental *Meshes of the Afternoon* (a Lynch favorite) and others".^[50] However, Carina Chocano of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that "the film, which begins promisingly, disappears down so many rabbit holes (one of them involving actual rabbits) that eventually it just disappears for good".^[51]

Dern received near-universal acclaim for her performance, with many reviews describing it as her finest to date. Lynch attempted to promote Dern's chances of an Academy Award for Best Actress nomination at the 2007 Academy Awards by campaigning with a live cow,^[52] though she was ultimately not nominated for the award.^[53]

Restoration by Janus Films

Inland Empire was restored and remastered by Janus Films in 2022, and was screened throughout the year beginning on April 8.^{[54][55]} The restoration of the film and soundtrack was overseen by David Lynch.^[14] For the restoration the original upscaled HD footage from the editing process was first downscaled back to standard definition to discard "false detail", then converted to 4K using an AI upscaling algorithm.^[56] This version of the film was released on Blu-Ray by The Criterion Collection.

Accolades

	Category – Recipient(s)
National Society of Film Critics Awards	Best Experimental Film – <i>Inland Empire</i> ^[57]
Venice Film Festival	Future Film Festival Digital Award – David Lynch ^[58]
	Category – Nominee(s)
National Society of Film Critics Awards	Best Actress – Laura Dern ^[59]
New York Film Critics Online Awards	Best Picture – <i>Inland Empire</i> ^[59]
Toronto Film Critics Association Awards	Best Actress – Laura Dern ^[59]

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