



MEMBER PICKS

Twelve Monkeys

Dangling in mid-air, the bald man works diligently, sifting through clues to a monumental puzzle, piece by piece. Across one wall of a forbidding 21st century archive he has pasted the headlines of newspapers and magazines from around the world, dated 1996-97, announcing five thousand million deaths from a ravaging plague. The mutated virus, origin unknown, has left the surface of the planet uninhabitable. Only by 'sealed-suit' excursions into the outside air and transportation back in time can information for a cure be obtained, to rescue what remains of humanity.

This could be the last gasp of civilisation as we know it. It could also be the distorted, 'mentally divergent' vision of James Cole, a violence-prone lunatic being held for psychiatric evaluation at a Baltimore institution in 1990. Cole (Bruce Willis) believes he is an emissary from the future, charged with discovering this epochal event's cause, which he suspects may be the mysterious 'Army of the 12 Monkeys'.

Directed by Terry Gilliam, *Twelve Monkeys* is a comical romantic thriller about madness and apocalyptic visions. It was inspired by Chris Marker's classic 1962 short *La Jetée*, a rumination on memory, time travel, and a vision of death. It also stars Brad Pitt, as the certifiably crazy son of a noted genetic scientist, and Madeleine Stowe, as the psychiatrist who first treats Cole, and who begins to question her own rational, science-based view of reality.

The script, by David Peoples (*Blade Runner*, *Unforgiven*) and his wife Janet, plays with the point of view of Cole, who perceives past, present and future as a jumble of faces, voices and places that overlap, or exist in more than one context. Adding to his tortured psyche is a vivid dream of a young boy at an airport, which portends both freedom and murder. But his disjointed perspective only heightens his yearning for freedom, he searches for a time in which he can exist not as a prisoner or mental patient, but on his own terms.

Like Cole, Gilliam may feel himself a bit out of his time (or his mind), having been away from feature filmmaking since 1991, only to find himself working with Hollywood megastars, shooting in the industrial wastelands of Baltimore and Philadelphia, on a budget of \$30 million – small by *Munchausen* standards, but tidy enough.

Elliptical though it may be, he claims that this material is straighter than anything he's done before. But he can't seem not to go to extremes with his imagery, using wide-angle lenses and brutal close-ups to make Cole's visions and surroundings even more hellish and claustrophobic. Indeed, scenes shot in the decayed Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania – built by Quakers in the 1820s, turned into a mental hospital by Gilliam's crew – exude a suffocatingly disturbing air.

He and production designer Jeffrey Beecroft (*Dances with Wolves*, *The Bodyguard*) strenuously sought to avoid designing and shooting in any style that called to mind earlier Gilliam films. They felt the freshness of *Twelve Monkeys'* script deserved its own special visual trademark just as *La Jetée's* haunting static images evoked a unique place, outside of time). Much of their inspiration, at least for those scenes employing Cole's haunted POV, comes

from the sadness of Josef Sudek's photography, as well as the fantasies of illustrator Lebbeus Woods, whose radical architectural designs have never been built because they wouldn't stand up.

'It just seems that I have this German-Expressionistic-Destructivist-Russian-Constructivist view of the future,' Gilliam says with a shrug. 'It's really hard not to do some of *Brazil*,' says Beecroft, discussing Cole's subterranean refuge. 'But if the world stopped today, and you can only take things down below now, what could you find down there? These people put all this stuff together, and then had to kind of make-up things, jerry-rig machines together, so they're hydraulic and steam-driven. In terms of lasers and all that stuff, we could have gone that way, but it's not as fun.'

Yet despite the sci-fi trappings of time-travel and mutating viruses, the story is primarily a search for redemption amidst a crazy, unfeeling world. This rugged individualist standing tall against a crushing society that more often than not passes painful judgments parallels Gilliam himself: a visionary filmmaker standing tall against a crushing industry that more often than not produces lousy movies (his love/hate relationship with the American film industry is well-documented).

The timing of *Twelve Monkeys*' arrival on Gilliam's plate was propitious, particularly as the themes in the script resonated strongly within him. 'The thing is so varied: the places we go, the times we go in. It's a chance to do a little bit in the future, a little in the past, and the tone is very odd. It plays with the same old things – time, reality, madness – so I was intrigued. And it was romantic.

Madness has always been an integral trait of Gilliam's characters, whether their mental illness, or the sheer hubris of Man trying to battle the superior forces of Nature. It may serve the dramatic functions of escape, of weapons against authority, or of keys to spiritual enlightenment, but it is usually played out as one man's fantasies against the world, the audience siding with the individual.

In *Twelve Monkeys*, however, the filmmakers force the audience into a trickier situation: since Cole's perception is what we the viewers are allowed to see, we have to decide whether it's the truth, or a crazily distorted vision of one man's gravest fears. It would be easy to write off his strained logic and jumbled note-taking as a loony's. But despite his fragile state of mind, we see his intrinsic humanity, and so we want to see him healed and well. However, if we are rooting for Cole to be sane, that means accepting that he is telling the truth – ergo, we are all doomed to perish, by the millions. This is not standard material for a comfortable, audience-pleasing tale – which is why Gilliam is doing it.

Twelve Monkeys is also rare as a Gilliam piece in that he did not develop and write it himself. 'It's one thing to get lost in your own madness,' he says, 'but to become lost in somebody else's madness is weirder.' And unlike *The Fisher King*, where LaGravenese was on the set throughout the shoot to confer with the director, Gilliam does not have the writers with him, and so is prone to mistrust his interpretation.

'I'm not 'certain that I'm totally comfortable with taking somebody else's idea or script and trying to work with it. And the words are really good. I mean, this is in some ways more serious than anything I've done. That was intriguing, but also very unnerving, because I was never certain whether I'm being boring

because everything's straight; yet I don't want to juice it up with weirdness that gives it away.'

Though a physically demanding role, as always, this character is unusual for Bruce Willis. More often a heroic figure seeking to assert control while chaos reigns around him, he here plays a mentally unstable, ill-at-ease cipher who feels completely powerless, at the mercy of others. Cole accepts his helplessness, rejecting one doctor's suggestion in 1990 that his destiny is to prevent the 1996 plague: saying 'Save you? How can I save you? It already happened!' But from his weakness, and his questioning of his own sanity, he learns to shape his destiny.

Gilliam says, 'One of the reasons [for doing *Twelve Monkeys*] was taking Bruce and putting him into situations and asking of him things I don't think he's ever done before or that people haven't seen him do – maybe done privately, but he's not done it publicly. And that's pretty interesting, and with Brad Pitt it's the same thing. Brad is pretty laconic in some ways. Suddenly he's a blabbermouth, jabbering away at high speed. I love doing that, playing with the public's perception of that star; otherwise, it wouldn't be fun.

Twelve Monkeys may prove to be Gilliam's most intimate film; despite the disturbing imagery and doomsday subtext, Cole's struggle for mental clarity and his bonding with Stowe's psychiatrist are powerful elements in the script. But the focus upon characterisations, as opposed to fantastic opticals, hasn't necessarily made Gilliam's job easier.

'There actually hasn't been any technical challenge on this, it's all been me avoiding technical challenges. I tried to do this thing without getting caught in all the tricks I've done in the past – blue screen, all those things. In *Brazil* when we did the driving shots we had cloth backgrounds we were pulling around.

'This time, I thought I wanted to do things just like everybody else does, the way they do it in a real movie. But when you're towing a vehicle or putting it on the back of a low loader you can't be in there with the actors. And they get distracted; it's hard to get good performances. Now when you're doing it [in the streets] the senses are being battled; the wind's blowing, everything's banging, crashing, it's very exciting! Then you look at it on film, and the performances are not what they should be, so what the fuck are we doing? It's a great waste of time.

'So we've reverted to using all these old tricks, going with blue screen and a car on a stage, and the performances are really good now. I had thought it was the complicated way of doing things; in fact, it's the more intelligent way of doing things.'

David Morgan, *Sight and Sound*, January 1996

TWELVE MONKEYS

Directed by: Terry Gilliam
©: Universal City Studios, Inc.
Polygram Filmed Entertainment and Universal Pictures present an Atlas Entertainment production
Executive Producers: Robert Cavallo, Gary Levinsohn, Robert Kosberg
Produced by: Charles Roven
Co-producer: Lloyd Phillips
Associate Producers: Kelley Smith-Wait, Mark Egerton
Atlas Production Executive: Richard Suckle
Production Accountant: Mathilde Valera
Production Co-ordinator: Elizabeth Nevin
2nd Unit Co-ordinator: Ellen Hillers
Unit Production Manager: Lloyd Phillips
Location Manager: Scott Elias
Post-production Co-ordinator: Lucy Darwin
1st Assistant Director: Mark Egerton
2nd Assistant Director: Philip A. Patterson
Script Supervisor: Marilyn Bailey
Casting: Margery Simkin
Philadelphia Casting: Mike Lemon
Screenplay by: David Peoples, Janet Peoples
Inspired by the film La Jetée written by: Chris Marker
Director of Photography: Roger Pratt
Camera Operator: Craig Haagensen
B Camera Operators: Kyle Rudolph, Peter Norman
Still Photographer: Phil Caruso
Computer Graphics/Digital/Optical FX by: Peerless Camera Company
Special FX Mechanical/Pyrotechnic Engineer: Vincent Montefusco
Graphic Artist: R. Scott Purcell
Editor: Mick Audsley
Production Designer: Jeffrey Beecroft
Art Director: Wm Ladd Skinner
Interrogation Room Inspired by the Works of: Lebbeus Woods
Art Department Co-ordinator: Lara Kelly
Set Decorator: Crispian Sallis
Production Illustrator: Matt Codd
Property Master: Douglas Harlocker
Prop Builder: Rick Gamez
Costume Designer: Julie Weiss
Costume Supervisor: Eric Sandberg
Wardrobe Supervisor: Melissa Stanton
Make-up/Hair Designer: Christina Beveridge
Make-up Artist: Alan Weisinger
Key Hairstylist: Peggy Nicholson
Title Design: Penny Causer
Music Composer and Conductor: Paul Buckmaster
Orchestral Leader: Gayvn Wright
Music Editor: Robin Clarke
Sound Mixer: Jay Meagher
Boom Operator: Randy Smith
Re-recording Mixers: Peter Maxwell, Mick Boggis, Clive Pendry
Digital Sound Adviser: Nick Church
Supervising Sound Editor: Peter Joly
Sound Editor: Imogen Pollard
Digital Sound Editor: Jennie Evans
Dialogue Editor: Danny Longhurst
ADR Mixers: Thomas J. O'Connell, Dominick Tavella
ADR Editor: Budge Tremlett
Foley Artists: Jack Stew, Diane Greaves, Jason Swanscott
Foley Recordist: Ted Swanscott
Foley Editor: Ian Wilson
Stunt Co-ordinator: Terry Jackson
Animal Co-ordinator: Ernie Karpeles

Cast

Bruce Willis (*James Cole*)
Madeleine Stowe (*Kathryn Raily*)
Brad Pitt (*Jeffrey Goines*)
Christopher Plummer (*Dr Goines*)
Frank Gorshin (*Dr Fletcher*)
Jon Seda (*Jose*)
Ernest Abuba (*engineer*)
Bill Raymond (*microbiologist*)
Simon Jones (*zoologist*)
Bob Adrian (*geologist*)
Carol Florence (*astrophysicist*)
H. Michael Walls (*botanist*)
Joseph Melito (*young Cole*)
Michael Chance (*Scarface*)
Vernon Campbell (*Tiny*)
Irma St. Paule (*poet*)
Joey Perillo (*Detective Franki*)
Bruce Kirkpatrick (*policeman no.1*)
Wilfred Williams (*policeman no.2*)
Rozwill Young (*Billings*)
Nell Johnson (*ward nurse*)
Fred Strother (*L.J. Washington*)
Rick Warner (*Dr Casey*)
Anthony 'Chip' Brienza (*Dr Goodin*)
Joliet Harris (*harassed mother*)
Drucie McDaniel (*waltzing woman patient*)
John Blaisse (*old man patient*)
Louis Lippa (*patient at gate*)
Stan Kang (*x-ray doctor*)
Pat Dias (*WWI captain*)
Aaron Michael Lacey (*WWI sergeant*)
David Morse (*Dr Peters*)
Charles Techman (*professor*)
Jann Ellis (*Marilou*)
Johnnie Hobbs Jr (*officer no.1*)
Janet L. Zappala (*anchorwoman*)
Thomas Roy (*evangelist*)
Harry O'Toole (*Louie/raspy voice*)
Korchenko (*thug no.1*)
Chuck Jeffreys (*thug no.2*)
Lisa Gay Hamilton (*Teddy*)
Felix A. Pire (*Fale*)
Matthew Ross (*Bee*)
Barry Price (*agent no.1*)
John Panzarella (*agent no.2*)
Larry Daly (*agent no.3*)
Arthur Fennell (*anchorman*)
Karl Warren (*pompous man*)
Christopher Meloni (*Lt Halperin*)
Paul Meshejian (*Detective Dalva*)
Robert O'Neill (*Wayne*)
Kevin Thigpen (*Kweskin*)
Lee Golden (*hotel clerk*)
Joseph McKenna (*Wallace*)
Jeff Tanner (*plain clothes cop*)
Faith Potts (*store clerk*)
Michael Ryan Segal (*Weller*)
Annie Golden (*woman cabbie*)
Lisa Talerico (*ticket agent*)
Stephen Bridgewater (*airport detective*)
Frank Huffman (*plump businessman*)
JoAnn S. Dawson (*gift store clerk*)
Jack Dougherty (*airport security no.1*)
Lenny Daniels (*airport security no.2*)
Herbert C. Hauls Jr (*airport security no.3*)
Charley Scalies (*impatient traveller*)
Carolyn Walker (*terrified traveller*)
Radio programmes performed by:
Stephen Bridgewater

USA 1995©
129 mins

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