

What a film festival means to the fans

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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The Encounter

by Maria Fernanda Cristo

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July 10, 2010, has been, without a doubt, the most exciting day of my life. When I woke up on that crispy Parisian morning, I never imagined how I would feel later on, not even in my wildest dreams. I thought it was going to be a normal day, but it turned out to be the day I would experience lunacy for ten seemingly-eternal minutes.

It all started while I was sitting in a bus, taking a tour of Paris.

As I was trying to take great shots of the city, I couldn't help but think that this wasn't my idea of how a last day in Paris should be spent. There were so many great things to see and do, things I'd never get to see or do while sitting on a bus. But little did I suspect that my day was about to change completely.

"Hey, what's going on over there?" my dad suddenly cried out. "Hurry! Take a picture! It might be someone famous!"

I turned and saw a cluster of people dressed in suits. I noticed that the place was a cinema and that a huge poster of the film *Inception* hung from a wall. My heart started pounding.

"LEONARDO DICAPRIO!" I shrieked.

Everyone in the bus stood up, yelling and taking pictures, only to realize there was no Leonardo DiCaprio. They all looked back at me in anger. I felt embarrassed, but I had a feeling that something special was going about to happen in that cinema. I begged my parents to get off the bus at the next stop and go investigate with me. Thank heavens they agreed, even though at the time it was only for a short food break.

While they were buying the food and drinks, I ran to the cinema. When I arrived, a man eight-times my size blocked the way, saying that I couldn't pass. I hated him for being so immense, but I politely asked him what was going on. He told me that it was the premiere of *Inception*. As soon as I heard this, my mind started spinning in circles. Actors attend premieres, right? And Leonardo DiCaprio is in *Inception*. Leonardo DiCaprio from *Titanic*. Leonardo DiCaprio from *Blood Diamond*, *Shutter Island*, *The Departed*. Leonardo DiCaprio: the hottest actor in the world. My favorite actor.

I recuperated from my astonishment and asked the guard at what time the person of my

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dreams would arrive. "In another three hours," he answered. Oh no, I thought to myself, my parents will never agree to this.

As I walked back to meet my family, I thought of the best way to ask them to spend their last day in Paris standing in line. When I arrived, I crossed my fingers, closed my eyes, and just asked. To my surprise, they also became excited, and their answer was yes.

When we arrived, the place was so empty that we were able to choose an amazing spot. It was in the first row, right next to the theater entrance. That spot became the reason for our three-hour sacrifice. But it was worth it.

Needless to say, those three hours seemed more like three days. Still, lots of things were happening as we waited. The place filled up, well-known French film stars started arriving, the carpet and the sound system were being installed, and we became friends with a Lebanese girl who works for Warner Bros. But this did not compare to what was about to happen next. After looking at my watch for the thousandth time, and feeling my feet growing more numb every second, the speakers started to blare, and my heart nearly stopped.

Nothing I've heard before has ever been as beautiful as the Inception soundtrack. It was the kind of music that invades one's senses, transforming the strong beat into an overwhelming feeling of excitement. At that moment I started trembling. I could hear nothing but the music and see nothing but the sparkle of camera flashes going off in every direction. I tried to hold my camera steadily, but I couldn't even take a picture. I was carried away by waves of various emotions as the vibrant environment absorbed me.

Suddenly, the first Inception star appeared. Everything became even more intense. At once I was surrounded by hysterical people, and paparazzi screaming questions. The first person to walk across the carpet was the acting legend Michael Caine. At this point, I lost control and started jumping up and down like a freak. I found myself screaming his name and waving. The sensation was surreal.

The stars kept arriving: Marion Cotillard, Cillian Murphy, Ken Watanabe, Tom Hardy, Ellen Page, and Joseph Gordon-Levitt. Every time I saw any of them, my heart accelerated and my legs propelled me repeatedly into the air. But as I realized something bigger was yet to come, anxiety took over. I literally felt like I was going to burst.

Then, as the crowd became even more excited, I stood on my toes and saw Leonardo DiCaprio's face. All of a sudden, my knees could barely hold me up, my heart almost stopped beating, and I involuntarily started crying. To summarize that experience: I completely lost it.

At first, I couldn't see him very well. I mostly saw the waving of hands and a cluster of faces surrounding him. Yet, I still felt as if someone had shot me with adrenaline.

I never took my eyes off him. Leonardo de Caprio moved like a god. I actually saw light radiating from his body. But he looked so calm. There was a vast contrast between his serenity and the frenzy of his fans. And his smile was not of conceit, but of gratitude.

He approached the corner where I stood, and I immediately awakened from my dazed state. I thought to myself, It's now or never, and stretched my body as far as I could to give him my poster. I could barely see him, but I could tell he was looking at my hand, and I could see him smiling. When I got the poster back, I saw that he had signed it smack in the middle of the heart I had drawn! At that moment I became the happiest woman on the face of this Earth.

He moved on, and I became ecstatic. I couldn't believe I had his autograph, that his pen had touched my poster, and that he smiled while signing it! I screamed, jumped, and I believe I performed a little victory dance.

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I had lost sight of him. Then I spotted him amid a sea of waving hands while signing autographs on the other side. I knew that I had his autograph, but somehow this now didn't seem like enough. I couldn't believe it, but I wanted more. I hadn't yet gotten a good look at him. I knew I would, eventually, when he entered the theater; so I waited for him as patiently as possible to come around the circle.

None of the other stars had stopped to sign autographs where I was, at the side of the entrance. But to my surprise, Leo did it a second time. On this occasion, he stopped right across from where I was stood. I could see him clearly now, and the fictional characters that I adored so much became real: Danny Archer, Teddy Daniels, and Roger Ferris were all standing right before me. They all sprung to life in one person.

Leonardo de Caprio turned around and, even though I already had his signature, out of pure instinct I stretched my arm with the other side of the poster facing up, so that he would sign it again. He saw it, and started walking towards me.

At that moment, only he and I existed. I grew calm. Everything else faded away. I became oblivious to the sounds, the camera flashes, the bodyguards, and the people pushing me from behind. And then, he stopped before me.

I literally stopped breathing. My eyes tried to take in the grandeur of the moment, but failed. Jack Dawson was standing before me now. Without taking my eyes from his impeccable face, I gave him my poster. Say something, I thought to myself. Say something smart. Anything.

"Leo, you are the best!" I yelled at him, a huge smile on my face.

He signed the poster.

Then, his eyes met mine, and he winked.

That was all it took for me to become a complete lunatic. I started screaming hysterically. I jumped in-place, yelling, "He winked at me, he winked at me!" I hugged my poster and cried at the same time. I couldn't help myself. For an entire ten minutes I didn't jumping, yelling, crying, and hugging my poster.

Never did I imagine that I would react like this before a superstar. I love movies, television, and music. I watch the Billboard Awards, the Golden Globes, the Emmys, the Oscars, and the Grammys. But all of this I do as any normal human-being. When I think back to my reaction, I feel embarrassed. I guess you never know how you are going to react in certain situations. Nevertheless, I am never going to forget that spectacular Saturday night. The night I was fortunate enough to get winked at by Leonardo DiCaprio.