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Shutter Island

By [Douglas Keeseey](#)

Douglas Keeseey, author of the Neo-Noir Kamera Book, writes about Martin Scorsese's Shutter Island (2010) Beware spoilers.

1954. US Marshal Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio) is investigating some mysterious goings-on at an institution for the criminally insane in Boston Harbour. For the first part of the film we are with him as his theories about various dark doings seem on the verge of confirmation. But then, for most viewers, the second part seems to unravel Teddy's story, revealing it all to have been an elaborate fiction spun to cover his own guilt over having killed his wife. Teddy, it turns out, is not a hero but the murderer he seeks. Teddy (Edward) Daniels is killer Andrew Laeddis (the former name an anagram to disguise the latter), while the woman whose disappearance from the asylum he has been investigating, Rachel Solando (another anagram), is really his wife Dolores Chanal, whom he made disappear.

This is horrible news for Teddy but a great comfort to us. What a relief to realize that US Intelligence has not hired former Nazis like Dr Naehring (Max von Sydow) to conduct illegal experiments on patients, as the Nazis did on Jews, with the goal of turning men into guiltless killing machines. It is good to know that heads of institutions like the Warden (Ted Levine) - 'If I was to sink my teeth into your eye right now, would you be able to stop me before I blinded you?' - only appear hyper-macho and sadistic in the delusional eyes of paranoid patients like Teddy. And all the doctors, nurses, orderlies and guards who would know about the violence and the illegal experiments and still let them go on - fortunately, they are off the hook, since there is nothing nefarious here. Teddy's best friend, Chuck Aule (Mark Ruffalo), didn't betray him because he's really a doctor just trying to help Teddy get better, and Dr Cawley (Ben Kingsley) doesn't want to cover up any illegal surgeries; in fact, he's trying to dispel Teddy's paranoid delusions through gentle persuasion so that Teddy won't have to undergo a terrible lobotomy. It's just too bad that Teddy won't give up his crazed belief that the Americans around him are capable of and, indeed, committing terrible crimes, so the doctors end up having to give him that lobotomy anyway.

Luckily, it was all in his head - until it wasn't anymore.

Douglas Keeseey's Neo-Noir: From Chinatown to The Dark Knight was just published by Kamera Books.

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