

# X (2022 film)

*X* is a 2022 American slasher film written, directed, produced and edited by Ti West. It stars Mia Goth in dual roles: a young woman named Maxine, and an elderly woman named Pearl. The film also stars Jenna Ortega, Martin Henderson, Brittany Snow, Owen Campbell, Stephen Ure and Scott Mescudi. Set in 1979, the film follows a cast and crew who gather to make a pornographic film on an elderly couple's rural Texas property, but find themselves threatened by the homicidal couple.

A24 announced *X* in November 2020. Principal photography occurred from February 16 to March 16, 2021, primarily in Fordell, New Zealand. Goth underwent extensive prosthetic makeup for Pearl, and special effects were employed to depict violent scenes in the film. Characterized as a contemporary take on psycho-biddy, the film draws inspiration from horror, exploitation, and pornographic films, and emphasizes the interplay between beauty, aging, and self-worth. The score was composed by Tyler Bates and Chelsea Wolfe.

*X* had its world premiere at South by Southwest (SXSW) on March 13, 2022, and was theatrically released in the United States on March 18, 2022, by A24. It received generally positive reviews from critics. The film is the first in a film series of the same name, consisting of a prequel film titled *Pearl* released on September 16, 2022, and a sequel titled *MaXXXine* which is scheduled for release on July 5, 2024.

## Plot

In 1979, police officers arrive on a lonely farm in rural Texas and find numerous dead bodies wrapped in bags. They enter the farmhouse and find something shocking in the basement.

24 hours earlier, aspiring adult film star Maxine is on a trip to shoot a pornographic film with her producer boyfriend Wayne, fellow burlesque dancer Bobby-Lynne, Marine Corps veteran Jackson, director RJ, and RJ's quiet girlfriend Lorraine. The group arrives at a farm owned by Howard and Pearl, an elderly couple who have a guesthouse they rented for the shoot. Howard disapproves of the group, but Wayne excuses this due to not informing Howard of their intentions.

X



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>Ti West</u>
<b>Written by</b>	<u>Ti West</u>
<b>Produced by</b>	<u>Ti West</u> <u>Jacob Jaffke</u> <u>Kevin Turen</u> <u>Harrison Kreiss</u>
<b>Starring</b>	<u>Mia Goth</u> <u>Jenna Ortega</u> <u>Martin Henderson</u> <u>Brittany Snow</u> <u>Owen Campbell</u> <u>Stephen Ure</u> <u>Scott Mescudi</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<u>Eliot Rockett</u>
<b>Edited by</b>	<u>David Kashevaroff</u> <u>Ti West</u>

While Bobby-Lynne and Jackson act out a scene, Pearl invites Maxine into the farmhouse and expresses an unusual fixation on her (as Maxine looks exactly like Pearl when she was young). Howard returns home and Pearl rushes Maxine out, urging her to keep it a secret.

Maxine returns to the guesthouse and shoots a sex scene with Jackson in the barn, as Pearl secretly watches and imagines herself in Maxine's spot. Later, Pearl attempts to seduce Howard but he turns her down, citing heart problems. That night, Lorraine asks to participate in the shoot, upsetting RJ. When everyone is asleep, an angry RJ attempts to drive away and strand the group at the farm, but finds Pearl in the driveway. After he rebuffs her advances, Pearl stabs him to death.

Noticing RJ is missing, Lorraine and Wayne look for him. In the barn, Wayne steps on a large nail and gets killed by Pearl with a pitchfork. Meanwhile, Howard invites Lorraine into their house, claiming Pearl has gone missing. He asks Lorraine to retrieve a flashlight from the basement. When she goes down, Howard locks the door and she discovers a naked male corpse hanging from the ceiling.

Howard goes to the guesthouse and asks Jackson to help find Pearl. When they split up to scout the lake's perimeter, Jackson finds a car submerged in the water. After failing to draw Jackson into the water with his flashlight, Howard confronts him and shoots him in the chest. Meanwhile, Pearl sneaks into the guesthouse, undresses, and climbs into bed with Maxine, caressing her body. Maxine awakens in horror to find Pearl lying next to her, waking Bobby-Lynne.

Back in the house, Lorraine breaks through the basement door with a hatchet but Howard breaks her fingers. Bobby-Lynne finds Pearl standing on the lake's edge and tries to help her. Pearl insults Bobby-Lynne and pushes her into the water where an alligator kills her. Pearl and Howard reunite and enter the guesthouse where they have sex. Maxine escapes to the van and arms herself with a pistol. She frees Lorraine, who runs out the front door, only to be shot by Howard. As the couple moves her body inside the house, Lorraine's corpse twitches, startling Howard and causing him to have a fatal heart attack.

Maxine retrieves the keys to Howard's truck and attempts to shoot Pearl, but the pistol is not loaded. Pearl shoots at Maxine with Howard's gun, but the recoil knocks her back onto the porch, breaking her hip. As Maxine gets into Howard's truck, Pearl berates and insults her. Maxine reverses the truck, crushing Pearl's head before driving away. It is revealed that Maxine is the daughter of a televangelist frequently heard throughout the film. The police discover RJ's camera, with the sheriff speculating that it contains footage of "one goddamn fucked up horror picture."

<b>Music by</b>	<u>Tyler Bates</u> <u>Chelsea Wolfe</u>
<b>Production companies</b>	<u>A24</u> <u>Little Lamb</u> <u>Mad Solar Productions</u>
<b>Distributed by</b>	A24
<b>Release dates</b>	March 13, 2022 ( <u>SXSW</u> ) March 18, 2022 (United States)
<b>Running time</b>	106 minutes <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Country</b>	United States <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$1 million <sup>[3]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$15.1 million <sup>[4]</sup> <sup>[5]</sup>

## Cast

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- Mia Goth as Maxine Minx / Pearl<sup>[6]</sup>
- Jenna Ortega as Lorraine Day
- Brittany Snow as Bobby-Lynne Parker

- Scott Mescudi as Jackson Hole
- Martin Henderson as Wayne Gilroy
- Owen Campbell as RJ Nichols
- Stephen Ure as Howard<sup>[7][8][9]</sup>
- Simon Prast as the televangelist
- James Gaylyn as Sheriff Dentler<sup>[10]</sup>

## Themes and influences

Nate Roscoe of *Fangoria* wrote in an essay on the film that *X* exemplifies a modern take on the psycho-biddy horror subgenre, in which aging or elderly women portray grotesque, violent characters. Roscoe also notes that the film's primary theme revolves around aging, youth, and longing over the past.<sup>[11]</sup> "Snatching its inspo from the shadiest recesses of art and exploitation, it is the relationship between beauty, aging and self-worth that creeps most conspicuously through the architecture of *X*."<sup>[11]</sup> He also notes that the film presents its antagonist—the murderous Pearl—in a manner that is sympathetic, writing that, at moments, "one can't help but feel crushingly sorry for this tragic figure."<sup>[11]</sup>



Mia Goth plays dual roles in the film as Maxine and Pearl.

Critics noted the influence of several films on *X*, with multiple commentators observing homages to the 1974 film *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.<sup>[12][13][14]</sup> Other films cited by critics as having an influence on *X* include *Psycho* (1960), *Hardcore* (1979), *The Shining*, *Alligator* (both 1980),<sup>[13]</sup> and *Boogie Nights* (1997). Richard Roeper wrote that *X* also contains "echoes" of such pornographic films as *Blue Movie* (1969) and *Debbie Does Dallas* (1978).<sup>[12]</sup>

## Production

In November 2020, it was announced that A24 would produce a horror film titled *X*, which would be written and directed by Ti West and star Mia Goth, Scott Mescudi (who also executive produces) and Jenna Ortega.<sup>[15]</sup> In February 2021, Brittany Snow joined the cast.<sup>[16]</sup>

Principal photography took place from February 16 to March 16, 2021, in the Manawatū region of the North Island.<sup>[17][18]</sup>

A number of scenes were shot in and around the city of Whanganui. Production was predominantly based at a farm in the settlement of Fordell, where a large barn was constructed as part of the production.<sup>[19]</sup> Photography also took place near the Rangitikei District town of Bulls, where producers made use of an old town hall.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Special effects

Goth donned extensive prosthetic makeup to portray the elderly Pearl.<sup>[6]</sup> Describing her experience, Goth stated, "It was a good 10 hours in the makeup chair, and then I'd go and do a 12-hour day on set, and the makeup artist, Sarah Rubano, who was incredible, would constantly be touching me up and making sure my contacts were all right and all those sorts of things."<sup>[6]</sup>

The scene in which Pearl stabs RJ in the neck involved the use of a retractable prop knife, a prosthetic neck with a slit in it, and tubing to allow the passage of stage blood through the slit.<sup>[21]</sup> The effect of RJ's subsequent decapitation was accomplished using a dummy head of RJ, with a stunt performer and a false floor; the stunt performer lay on his back, with his head and shoulders beneath the false floor and concealed by a prosthetic upper body.<sup>[21]</sup> The performer then twitched his body during the filming of the scene, which, when paired with the disembodied dummy head, creates the illusion of RJ's body continuing to twitch after death.<sup>[6]</sup> For the scene in which Pearl stabs Wayne in the eyes with a pitchfork, a dummy of Wayne's upper body and head was constructed by the Netherlands-based MimicFX Studio.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Music

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The film's score was composed by Tyler Bates and Chelsea Wolfe, who intended to create a soundtrack with emphasis on synthesizers and vocals.<sup>[22]</sup> Wolfe performed a cover version of "Oui, Oui, Marie" which preceded the soundtrack as a single on March 11, 2022.<sup>[23]</sup> The soundtrack album was released on March 25, 2022, by A24 Music.<sup>[24]</sup>



Chelsea Wolfe and Tyler Bates collaborated on the soundtrack for *X*.

## Release

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### Theatrical

*X* premiered at the 2022 South by Southwest (SXSW) festival on March 13, 2022 and was released in the United States on March 18, 2022.<sup>[25][26]</sup> It is the last film to be distributed by Entertainment One in Spain before the distributor's Spain division was shut down on June 29, 2023, along with its Canadian division shortly before the film's release.<sup>[27]</sup>

The film was re-released in US-based AMC Theatres on October 11, 2023, alongside other A24-distributed films *Under the Skin* (2013), *The Witch* (2015) and *Midsommar* (2019).<sup>[28]</sup>

### Home media

The film was released on video on demand services (including Apple TV, Amazon Prime Video, Google Play, YouTube, and VUDU) on April 14, 2022.<sup>[6][29]</sup> It was released on Blu-ray and DVD on May 24, 2022, by Lionsgate Home Entertainment.<sup>[30][31]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

*X* grossed \$11.8 million in the United States and Canada, and \$3.3 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$15.1 million, making it a box office success against its mere \$1 million budget.<sup>[5][4]</sup>

In the United States and Canada, *X* was released alongside *Jujutsu Kaisen 0*, *The Outfit*, and *Umma*, and was projected to gross \$2–5 million in its opening weekend.<sup>[32]</sup> The film earned \$4.3 million from 2,865 theaters in its opening weekend, finishing fourth.<sup>[33]</sup> Men made up 55% of the audience during its opening, with those in the age range of 18–34 comprising 73% of ticket sales. The ethnic breakdown of the audience showed that 50% were Caucasian, 22% Hispanic and Latino Americans, 12% African American, and 16% Asian or other.<sup>[34]</sup> The film made \$2.2 million in its second weekend and \$1 million in its third.<sup>[35][36]</sup> It dropped out of the box office top ten in its fourth weekend with \$359,067 (a drop of 65%).<sup>[37]</sup>

## Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, the film has an approval rating of 93% based on 225 reviews, with an average rating of 7.7/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "A fresh spin on the classic slasher formula, *X* marks the spot where Ti West gets resoundingly back to his horror roots."<sup>[38]</sup> On Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, the film has a score of 80 out of 100 based on 35 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".<sup>[39]</sup> Audiences polled by PostTrak gave the film a 68% positive score, with 45% saying they would definitely recommend it.<sup>[34]</sup>

Reviewing the film following its SXSW premiere, Owen Gleiberman of *Variety* called it "a deliberate, loving, and meticulous homage" to 1974's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, as well as "a wily and entertaining slow-motion ride of terror that earns its shocks, along with its singular quease factor, which relates to the fact that the demons here are ancient specimens of humanity who actually have a touch of... humanity."<sup>[13]</sup> John DeFore of *The Hollywood Reporter* commended the film's cast and noted that, "Before the gore begins (and even mid-action), West seems to truly consider the pain of irretrievable youth, and feel for those whose final years are consumed by it."<sup>[40]</sup> *The A.V. Club*'s Todd Gilchrist gave the film a grade of "B+", writing that it "examines the way that youth in others seems to bring out the feeling and impact of age in ourselves, not to mention how we resist or respond to that when it happens," and calling it "bloody, ballsy fun".<sup>[41]</sup> Abby Olcese, writing for *RogerEbert.com*, gave the film a score of three out of four stars, concluding: "*X* is plenty of fun; it also feels like a trifle that could easily have been much more."<sup>[7]</sup>

Upon release, *The Atlantic*'s David Sims called the film "a modern classic", comparing it with 2022's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which he felt failed creatively compared to *X*.<sup>[42]</sup> Richard Roeper of the *Chicago Sun-Times* awarded the film three-and-a-half out of four stars, calling it "the kind of movie that has you reeling in disgust at certain moments, then laughing at the blood-spattered absurdity of it all. It's a new twist on the period-piece slasher movie, smart and strange and fantastically depraved."<sup>[12]</sup> A.O. Scott, in a review of the film for *The New York Times*, wrote that *X* "isn't shy about appealing to voyeurism. There's nothing coy or arty about the bloodletting. [...] West, unlike his pornographers, has things to say as well as bodies to show. Most of all, he has an aesthetic that isn't all about terror or titillation. *X* is full of dreamy, haunting overhead shots and moments of surprising tenderness."<sup>[43]</sup>

Valerie Complex of *Deadline Hollywood* referred to the film as "a new love letter to the slasher film genre", writing: "I give West credit for having a vision and sticking to his influences. He knows what he wants to do and how to execute it unapologetically. *X* is surface-level entertainment [...] but still a satisfying piece of indie horror filmmaking that's worth taking a chance on."<sup>[44]</sup> Dmitry Samarov of the *Chicago Reader* gave the film a mostly negative review, writing that "even the most casual horror fan won't miss" the references

that *X* makes to 1974's *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but that, "unlike Tobe Hooper's masterpiece, which has a point to make about economic desperation and cultural clash in 70s America, West just wants to punish everyone involved in gory ways played for laughs."<sup>[14]</sup>

## Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>MTV Movie &amp; TV Awards</u>	<u>June 5, 2022</u>	<u>Most Frightened Performance</u>	Mia Goth	Nominated	<sup>[45]</sup>
<u>Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Film Awards</u>	<u>July 1, 2022</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	X	Nominated	<sup>[46]</sup>
		<u>Best Horror</u>		Nominated	
		<u>Best Indie Film</u>		Nominated	
<u>Saturn Awards</u>	<u>October 25, 2022</u>	<u>Best Horror Film</u>		Nominated	<sup>[47]</sup>
<u>Hollywood Music in Media Awards</u>	<u>November 16, 2022</u>	<u>Best Music Supervision — Film</u>	Joe Rudge	Nominated	<sup>[48]</sup>
<u>North Texas Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 18, 2022</u>	<u>Best Newcomer</u>	<u>Jenna Ortega</u>	Nominated	<sup>[49]</sup>
<u>Sunset Circle Awards</u>	<u>November 29, 2022</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	Mia Goth (also nominee for <i>Pearl</i> )	Nominated	<sup>[50]</sup>
		<u>Best Horror Film</u>	X	Won	
		<u>Five Fire Directors</u>	Ti West (also nominee for <i>Pearl</i> )	Nominated	
<u>Boston Society of Film Critics</u>	<u>December 11, 2022</u>	<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Eliot Rockett (also for <i>Pearl</i> )	Won	<sup>[51]</sup>
<u>St. Louis Gateway Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 18, 2022</u>	<u>Best Horror Film</u>	X	Nominated	<sup>[52]</sup>
<u>Austin Film Critics Association</u>	<u>January 10, 2023</u>	<u>Breakthrough Artist Award</u>	Jenna Ortega (also nominee for <i>The Fallout</i> , <i>Scream</i> and <i>Studio 666</i> )	Won	<sup>[53]</sup>
<u>Seattle Film Critics Society</u>	<u>January 17, 2023</u>	<u>Best Villain</u>	Pearl (portrayed by Mia Goth) (also nominee for <i>Pearl</i> )	Nominated	<sup>[54]</sup>
<u>Hollywood Critics Association Awards</u>	<u>February 24, 2023</u>	<u>Best Horror Film</u>	X	Nominated	<sup>[55]</sup>

## Related works

In March 2022, it was revealed that a prequel film, *Pearl*, was secretly shot back-to-back with the first film. West directed and co-wrote the film with Goth.<sup>[56]</sup> Principal photography took place in New Zealand, and upon official announcement was already in the post-production stage. Goth reprises her role as a younger-aged *Pearl*. A24 produced the project, with Jacob Jaffke, Harrison Kreiss and Kevin Turen serving as

producers, and West, Goth, Mescudi and Sam Levinson as executive producers.<sup>[57]</sup> A sneak preview was also shown in *X*'s post-credits scene for North American releases only. *Pearl* was released theatrically in North America on September 16, 2022, approximately six months after the release of *X*.<sup>[58]</sup>

A third installment in the series, *MaXXXine*, was announced shortly before the release of *Pearl*. It will focus on the Maxine character in 1980s Los Angeles, following the events depicted in *X*.<sup>[59]</sup>

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