

Asteroid City

Asteroid City (or "***Asteroid City***") is a 2023 American comedy-drama film written, directed, and produced by Wes Anderson, from a story he wrote with Roman Coppola. It features an ensemble cast, including Jason Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Jeffrey Wright, Tilda Swinton, Bryan Cranston, Edward Norton, Adrien Brody, Liev Schreiber, Hope Davis, Steve Park, Rupert Friend, Maya Hawke, Steve Carell, Matt Dillon, Hong Chau, Willem Dafoe, Margot Robbie, Tony Revolori, Jake Ryan, and Jeff Goldblum. Its plot is mostly concerned with a play of the events of a Junior Stargazer convention in a retrofuturistic version of 1955, but it becomes metatextual because the making of the play is the subject of a television documentary.^[6] It is Anderson's homage to popular memory and mythology about extraterrestrials and UFOs witnessed in the American Southwestern desert in close proximity to atomic test sites during the postwar period of the 20th century.

The project was announced in September 2020 as an untitled romance film, with Anderson writing, producing and directing, alongside Jeremy Dawson of American Empirical Pictures and Steven Rales of Indian Paintbrush. In February 2021, it was described as being about a "group of brainy teenagers". Originally set for Rome, filming took place in Chinchón, Spain, between August and October, 2021, with cinematographer Robert D. Yeoman. Several sets resembling a desert landscape and a mock train station were used. Post-production included editor Barney Pilling and a musical score composed by frequent Anderson composer Alexandre Desplat, featuring country and western songs from many artists. The official title for *Asteroid City* was revealed in October 2021 at the BFI London Film Festival.

Asteroid City premiered at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 23, 2023, where it competed for the Palme d'Or. It began a limited theatrical release through Focus Features in the United States on June 16, 2023, expanding to a wide release a week later.^[7] It grossed \$54 million worldwide on a \$25 million budget,^[8] and received generally positive reviews.

Plot

Asteroid City



Theatrical release poster

Directed by Wes Anderson

Screenplay by Wes Anderson

Story by Wes Anderson
 Roman Coppola

Produced by Wes Anderson
 Steven Rales
 Jeremy Dawson

Starring Jason Schwartzman
 Scarlett Johansson
 Tom Hanks
 Jeffrey Wright
 Tilda Swinton
 Bryan Cranston
 Edward Norton
 Adrien Brody
 Liev Schreiber

In a retro-futuristic version of the 1950s, a television host introduces a documentary about the creation and production of *Asteroid City*, a play by the famed playwright Conrad Earp. The play's events are depicted in widescreen and stylized color, while the television special is seen in black-and-white Academy ratio.

In the play, a youth astronomy convention is held in the fictional desert town of Asteroid City. War photojournalist Augie Steenbeck arrives early to the Junior Stargazer convention with Woodrow, his intellectual teenage son, and his three younger daughters. When their car breaks down, Augie phones his father-in-law, Stanley, asking for his help. Stanley, who dislikes his son-in-law, persuades him to tell the children about their mother's recent death, which Augie had concealed. Augie and Woodrow meet Midge Campbell, a famous but world-weary actress, and her daughter Dinah, who, like Woodrow, will be honored at the convention. Augie and Midge, and Woodrow and Dinah, gradually fall in love throughout the play. The other convention participants arrive: five-star General Grif Gibson, astronomer Dr. Hickenlooper, three additional teenaged honorees (Clifford, Shelly, and Ricky) and their parents (J.J., Sandy, and Roger), a busload of elementary-school children chaperoned by young teacher June Douglas, and a cowboy band led by singer Montana. A local motel provides everyone's accommodations.

Gibson welcomes the attendees at the Asteroid City crater where the teenagers are to receive awards for various inventions. A UFO suddenly appears above the crater; an alien emerges and steals the remnant of the meteorite that created the crater, which Augie manages to photograph. Gibson, with instructions from the president, places the town under military quarantine, and everyone is subjected to medical and psychiatric examinations. Meanwhile, a romance blossoms between Montana and June, who assure the students that the alien is likely peaceful. The Stargazer honorees use Dr. Hickenlooper's equipment to attempt to contact the alien. Tricking the guard watching the pay phone, Ricky calls his school newspaper to relay the quarantine details and cover-up to the outside world.

The Asteroid City events become national news. A furious Gibson is about to be forced to end the quarantine when the UFO reappears, dropping the meteorite back into its former position; the General sees new markings on it and deduces that it has been "inventoried." Gibson then reinstates the quarantine; the children, scientists, and parents revolt, using the honorees' inventions to overpower the military. In the play's epilogue, Augie and his family are the last to leave Asteroid City after Gibson officially lifts the quarantine. Woodrow reveals he has won the fellowship funding, and Midge leaves Augie her mailing address. Augie and his family quietly drive away.

	<u>Hope Davis</u> <u>Stephen Park</u> <u>Rupert Friend</u> <u>Maya Hawke</u> <u>Steve Carell</u> <u>Matt Dillon</u> <u>Hong Chau</u> <u>Willem Dafoe</u> <u>Margot Robbie</u> <u>Tony Revolori</u> <u>Jake Ryan</u> <u>Jeff Goldblum</u>
Cinematography	<u>Robert Yeoman</u>
Edited by	<u>Barney Pilling</u>
Music by	<u>Alexandre Desplat</u>
Production companies	<u>American Empirical Pictures</u> <u>Indian Paintbrush</u>
Distributed by	<u>Focus Features</u> (United States) <u>Universal Pictures</u> <u>International</u> (international) ^[1]
Release dates	May 23, 2023 (Cannes) June 16, 2023 (United States)
Running time	105 minutes ^[2]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$25 million ^[3]
Box office	\$54 million ^{[4][5]}

Throughout the film, the play's creation is interspersed with the play itself in the television documentary. Some time after Conrad Earp started writing, he meets with actor Jones Hall, who performs an audition in Earp's home and is immediately cast. During the same interaction, Earp and Hall kiss, establishing their relationship as lovers. Earp writes the play with help from a local acting school and recruits most cast members from it, including Mercedes Ford, a temperamental yet talented actress who plays Midge.

During the recorded performance of the play, Hall, who plays Augie, confronts the play's director Schubert Green, saying he "still doesn't understand the play", and asks Green if he is "doing him right". Green tells Hall to keep playing Augie the same way despite being uncertain, and that he is doing him right. After that interaction, while taking a smoke break on a balcony, Hall runs into the actress who was cast to play Augie's wife before her only scene was cut. She recites the deleted scene's text to him, and he appears to gain new insight from it.

Six months into the play's run, Conrad Earp dies in an automobile accident.

Cast

- Jason Schwartzman as
 - Augie Steenbeck,^[9] a war photojournalist and Woodrow's father
 - Jones Hall, the actor playing Steenbeck
- Scarlett Johansson as
 - Midge Campbell,^[10] a famous but disillusioned actress and Dinah's mother
 - Mercedes Ford, the actress playing Campbell
- Tom Hanks as Stanley Zak,^[11] Augie's father-in-law who dislikes him
- Jeffrey Wright as General Grif Gibson,^[12] a Five-star general who serves as the host of the Junior Stargazer convention
- Tilda Swinton as Dr. Hickenlooper,^[13] a scientist at a local observatory
- Bryan Cranston as the unnamed host of an anthology television series that the production is being broadcast on ^[12]
- Edward Norton as Conrad Earp,^[1] a legendary playwright
- Adrien Brody as Schubert Green,^[14] a director who's in charge of the televised production
- Liev Schreiber as J.J. Kellogg,^[12] Clifford's father
- Hope Davis as Sandy Borden,^[12] Shelly's mother
- Stephen Park as
 - Roger Cho,^[15] Ricky's father
 - Linus Mao, the actor playing Cho
- Rupert Friend^[9] as
 - Montana, a singing cowboy interested in June
 - Asquith Eden, the actor playing Montana
- Maya Hawke^[16] as
 - June Douglas, a young schoolteacher who is interested in Montana
 - Lucretia Shaver, the actress playing Douglas
- Steve Carell^[17] as a motel manager

- Matt Dillon as
 - A mechanic^[18]
 - Walter Geronimo, the actor playing the mechanic
- Hong Chau as Polly,^[19] Schubert's wife
- Willem Dafoe as Salzburg Keitel,^[1] a revered and extremely dedicated acting teacher
- Margot Robbie^[20] as
 - Steenbeck's deceased wife and Zak's daughter
 - the actress playing the wife
- Tony Revolori as Gen. Gibson's aide-de-camp^[21]
- Jake Ryan as
 - Woodrow,^[22] Steenbeck's son and Zak's grandson, and a Junior Stargazer winner
 - the understudy for the character of Woodrow
- Grace Edwards as Dinah,^[1] Midge's daughter, and a Junior Stargazer awardee who develops a relationship with Woodrow
- Aristou Meehan as Clifford, J.J.'s son, and a Junior Stargazer awardee^[1]
- Sophia Lillis as Shelly, Sandy's daughter, and a Junior Stargazer awardee^[23]
- Ethan Josh Lee as Ricky,^[1] Roger's son, and a Junior Stargazer awardee who reports on the Alien^[24]
- Jeff Goldblum^[12] as the alien
- Kim Keukeleire as the puppeteer for the alien^[25]
- Fisher Stevens as Detective 1^[26]
- Rita Wilson^[1] as Mrs. Weatherford
- Jarvis Cocker^[27] as a cowboy
- Bob Balaban^[28] as Larkings Executive
- Seu Jorge^[29] as a cowboy
- Deanna Dunagan^[30] as a waitress

Bill Murray was originally cast as the motel manager, but had to drop out of the role due to being infected with COVID-19, leading to Carrell playing the part instead. However, after his recovery, he arrived at the film set in Spain, and while Anderson could not add another role to the film, he gave Murray the role of Tab Whitney, the actor playing Jock Larkings, business titan of the company bearing his name, which was an additional character created for a short promotional film trailer.^[31]

Production

Development and casting

In September 2020, it was reported Wes Anderson would write and direct a romance film, which he would produce with Jeremy Dawson of American Empirical Pictures and Steven Rales of Indian Paintbrush.^{[32][33]} By February 2021, Michael Cera and Jeff Goldblum entered negotiations to star; the film was then described as being about a "group of brainy teenagers".^[34] Tilda Swinton was the first person to officially join the cast, in June 2021.^[13] In May 2023, Anderson talked about how the COVID-19

pandemic inspired the film and its story, saying: "I don't think there would be a quarantine in the story if we weren't experiencing it. It wasn't deliberate...Writing is the most improvisational part of the whole process. It relies on having nothing."^[35]

Filming

Principal photography, originally planned for Rome, took place in Spain between August and October 2021, with COVID-19 safety precautions in place.^{[20][36][35]} Several sets were built in Chinchón, including a vast diorama resembling a desert landscape with the eponymous town of Asteroid City, including its train station, a diner, a garage and an observatory.^{[37][38]} Cast member Fisher Stevens said the film would include "the wildest cast since *The Bridge on the River Kwai*" and that the cast and crew "were all bubbled together in a hotel, which was an old monastery".^[39]

Scarlett Johansson was paid \$4,131 a week for her two months of work.^[40]

Post-production

The film's title was revealed by Bill Murray to be *Asteroid City* at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2021.^[41] Alexandre Desplat composed the score, his sixth collaboration with Anderson.^[42] Costume design was by multiple Academy Award winner Milena Canonero.^[43] In July 2022, it was announced that Focus Features would distribute the film, reuniting them with Anderson after *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012).^[1] It was also revealed that Murray would not be in the film as initially reported,^[44] as a result of contracting COVID-19 before he could shoot his scenes, leading to him being replaced by Steve Carell for the role of the motel manager.^[45]

Music

Marketing

A teaser poster for *Asteroid City* was released on March 28, 2023. The first trailer was released the following day, which featured a rendition of Johnny Duncan's 1957 song "Last Train to San Fernando".^[46] Jazz Monroe of *Pitchfork* called the trailer "extremely Andersonian", while Charles Pulliam-Moore of *The Verge* wrote that the film "looks and feels exactly how you'd think a Wes Anderson coming-of-age movie about stargazing in the desert would".^{[47][48]}



The *Asteroid City* immersive exhibition in London

Release

Asteroid City premiered at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 23, 2023.^[49] It was given a limited theatrical release in New York City and Los Angeles in the United States on June 16, 2023, expanding to a wide release on June 23, 2023.^[7] It had an earlier premiere in Sweden and a limited number of other countries on June 9, 2023.^[50]

Home media

Asteroid City was released digitally on July 11, 2023, two and a half weeks after its theatrical premiere.^[51] A DVD and Blu-ray were released on August 15, 2023.^[52] It began streaming on Peacock on August 11, 2023.^[53] It is available on Prime Video with the default subscription.



The cast of *Asteroid City* at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival

MPA rating

In the United States, the Motion Picture Association (MPA) initially gave the film an R-rating "for brief graphic nudity".^[54] Focus Features successfully appealed the decision, and the film was re-rated PG-13 "for brief graphic nudity, smoking, and some suggestive material".^[55]

Reception

Box office

Asteroid City grossed \$28.2 million in the United States and Canada, and \$25.8 million in other territories, for a worldwide gross of \$54 million.^{[4][56]}

In its limited opening weekend, it made \$853,382 from six theaters, finishing in tenth. Its per-venue average of \$142,230 was the best total since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the largest since *La La Land* in 2016.^{[57][58]} Expanding to 1,675 theaters in its second weekend, it was projected to gross \$7–8 million.^[59] It made \$3.8 million on its first day of wide release, including \$1.1 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to make \$9 million, finishing sixth.^[60] It also had the highest opening for a Wes Anderson film in wide release.^[61] *Asteroid City* completed its theatrical run in the United States and Canada on September 7, 2023.^[62]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 75% of 345 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Asteroid City* is unlikely to win Wes Anderson many new converts, but those who respond to his signature style will find this a return to immaculately arranged form."^[63] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 75 out of 100, based on 60 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[64] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "B" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak reported 78% of filmgoers gave it a positive score, with 51% saying they would definitely recommend it.^[60]

In *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw called *Asteroid City* "terrifically entertaining and lightly sophisticated". and wrote: "The movie rattles cleverly and exhilaratingly along, adroitly absorbing the implications of pathos and loneliness without allowing itself to slow down. It is tempting to consider this savant blankness as some kind of symptom, but I really don't think so: it is the expression of style. And what style it is".^[65] John Nugent of *Empire* commended the film's unique visual and narrative style, writing: "[Anderson] remains cinema's most astonishing stylist, the rigour and detail in every frame never better", but warned: "It is occasionally a bit unfocused, and always a bit indulgent. If you don't like The Wes Anderson Film, you won't like this. But we others must hope he keeps making it."^[66]

In his review for *Vulture*, Bilge Ebiri wrote: "To the casual observer, Wes Anderson might seem like someone who either refuses to read his own press or has bought into his press to an absurd degree", alluding to criticism of Anderson's filmmaking style, but later argued: "There's a point to all this indulgence. Anderson's obsessively constructed dioramas explore the very human need to organize, quantify, and control our lives in the face of the unexpected and the uncertain [...] *Asteroid City* might be the purest expression of this dynamic because it's about the unknown in all its forms."^[67] Owen Gleiberman of *Variety* found the film similar to the "fussy, top-heavy, narratively batty yet stretched-thin concoctions" he saw in *The Darjeeling Limited* and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, and concluded: "*Asteroid City* looks smashing, but as a movie it's for Anderson die-hards only, and maybe not even too many of them."^[68]

In his review for *The New Yorker*, Anthony Lane highlighted Johansson's performance as what "cracks the movie's ordered surface", and wrote: "Even if you regard the latest movie as a box of tricks, you have to admire the nerve with which Johansson, as Midge, delves into that box and plucks out scraps of coolly agonized wit. More deftly than anyone else, she traffics in the to-and-fro between the real and the imagined".^[69] Adam Mullins-Khatib of the *Chicago Reader* hailed the film as "a true achievement from one of America's most unique cinematic voices", complimenting Anderson's direction and screenplay, as well as the cast's performances.^[70]

Asteroid City received a wide variety of negative reviews, including one article on *Screen Rant* which collated negative sentiments from a variety of sources.^[71] A *BBC* review was entitled "Even Wes Anderson fans may be irritated by this 'empty' and 'cartoonish' film," stating, "...at no point does [Anderson] allow us to settle into any narrative in particular."^[72] *Variety Magazine* labeled *Asteroid City* as one of the worst movies of 2023, saying " ...[in this] claustrophobic dud of a movie, Anderson triples down on his fetishistic yet oppressive way of engineering a story, even as his most ardent fans triple down on their devotion to the idea that he's somehow expressing an arch humanity. This one, we kept hearing, is actually an aria of 'grief,' though the only grief I felt was that of being trapped in a stylized panorama so insistent it's become a form of OCD."^[73]

A review in the *Alton Telegraph* entitled, "'Asteroid City' script lacks direction and plot," said, "'Asteroid City' made no sense. The script was mind-numbing. I saw several people nod off because they were bored."^[74] *Time Magazine's* review was titled "Asteroid City Is Too Stiff and Stylized—Even for a Wes Anderson Movie, " saying "Wes Anderson's *Asteroid City* is what happens when a filmmaker's world of wonder and whimsy becomes a prison."^[75]

Accolades

The film appeared on multiple critics' lists of the best films of 2023, including:

- 2nd – *The New Yorker*^[76]
- 2nd – *Esquire*^[77]
- 3rd – *IndieWire*^[78]
- 3rd - *IGN*^[79]
- 4th – *The Atlantic*^[80]
- 5th – *RogerEbert.com*^[81]
- 6th – *The New York Times*^[82]
- 7th – *The Independent*^[83]

- 8th - *The Film Stage*^[84]
- 9th – *Vulture*^[85]
- 10th – *Vanity Fair*^[86]
- 10th – *IndieWire*^[87]
- 11th – *Slant Magazine*^[88]
- 13th – *Sight and Sound*^[89]
- 15th – *Mashable*^[90]

Awards and nominations

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>ADG Excellence in Production Design Awards</u>	February 10, 2024	<u>Excellence in Production Design for a Period Film</u>	<u>Adam Stockhausen</u>	Nominated	[91]
<u>Artios Awards</u>	March 7, 2024	<u>Outstanding Achievement in Casting – Big Budget Feature (Comedy)</u>	Douglas Aibel, Jina Jay, Matthew Glasner	Nominated	[92]
<u>Astra Film Awards</u>	February 26, 2023	<u>Best Production Design</u>	<u>Adam Stockhausen</u>	Nominated	[93]
<u>Boston Society of Film Critics Awards</u>	December 10, 2023	<u>Best Ensemble Cast</u>	<i>Asteroid City</i>	Runner-up	[94]
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	<u>Robert D. Yeoman</u>	Runner-up	
<u>Cannes Film Festival</u>	May 27, 2023	<u>Palme d'Or</u>	<u>Wes Anderson</u>	Nominated	[95] [96]
<u>Chicago Film Critics Association Awards</u>	December 12, 2023	<u>Best Art Direction/Production Design</u>	<u>Adam Stockhausen</u>	Nominated	[97]
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	<u>Robert D. Yeoman</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	<u>Milena Canonero</u>	Nominated	
<u>Critics' Choice Awards</u>	January 14, 2024	<u>Best Production Design</u>	<u>Adam Stockhausen</u>	Nominated	[98]
<u>Critics' Choice Super Awards</u>	April 4, 2024	<u>Best Science Fiction/Fantasy Movie</u>	<i>Asteroid City</i>	Nominated	[99]
<u>Columbus Film Critics Association</u>	January 4, 2023	<u>Best Ensemble</u>	<i>Asteroid City</i>	Nominated	[100]
		<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	<u>Wes Anderson & Roman Coppola</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Frank Gabrenya Award for Best Comedy</u>	<i>Asteroid City</i>	Nominated	
		<u>Actor of the Year (for an exemplary body of work)</u>	<u>Willem Dafoe, also for Poor Things, Inside and The Boy and the Heron</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Actor of the Year (for an exemplary body of work)</u>	<u>Jeffrey Wright, also for American Fiction and Rustin</u>	Runner-up	

Florida Film Critics Circle	December 21, 2023	Best Ensemble	Asteroid City	Runner-up	[101] [102]
		Best Director	Wes Anderson	Nominated	
		Best Original Screenplay	Wes Anderson	Runner-up	
		Best Art Direction/Production Design	Adam Stockhausen	Won	
Greater Western New York Film Critics Association Awards	January 6, 2024	Best Picture	Asteroid City	Nominated	[103]
Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Film Awards	June 30, 2023	Best Picture	Asteroid City	Nominated	[104]
		Best Supporting Actress	Scarlett Johansson	Nominated	
		Best Screenplay	Wes Anderson	Nominated	
Hollywood Music in Media Awards	November 15, 2023	Best Original Score – Sci-Fi/Fantasy Film	Alexandre Desplat	Nominated	[105]
Indiana Film Journalists Association	December 18, 2023	Best Picture	Asteroid City	Nominated	[106]
		Best Original Screenplay	Wes Anderson & Roman Coppola	Nominated	
		Best Ensemble Acting	Asteroid City	Nominated	
		Best Cinematography	Robert D. Yeoman	Nominated	
		Best Musical Score	Alexandre Desplat	Nominated	
IndieWire Critics Poll	December 11, 2023	Best Film	Asteroid City	10th Place	[107]
		Best Director	Wes Anderson	8th Place	
		Best Screenplay	Wes Anderson and Roman Coppola	10th Place	
Las Vegas Film Critics Society Awards	December 13, 2023	Best Art Direction	Adam Stockhausen	Nominated	[108]
		Youth in Film - Male	Jake Ryan	Nominated	
Manaki Brothers Film Festival	September 29, 2023	Golden Camera 300	Robert D. Yeoman	Nominated	[109]
London Critics Circle Film Awards	February 24, 2023	Best British/Irish Performer of the Year	Tilda Swinton	Nominated ^[a]	[110]
North Texas Film Critics Association	December 18, 2023	Gary Murray Award for Best Ensemble	Asteroid City	Nominated	[111]
		Best Cinematography	Robert D. Yeoman	Nominated	
Online Association of Female Film Critics	December 21, 2023	Best Costume Design	Milena Canonero	Nominated	[112]
People's Choice Awards	February 18, 2024	The Comedy Movie of the Year	Asteroid City	Nominated	[113]
		The Comedy Movie Star of the Year	Scarlett Johansson	Nominated	
Phoenix Critics Circle	December 15, 2023	Best Comedy Film	Asteroid City	Nominated	[114]
		Best Science Fiction Film	Asteroid City	Nominated	
San Francisco Bay Area Film Critics	January 9, 2024	Best Production Design	Adam Stockhausen	Nominated	[115]

Circle Awards					
Seattle Film Critics Society	January 8, 2024	Best Ensemble Cast	<i>Asteroid City</i>	Nominated	[116]
		Best Cinematography	Robert D. Yeoman	Runner-up	
		Best Art Direction/Production Design	Adam Stockhausen	Nominated	
Washington DC Area Film Critics Association Awards	December 10, 2023	Best Production Design	Adam Stockhausen & Kris Moran	Nominated	[117]
Minnesota Film Critics Alliance	February 4,	Best Ensemble	<i>Asteroid City</i>	Nominated	[118]

Notes

a. Also for *The Eternal Daughter* and *The Killer*

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External links

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 - *Asteroid City* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14230388/>) at [IMDb](#)
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