

***Black Flies*** (Released in some countries as ***Asphalt City***) is a 2023 American thriller drama film directed by Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire and written by Ryan King and Ben Mac Brown, based on the 2008 novel *Black Flies* by Shannon Burke. It stars Sean Penn, Tye Sheridan, Gbenga Akinnagbe, Raquel Nave, Kali Reis, Michael Pitt, Katherine Waterston, and Mike Tyson.

The film premiered at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 18, 2023. It was released theatrically by Roadside Attractions and Vertical on March 29, 2024.

## Premise

Rookie paramedic Ollie Cross hopes to pass the Medical College Admission Test and become a doctor. The film follows his partnership with veteran paramedic Gene Rutkovsky as they serve the people of New York City.

## Cast

- Tye Sheridan as Cross<sup>[3]</sup>
- Michael Pitt as Lafontaine<sup>[4]</sup>
- Sean Penn as Gene Rutkovsky<sup>[5]</sup>
- Mike Tyson as Chief Burroughs<sup>[6]</sup>
- Gbenga Akinnagbe as Verdis
- Raquel Nave as Clara<sup>[7]</sup>
- Katherine Waterston as Nancy<sup>[8]</sup>
- Kali Reis as Nia Brown<sup>[9]</sup>

## Production

In December 2018, Ryan King's screenplay *Black Flies*, based on the 2008 novel of the same name by Shannon Burke, was featured on the Black List, an annual survey of the most-liked yet unproduced scripts of the year.<sup>[10]</sup> By February 2019, Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire came on board to direct, with Mel Gibson and Tye Sheridan in final negotiations to star.<sup>[3]</sup> In February 2021, Sean Penn replaced Gibson in one of the lead roles and was reported that Open Road Films had acquired the U.S. distribution rights.<sup>[5]</sup> Katherine Waterston, Michael Pitt, Mike Tyson, and Raquel Nave were announced to star in the following months.

Asphalt City	
<span></span> <div>Theatrical release poster</div>	
Directed by	<u>Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Ryan King</u> <div><u>Ben Mac Brown</u></div>
Based on	<i>Black Flies</i> by <u>Shannon Burke</u>
Produced by	<u>Warren Goz</u> <div><u>Eric Gold</u><div><u>Christopher Kopp</u><div><u>Lucan Toh</u><div><u>Sean Penn</u><div><u>John Ira Palmer</u><div><u>John Wildermuth</u><div><u>Tye Sheridan</u><div><u>Tina Wang</u></div></div></div></div></div></div></div></div>
Starring	<u>Sean Penn</u>

Filming began in May 2022 in New York City with cinematographer David Ungaro.<sup>[8][4]</sup> It was produced by Sculptor Media, FilmNation Entertainment and Projected Picture Works.<sup>[7][4][11]</sup>

## Release

The film had its world premiere as *Black Flies* at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 18, 2023, where it competed for the Palme d'Or.<sup>[12]</sup> The film was originally set to be released in the United States by Open Road Films.<sup>[13]</sup>

In January 2024, Vertical and Roadside Attractions acquired North American rights to the film, which was renamed *Asphalt City*, and released it exclusively in theaters on March 29.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Reception

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 43% of 47 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.6/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Asphalt City* can be commended for trying to highlight the unforgiving nature of EMT work, but the unrelentingly grim end results prove a punishing watch."<sup>[15]</sup> Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 47 out of 100, based on 15 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.<sup>[16]</sup>

Eric Ortiz Garcia of Screen Anarchy wrote that the film "finds its power reflecting the brutal level of stress inherent in this profession ... Sauvaire makes his mission explicit: to raise awareness about those paramedics who are completely overwhelmed. That's something the filmmaker achieves."<sup>[17]</sup> Tori Brazier of Metro wrote, "*Black Flies* is a grim tale, and not a recommended watch for the more delicate cinema fan, but its message and lack of subtlety certainly hit home."<sup>[18]</sup>

Pete Hammond of Deadline wrote that the film had a "game cast and nice mostly handheld camera work by David Ungaro" but that it failed to offer anything new, and repeated plot points already covered in Martin Scorsese's *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999).<sup>[19]</sup> David Ehrlich of IndieWire wrote, "*Black Flies* is such an unrelentingly bleak look inside the busted gut of the American healthcare system that its posturing honesty soon curdles into something that's hard to believe."<sup>[20]</sup>

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	<div><div><div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Tye Sheridan</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Gbenga</div></div></div><div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Akinnagbe</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Raquel Nave</div></div></div><div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Kali Reis</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Michael Pitt</div></div></div><div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Katherine</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Waterston</div></div></div><div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Mike Tyson</div></div></div></div></div>
Cinematography	<div><div><div><span></span></div><div>David Ungaro</div></div></div>
Edited by	<div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Saar Klein</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Katherine McQuerrey</div></div></div>
Music by	<div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Nicolas Becker</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Quentin Sirjacq</div></div></div>
Production companies	<div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Sculptor Media</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>FilmNation</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Entertainment</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Projected</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Picture Works</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>AZA Films</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Two &amp; Two</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Pictures</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Dogwood</div></div><div><div><span></span></div><div>Pictures</div></div></div>

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## External links

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- *Asphalt City* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9663896/>) at IMDb
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