

Possessor (film)

Possessor is a 2020 science fiction psychological horror film^[5] written and directed by Brandon Cronenberg. It stars Andrea Riseborough and Christopher Abbott, with Rossif Sutherland, Tuppence Middleton, Sean Bean, and Jennifer Jason Leigh in supporting roles. Riseborough portrays an assassin who performs her assignments through possessing the bodies of other individuals, but finds herself fighting to control the body of her current host (Abbott).

The film had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on January 25, 2020, and was released in the United States and Canada on October 2, 2020, by Neon and Elevation Pictures, while Signature Entertainment distributed the United Kingdom release on November 27, 2020. It received positive reviews, with praise for its originality and Riseborough and Abbott's performances.

Plot

In an alternate 2008, Tasya Vos is an assassin who takes control of other people's bodies to carry out her hits. Through an implant installed in the unwitting host's brain, Vos' consciousness is inserted into their minds. She returns to her own body by forcing the host to commit suicide at the end of the job, although the movie's intro sequence has her deviate from her protocol and struggling to commit suicide by her own gun, getting the host shot by shooting at arriving police forces instead.

Vos struggles with neurological symptoms and increasing detachment from her own identity and cannot fully separate her work from her interactions with her husband, Michael, and son, Ira. She "practices" assuming her normal persona the same way she practices impersonating her hosts. Thoughts of violence haunt her domestic life, such as when putting Ira to bed and having sex with Michael.

Vos' handler, retired assassin Girder, is critical of her desire to remain connected to her family and expresses the belief that Vos would be a better killer without personal attachments. In a debriefing session meant to reconnect her with her real identity,

Possessor



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Brandon Cronenberg
Written by	Brandon Cronenberg
Produced by	Fraser Ash <div></div> Niv Fichman <div></div> Kevin Krikst <div></div> Andrew Starke
Starring	Andrea Riseborough <div></div> Christopher Abbott <div></div> Rossif Sutherland <div></div> Tuppence Middleton <div></div> Sean Bean <div></div> Jennifer Jason Leigh
Cinematography	Karim Hussain
Edited by	Matthew Hannam
Music by	Jim Williams

Vos sorts through a series of objects associated with personal memories and pauses on a butterfly that she pinned and framed as a child. She tells Girder she feels guilty for killing it.

Despite her fragile mental state and fatigue, Vos agrees to perform a major hit on wealthy CEO John Parse and his daughter, Ava, by possessing Ava's fiancé, Colin Tate. While assuming the host's life, the neurological symptoms worsen, but Vos hides this during her handler's check-ins. The hit is only a partial success as Ava dies, but not Parse.

Vos attempts to finish the job per protocol by forcing Tate to shoot himself, but again cannot make him pull the trigger. During a dissociative break, in which Vos struggles to remain in control of Tate's body, he stabs himself in the skull, damaging the implant and causing severe neurological symptoms on Vos' own body, causing her internal physical damage. Vos discovers she can neither leave Tate's body, nor overpower his consciousness. Tate regains control, but is severely disoriented, in shock and traumatised from the violence before him, so he flees the crime scene. He seeks refuge with his friend Reeta, while experiencing fragmented memories of Vos' life.

He kills Reeta while struggling with dissociative memories of the hit on Parse and Ava. Eddie, a co-employee from Tate's workplace who reveals himself to be a plant from Vos' agency, arrives at the apartment to help Vos regain control and complete Tate's suicide. The attempt fails and Tate kills Eddie during another dissociative episode in which Tate becomes aware of Vos' presence inside his body. His consciousness overpowers hers in a psychic confrontation, giving him access to memories of her husband, child and home.

Tate goes to Vos' home and holds her husband at gunpoint, demanding to know what she did to him. Vos appears inside Tate's mind and goads Tate into killing Michael. When Michael knocks the gun from Tate's hand, Tate kills him with a meat cleaver, in a similar manner as the movie's opening sequence's job. Moments later, Ira stabs Tate in the throat, killing him, also reminiscent to the opening sequence's stabbing. Vos uses Tate's last moments to shoot Ira dead, who is then revealed to also have been a host.

Vos returns to her own body and discovers that it was Girder who had taken control of Ira. With Ira and Michael both dead, she is now free of all human attachments, as Girder wanted.

In another debriefing, Vos sorts through her personal objects again. She contemplates and recognizes the butterfly, but does not express any guilt for killing it. Girder smiles and replies, "Very good."

Production companies	Ingenious Media
	Telefilm Canada
	Arclight Films
	Ontario Creates
	Particular Crowd
	Crave
Distributed by	Rhombus Media
	Rook Films
	Elevation Pictures
	(Canada)
	Signature
	Entertainment
Release dates	(United Kingdom)
	January 25, 2020
	(Sundance)
	October 2, 2020
	(United States and Canada)
	November 27, 2020
Running time	(United Kingdom)
	104 minutes ^[1]
Countries	Canada ^[2]
	United Kingdom ^[2]
Language	English
Box office	\$901,093 ^{[3][4]}

Cast

- [Andrea Riseborough](#) as Tasya Vos

- [Christopher Abbott](#) as Colin Tate
- [Jennifer Jason Leigh](#) as Girder
- [Sean Bean](#) as John Parse
- [Rossif Sutherland](#) as Michael Vos
- [Tuppence Middleton](#) as Ava Parse
- [Kaniehtiio Horn](#) as Reeta
- [Raoul Bhaneja](#) as Eddie
- [Gage Graham-Arbuthnot](#) as Ira Vos
- [Rachael Crawford](#) as Dr. Melis
- [Hrant Alianak](#) as Lead Technician
- [Gabrielle Graham](#) as Holly Bergman

Production

In May 2018, it was announced [Andrea Riseborough](#) and [Christopher Abbott](#) had joined the cast of the film, with [Brandon Cronenberg](#) directing from a screenplay he wrote. [Fraser Ash](#), [Niv Fichman](#), [Kevin Krikst](#), and [Andrew Starke](#) produced the film under their Rhombus Media and Rook Films banners. The film was also produced by [Telefilm Canada](#), with [Elevation Pictures](#) distributing the film in Canada.^[6] In February 2019, [Jennifer Jason Leigh](#), [Stacy Martin](#) and [Sean Bean](#) joined the cast of the film.^[7] In May 2019, [Tuppence Middleton](#) joined the cast of the film, replacing Martin.^[8]

Filming

[Principal photography](#) began on April 9, 2019 and concluded on May 14, in Ontario, Canada.^[9]

Release

In November 2018, [Well Go USA Entertainment](#) acquired distribution rights to the film.^[10] The film later had its world premiere at the [Sundance Film Festival](#) on January 25, 2020.^{[1][11]} Shortly after, [Neon](#) acquired distribution rights to the film, with Well Go USA only handling the film's home media release.^[12] It was released in the United States and Canada on October 2, 2020.^{[13][14]} The film was released in the United Kingdom on November 27, 2020, by [Signature Entertainment](#).^{[15][16]}

On May 31, 2023, it was announced that *Possessor* and Cronenberg's 2023 film *Infinity Pool* would receive a double feature in three North American theaters in June, with Cronenberg in attendance. The first for both films to theatrically screen in their uncut form, the screenings took place at the [Alamo Drafthouse Cinema](#) in [San Francisco](#) on the 20th, the [Aero Theatre](#) in [Los Angeles](#) on the 21st via [American Cinematheque](#), and the [Metrograph](#) in [New York City](#) on the 23rd.^[17]

Reception

On the [review aggregator](#) website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 94% of 224 critic ratings are positive for *Possessor*, and the average rating is 7.8/10. The website's consensus reads, "Further refining his provocative vision, writer-director Brandon Cronenberg uses *Possessor*'s potentially over-the-top premise as a delivery mechanism for stylishly disturbing thrills."^[18] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a weighted average score of 72 out of 100, based on 23 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[19]

The film received a positive review by David Sims in *The Atlantic*, who wrote: "Cronenberg isn't just looking to provoke with blood and guts—like all good dystopian fiction, *Possessor* offers disturbing and timely observations about the world we already live in."^[20] It was a *New York Times* Critic's Pick, with Glenn Kenny praising the film's formal sophistication.^[21]

The film's opening sequence was singled out for praise, particularly Gabrielle Graham's performance as Holly in the sequence. David Ehrlich from *IndieWire* called it "a coldly compelling prologue"; and Wendy Ide from *Screen Daily* agreed: "In a memorable cameo role in the film's opening, Gabrielle Graham also makes an impact."^{[22][23]}

Meagan Navarro of *Bloody Disgusting* gave the film a score of four-and-a-half out of five, writing: "Like dad David Cronenberg, Brandon Cronenberg has a unique way of testing the boundaries of comfort and exploring the human mind and body in squeamish fashion."^[24] John DeFore of *The Hollywood Reporter* praised the film's direction, visuals, as well as its performances, and special effects.^[5] Rob Hunter of *Film School Rejects* gave the film a positive review, writing: "While *Possessor* retains his family's love of body horror and morally misused electronics it also manages an engrossing pace, engaging characters, unrelentingly brutal violence, erect penises, a must-own Halloween mask, a mean-spirited Sean Bean, one hell of an ending, and more.... All of it, though, is fantastically and cruelly unforgettable."^[25] Chris Evangelista of *Slashfilm* gave the film ten out of ten, writing: "Bathed in blood and gore, and unrelentingly aggressive, Brandon Cronenberg's *Possessor* is unlike anything you've ever seen before. It is a singular work – one so ghastly, so unique, and so brutal that it will awe some and disgust others."^[26]

JoBlo.com's Chris Bumbray gave the film a score of eight out of ten, stating that the film "recalls many of his father David Cronenberg's previous works", Bumbray further praised Abbott and Riseborough's performances, as well as similar praise towards the film's visual style.^[27] David Ehrlich from *IndieWire* also gave the film a grade of "B-", praising Cronenberg's direction as well as the film's cinematography, visuals, and performances, while also stating it did not fully realize its potential.^[22]

Accolades

Possessor won the awards for Best Feature Length Film and Best Direction at the *Sitges Film Festival* in 2020.^[28] It was also given the Grand Prize at the 2021 *Gérardmer Film Festival*, where Jim Williams won for Original Score.^[29] The film received three nominations at the inaugural *Critics' Choice Super Awards* in the Science Fiction/Fantasy category, for Best Movie, Best Actor, and Best Actress.^[30] It was named to the *Toronto International Film Festival's* year-end *Canada's Top Ten* list for feature films.^[31] Special makeup effects artist Dan Martin won the Fangoria Chainsaw Award for best makeup effects.^[32] The film won the Golden Monster Award for Best Feature Film, as well as Best Director at the 2020 *Monster Fest* in Australia.



Cronenberg's direction
received praise

Accolades

Year	Award	Category	Recipient	Result	Ref.
2020	<u>Sitges Film Festival</u>	Best Feature Length Film	<i>Possessor</i>	Won	[28]
		Best Direction	Brandon Cronenberg	Won	
	<u>Monster Fest</u>	Golden Monster Award for Best Feature Film	<i>Possessor</i>	Won	[33]
		Best Director	Brandon Cronenberg	Won	
	<u>Sundance Film Festival</u>	World Cinema Dramatic Competition	<i>Possessor</i>	Nominated	[34]
	<u>St. Louis Film Critics Association Awards</u>	Best Horror Film	<i>Possessor: Uncut</i>	Nominated	[35]
	<u>Indiana Film Journalists Association</u>	Best Film	<i>Possessor</i>	Nominated	[36]
		Best Original Screenplay	Brandon Cronenberg	Nominated	
		Best Director		Nominated	
		Best Actor	Christopher Abbott	Nominated	
		Best Musical Score	Jim Williams	Nominated	
		Original Vision	<i>Possessor</i>	Nominated	
2021	<u>Gérardmer Film Festival</u>	Grand Prize	<i>Possessor</i>	Won	[29][37]
		Best Original Score	Jim Williams	Won	
	<u>Critics' Choice Super Awards</u>	Best Science Fiction/Fantasy Movie	<i>Possessor</i>	Nominated	[30]
		Best Actor in a Science Fiction/Fantasy Movie	Christopher Abbott	Nominated	
		Best Actress in a Science Fiction/Fantasy Movie	Andrea Riseborough	Nominated	
	<u>Fangoria Chainsaw Awards</u>	Best Makeup Effects	Dan Martin	Won	[32][38]
		Best Limited Release Movie	<i>Possessor</i>	Nominated	
		Best Score	Jim Williams	Nominated	
		Best Lead Performance	Andrea Riseborough	Nominated	
	<u>46th Saturn Awards</u>	<u>Best Independent Film</u>	<i>Possessor</i>	Nominated	[39][40]
	<u>Vancouver Film Critics Circle</u>	<u>Best Canadian Film</u>		Nominated	[41]
		<u>Best Director of a Canadian Film</u>	Brandon Cronenberg	Won	
		<u>Best Screenplay for a Canadian Film</u>		Nominated	
		<u>Best Actress in a Canadian Film</u>	Andrea Riseborough	Nominated	
		<u>Vancouver Film Critics Circle Award for Best Supporting Actor in a Canadian Film</u>	Christopher Abbott	Won	
		<u>Vancouver Film Critics Circle Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Canadian Film</u>	Jennifer Jason Leigh	Nominated	

	<u>Canadian Screen Awards</u>	<u>Best Achievement in Direction</u>	Brandon Cronenberg	Nominated	[42]
		<u>Best Achievement in Makeup</u>	Traci Loader, Dan Martin & Dorota Mitoraj	Nominated	
	<u>Detroit Film Critics Society</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Christopher Abbott	Nominated	[43]
		<u>Best Use of Music</u>	Jim Williams	Nominated	

Possessor and its uncut version appeared on numerous critic's year-end lists including:

- 1st – Jason Shawhan, *Nashville Scene*^[44]
- 3rd - Jim Ridley, *Nashville Scene*^[45]
- 4th - Angelica Jade Bastién, *Vulture*^[46]
- 5th - Elena Lazic, *Sight and Sound*^[47]
- 8th - Guy Lodge, *Sight and Sound*^[47]

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External links

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- *Possessor* (<https://www.metacritic.com/movie/possessor>) at Metacritic
- *Possessor* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/possessor_uncut) at Rotten Tomatoes
- *Possessor* (<http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=filvidandsou&id=571795&lang=eng>) at

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