

A Haunting in Venice

A Haunting in Venice is a 2023 American mystery film produced and directed by Kenneth Branagh from a screenplay by Michael Green, loosely based on the 1969 Agatha Christie novel Hallowe'en Party. It serves as a sequel to Death on the Nile (2022) and is the third film in which Branagh reprises his role as the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. The ensemble cast includes Kyle Allen, Camille Cottin, Jamie Dornan, Tina Fey, Jude Hill, Ali Khan, Emma Laird, Kelly Reilly, Riccardo Scamarcio, and Michelle Yeoh.

A Haunting in Venice was released in the United States on September 15, 2023, by 20th Century Studios. The film received positive reviews from critics and grossed \$122.3 million worldwide.

Plot

In 1947, Hercule Poirot has retired to Venice, having lost his faith in God and humanity, with ex-police officer Vitale Portfoglio as his bodyguard. Mystery writer Ariadne Oliver persuades Poirot to attend a Halloween party and séance at the palazzo of famed opera singer Rowena Drake, wishing to expose Joyce Reynolds—a World War I army nurse turned medium—as a fraud. The palazzo, a former orphanage, is believed to be haunted by the spirits of orphaned children who were locked up and abandoned to die there during a city-wide plague; rumors claim that the spirits torment any nurses and doctors who dare enter.

Rowena has hired Joyce to commune with her daughter Alicia, who committed suicide after Alicia's fiancé, chef Maxime Gerard, ended their engagement. Among the guests are Rowena's housekeeper Olga Seminoff, Drake family doctor Leslie Ferrier and his son Leopold, and Joyce's Romani assistant Desdemona Holland; they are joined by Maxime right before the séance, and during it Poirot reveals Desdemona's half-brother Nicholas—and Joyce's second assistant—hiding in the chimney. Joyce suddenly speaks in Alicia's voice, saying that one of the guests murdered her. Poirot confronts Joyce, who insists he lighten up, gives him her mask and robe, and cryptically says they will not meet

A Haunting in Venice



Theatrical release poster

	•		
Directed by	Kenneth Branagh		
Screenplay by	Michael Green		
Based on	Hallowe'en Party		
	by Agatha Christie		
Produced by	Kenneth Branagh		
	Judy Hofflund		
	Ridley Scott		
	Simon Kinberg		
Starring	Kyle Allen		
	Kenneth Branagh		
	Camille Cottin		
	Jamie Dornan		
	Tina Fey		
	Jude Hill		
	Ali Khan		
	Emma Laird		
	Kelly Reilly		
	Riccardo Scamarcio		
	Michelle Yeoh		

again. Seconds later, an unknown assailant nearly drowns Poirot when he is <u>apple bobbing</u>, while Joyce falls from an upper story and is impaled on a courtyard statue.

With a storm cutting off the palazzo, Poirot interviews the guests, during which he witnesses manifestations of Alicia's ghost and hears a young girl humming a tune. The investigation yields perplexing results:

- Leslie, severely traumatized by his experiences at the <u>Bergen-Belsen concentration camp</u>, is in love with Rowena.
- Maxime, who was not initially invited, ended his and Alicia's engagement because Rowena disapproved of him, and Alicia was obsessed with keeping her mother happy.
- Nicholas and Desdemona have been stealing from Joyce, intending to travel to St. Louis, Missouri, which they became enamoured with after partly seeing <u>Meet Me in St. Louis</u> at a <u>displaced persons</u> camp.
- Leopold claims to hear the same voice(s) Poirot has been hearing, a claim later also made by Leslie.

When the guests discover an underground chamber containing children's skeletal remains and bees, Leslie suffers a panic attack and nearly kills Maxime. He is locked inside the music room to recover, Rowena giving Poirot the only key. After examining Maxime's invitation, Poirot deduces Ariadne sent it and is conspiring with Vitale: Vitale, who investigated Alicia's

Cinematography	Haris Zambarloukos		
Edited by	Lucy Donaldson		
Music by	Hildur Guðnadóttir		
Production companies	Kinberg Genre		
	The Mark Gordon		
	Company		
	Scott Free		
	Productions		
	Agatha Christie Limited		
	TSG Entertainment		
Distributed by	20th Century		
	Studios		
Release dates	September 11, 2023		
	(Odeon Luxe		
	Leicester Square)		
	September 15, 2023 (United States)		
	103 minutes ^[1]		
Running time			
Country	United States		
Language	English		
Budget	\$60 million ^[2]		
Box office	\$122.3 million ^{[3][4]}		

death and resigned from the police as a result of the case, gave Joyce private details, while Ariadne had hoped to use Poirot's inability to explain the supernatural as a plot for her next book. Leslie is then found dead with a knife in his back.

Gathering the remaining guests, Poirot reveals Rowena caused the deaths of Alicia, Joyce, and Leslie, hoping to pass them off as part of the children's curse. Obsessed with keeping Alicia for herself, Rowena poisoned her with small doses of the honey of *Rhododendron ponticum*, weakening and then caring for a hallucinating Alicia (the same honey seemingly caused Poirot's visions) to isolate her from Maxime when they planned to reconcile; the night of Alicia's suicide, Olga unknowingly gave Alicia tea containing a fatal dose and Rowena, fearful of exposure, staged everything. When blackmail threats arrived, Rowena suspected either Joyce or Leslie. She attempted to drown Poirot, realized that she had mistaken him for Joyce, and then pushed Joyce to her death. Later, over the palazzo's internal phone line, she forced Leslie to stab himself by threatening to kill Leopold. When Poirot confronts Rowena on the roof, Alicia's ghost seems to appear to them both, pulling Rowena down off the building and into the canal where she drowns.

As dawn breaks, Poirot parts ways with Ariadne and chooses not to report Vitale's fraud. Later, Poirot privately confronts young Leopold, the true blackmailer who needed to support himself and his father: Leopold had identified the poisoning signs that his physician father missed and realized Rowena's first

starring role was in <u>an opera</u> whose <u>lead character</u> is the "king of poisons". Poirot suggests Leopold and Olga clear their consciences by financially helping the Hollands begin anew in St. Louis. His faith mostly restored, Poirot returns home to accept new cases.

Cast

- Kyle Allen as Maxime Gerard, Alicia Drake's ex-fiancé
- Kenneth Branagh as Hercule Poirot, a retired world-renowned Belgian detective
- Camille Cottin as Olga Seminoff, Rowena's housekeeper
- Jamie Dornan as Dr. Leslie Ferrier, a doctor suffering from psychological trauma
- Tina Fey as Ariadne Oliver, Poirot's friend and a crime novelist
- Jude Hill as Leopold Ferrier, Dr. Ferrier's precocious son
- Ali Khan as Nicholas Holland, Reynolds' assistant and Desdemona's half-brother
- Emma Laird as Desdemona Holland, Reynolds' assistant and Nicholas' half-sister
- Kelly Reilly as Rowena Drake, a retired opera singer and Alicia's mother
- Riccardo Scamarcio as Vitale Portfoglio, Poirot's bodyguard and a former police officer
- Michelle Yeoh as Joyce Reynolds, a supposed psychic medium

Additionally, <u>Rowan Robinson</u> stars as Alicia Drake, Rowena's deceased daughter, while <u>Amir El-Masry</u> portrays Alessandro Longo, a young man seeking Poirot's help, and <u>Vanessa Ifediora</u> plays Sister Maria Felicitas, a nun.

Production

Development

The president of 20th Century Studios, Steve Asbell, revealed in March 2022 that a script for a third Hercule Poirot film had been written by Michael Green, with Kenneth Branagh set to return as director and star. The film was loosely based on *Hallowe'en Party*, a lesser-known Poirot novel, for the plot. The film was confirmed in October 2022, with Jamie Dornan, Tina Fey, Jude Hill, Kelly Reilly and Michelle Yeoh among the cast. Branagh described the film as a "supernatural thriller" rather than a full-fledged horror film.

Filming

Filming began on October 31, $2022,^{\underline{[9]}}$ with production occurring between <u>Pinewood Studios</u> and Venice. $\underline{^{[11]}}$

Music

<u>Hildur Guðnadóttir</u> composed the score for the film in April 2023, marking the first in the series not to be composed by Branagh's frequent collaborator <u>Patrick Doyle</u>. The film's soundtrack album was released by Hollywood Records on September 15, 2023.

Release

A Haunting in Venice was released in the United States on September 15, 2023, by 20th Century Studios. $\frac{[14]}{}$ The film had its red carpet premiere at the Odeon Luxe Leicester Square at the West End London on September 11 with none of the cast members in attendance due to the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike. $\frac{[15]}{}$

The film was released on digital platforms on October 31, followed by a $\underline{Blu\text{-ray}}$ and \underline{DVD} release on November 28. [16]

Reception

Box office

A Haunting in Venice grossed \$42.5 million in the United States and Canada, and \$79.8 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$122.3 million. [4][3]

In the United States and Canada, *A Haunting in Venice* was projected to gross around \$12 million from 3,305 theaters in its opening weekend. The film made \$5.5 million on its first day, including \$1.2 million from Thursday night previews (up from *Nile*'s \$1.1 million). It went on to debut to \$14.3 million, an improvement from *Nile*'s \$12.9 million opening, and finished second behind holdover $\underline{The\ Nun\ II}$. The film made \$6.3 million in its second weekend, finishing in third.

In the United Kingdom, it became the second highest-grossing <u>horror film</u> of 2023, grossing approximately \$12.5 million. [19]

Critical response

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 76% of 291 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.5/10. The website's consensus reads: "A darker and spookier spin on Branagh's Poirot, *A Haunting in Venice* is a decent Halloween snack whose undemanding mystery gets a lift from nifty visuals and an all-star cast." [20] <u>Metacritic</u>, which uses a <u>weighted average</u>, assigned the film a score of 63 out of 100, based on 52 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews. [21] Audiences surveyed by <u>CinemaScore</u> gave the film an average grade of "B" on an A+ to F scale, same as the first two installments, while those polled at <u>PostTrak</u> gave it a 73% overall positive score, with 48% saying they would definitely recommend the film. [17]

<u>Jason Zinoman</u>, writing for <u>The New York Times</u>, called the film a "whodunit with a splash of horror" and wrote: "In straddling genres, <u>Haunting</u> can get stuck in the middle. But there's fun to be had there. What's consistent is the elegant visuals – striking cinematography by Haris Zambarloukos – which mark this movie's real genre as lavish old-fashioned Hollywood entertainment." <u>Justin Chang</u> of the <u>Los Angeles Times</u> said: "What lingers from this movie isn't the usual assemblage of clues and red herrings [..] but a free-floating air of grief, much of it rooted in the characters' turbulent memories of the war just a few years earlier". Similar sentiment was echoed by <u>Ann Hornaday</u> of <u>The Washington Post</u> who described the film as "moody", they both praised the cast's performances. <u>Saibal Chatterjee</u> wrote for <u>NDTV</u>: "A Haunting In Venice, a couple of jump scares notwithstanding, may not chill you to the bones but as a story focused on the emotional and psychological fallout of a devastating war, it works brilliantly".

Matt Zoller Seitz acclaimed the screenplay, direction and production values and said: "Movies are rarely directed in this style anymore". He added that it was an "empathetic portrayal of the death-haunted mentality of people from Branagh's parents' generation". Seitz and critic Michael Phillips (the *Chicago Tribune*) named it best of Branagh's Hercule Poirot films. The latter found the cast's acting "pretty crafty". About the performances, Mark Kermode said: "[...] everyone is given a 110 percent but not in a completely scenery chewing fashion, in a way that mixes old-fashioned and newfangled". [28]

Some critics pointed out that the film struggled in its character development. Kristen Lopez, writing for *TheWrap*, felt that almost all the characters were underdeveloped due to the attention given to the production values, but praised the performances, singling out Reilly, Dornan and Yeoh. *The Guardian*'s chief film critic Peter Bradshaw also thought the film wasted its cast, awarding it two out of five stars.

In a negative review, critic <u>Caryn James</u> found the film "uninvolving" and said: "The new film is much pokier in its pacing, with duller characters". She commended Branagh, Fey and Cottin's performances, while stating that so many actors in the cast were "sleepwalking". In an equally negative review, David Fear of <u>Rolling Stone</u> called the film "anemic and sluggish" and said audiences would be "bored to death."

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
British Film Designers Guild Awards	February 25, 2024	Best Production Design – Major Motion Picture – Period	John Paul Kelly, Peter Russell and Celia Bobak	Won	[33]
Hollywood Music in Media Awards	November 15, 2023	Original Score — Horror/Thriller Film		Won	[34]
International Film Music Critics Association Awards	February 22, 2024	Best Original Score For a Horror/Thriller Film	Hildur Guðnadóttir	Nominated	[35]
Las Vegas Film Critics Society	December 13, 2023	Youth in Film (Male)	Jude Hill	Won	[36]
San Diego Film Critics Society December 19, 2023	Best Performance by an Ensemble	the cast of A Haunting in Venice	Runner-up		
		Best Youth Performance (for a performer under the age of 18)	Jude Hill	Nominated	[37][38]

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External links

- Official website (https://www.20thcenturystudios.com/movies/a-haunting-in-venice)
- A Haunting in Venice (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt22687790/) at IMDb
- A Haunting in Venice (https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v12683146087) at AllMovie

■ *A Haunting in Venice (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/a_haunting_in_venice)* at Rotten Tomatoes

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