

The Tomorrow War

The Tomorrow War is a 2021 American military science fiction action film directed by Chris McKay, written by Zach Dean, and starring Chris Pratt. It was produced by David Ellison, Dana Goldberg, Don Granger, David S. Goyer, Jules Daly, and Adam Kolbrenner, with a supporting cast featuring Yvonne Strahovski, J. K. Simmons, Betty Gilpin, Sam Richardson, Edwin Hodge, Jasmine Mathews, Ryan Kiera Armstrong, and Keith Powers. It follows a mix of present-day soldiers and civilians sent into the future to fight an alien army.

Originally set for theatrical release by Paramount Pictures, the film's distribution rights were acquired by Amazon due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^[4] and digitally released on July 2, 2021, via Prime Video.^{[5][6]} With a budget of US\$200 million, the film was one of the most expensive films to debut on a streaming platform. *The Tomorrow War* received mixed reviews from critics, with praise for the concept, action sequences, and performances (particularly Pratt and Richardson), but criticism for its derivative execution. A sequel is in development.^[7]

Plot

In December 2022, biology teacher and former Green Beret Dan Forester fails to land a job at a prestigious research center. While he watches the 2022 FIFA World Cup final, soldiers from the year 2051, through a time portal, arrive to warn that humanity is on the brink of extinction due to alien invaders: the Whitespikes. In response, the world's military were sent to the future, but less than 20% manage to survive, prompting a global draft. Dan receives the draft and is fitted with a bracelet that tracks him. Dan's wife, Emmy Forester asks him to remove the bracelet with the help of his estranged father, James Forester, but Dan becomes angry with him and leaves without removing the bracelet. Dan and the draftees are sent to Miami Beach, Florida in the future, but few survive, having been dropped at the wrong location above the city.

Colonel Forester orders the recruits to rescue the staff from the nearby laboratory. The team discover the lab staff dead, but recover their research before the area is bombed. Dan and the survivors make it back to a military camp in Puerto Plata, where Dan learns that Colonel Forester is his daughter, Muri. She asks him to

The Tomorrow War



Promotional release poster

Directed by	<u>Chris McKay</u>
Written by	<u>Zach Dean</u>
Produced by	<u>David Ellison</u> <u>Dana Goldberg</u> <u>Don Granger</u> <u>Jules Daly</u> <u>David S. Goyer</u> <u>Adam Kolbrenner</u>
Starring	<u>Chris Pratt</u> <u>Yvonne Strahovski</u> <u>J. K. Simmons</u> <u>Betty Gilpin</u> <u>Sam Richardson</u> <u>Edwin Hodge</u>
Cinematography	<u>Larry Fong</u>
Edited by	<u>Roger Barton</u>

accompany her on a mission to capture a female Whitespike, which are rarer than the males. They find and capture the female, only to have the Whitespike males descend on her position.

Muri finally tells him what happened in his past, which was that Dan abandoned her and his wife after returning from the future and eventually died in a car wreck. Dan and Muri are transported to the Jumplink, located on a fortified oil platform in the middle of the ocean. They work on a toxin that can kill the female; however, the Whitespikes attack the base.

Muri is badly injured and asks Dan to take the toxin to the past, as humanity was never going to make it in this timeline, and they reconcile. Dan manages to return to the past with the toxin to mass produce it and attempts to give the toxin to the military so it can be sent back to the future, but learns that the Jumplink is offline, having been destroyed by the Whitespikes.

After explaining to his wife what happened in the future, they deduce that the Whitespikes did not arrive during the year 2048, but much earlier. Dan and Dorian investigate the Whitespikes claw with Charlie and discover fragments of volcanic ash from a volcano in the Changbai Mountains.

They theorize that Whitespikes were already on Earth and global warming caused their release when they thawed and emerged from beneath the polar caps. He turns to the military for aid but without proof, they do not support him. He asks his father to transport a team. Dan leads a mission to Severnaya Zemlya in northern Russia to test his theory and finds an alien ship in an ice sheet.

Once inside, they realize that the alien ship is not actually a Whitespikes ship, and that the Whitespikes were cargo for the deceased alien crew. They inject the toxin into the dormant Whitespikes and this kills those injected but awakens the remaining Whitespikes. The team decides to manually detonate the alien ship once they realize it is the only method of containment, but the female manages to escape. Dan and his father track down the female and manage to kill her, preventing the future war from occurring. Dan reunites with his daughter and introduces her to her grandfather.

	Garret Elkins
Music by	<u>Lorne Balfe</u>
Production companies	<u>Skydance</u> <u>Paramount Pictures</u> <u>New Republic Pictures</u>
Distributed by	<u>Amazon Studios</u>
Release date	July 2, 2021
Running time	138 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$200 million ^{[1][2]}
Box office	\$19.2 million ^[3]

Cast

- Chris Pratt as James Daniel "Dan" Forester Jr., a biology teacher and former Green Beret First Sergeant who served two tours in Iraq
- Yvonne Strahovski as Colonel Muri Forester, Dan's adult daughter and a military scientist
 - Ryan Kiera Armstrong as young Muri Forester
- J. K. Simmons as James Daniel Forester Sr., Dan's estranged father, an anti-government survivalist, mechanical engineer and Vietnam veteran
- Betty Gilpin as Emmy Forester, Dan's wife and a therapist for returning draftees
- Sam Richardson as Charlie, a draftee with a PhD in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
- Edwin Hodge as Dorian, a cancer-stricken draftee on his third tour of duty
- Jasmine Mathews as Lieutenant Hart, a future soldier who warned the world during the World Cup

- Keith Powers as Major Greenwood, Muri's executive officer

In addition, Mary Lynn Rajs kub and Mike Mitchell portray draftees Norah and Cowan, respectively, while Seth Schenall portrays Martin, Dan's amateur volcanologist student.

Production

Development

The film had been in development for several years by Skydance Media when they made a deal with writer Zach Dean.^[8] On February 13, 2019, it was confirmed that Chris Pratt has joined the film as the lead star and that it would be directed by Chris McKay, marking the latter's live-action debut after directing only for animated projects such as Moral Orel, Robot Chicken, Titan Maximum, and most recently The Lego Batman Movie.^{[9][10]} Pratt revealed that he would also serve as an executive producer of the film, making his debut as a producer.^[11]

The film was initially named *Ghost Draft*, and it was revealed that the film would be about a husband and father who is drafted to fight a future war where the fate of humanity could rely on his ability to correct issues of the past.^[8] The film was described as a dark and emotional sci-fi action epic about a generation of people who get drafted to go 30 years in the future to fight a losing war against aliens. Because the initial concept for the film was considered too dark, it was decided to lighten the treatment, hoping that the requested \$20 million production would be approved to make a more marketable family-friendly film.^[12]

The film was originally set to be distributed by Paramount Pictures with the intention of giving the film a theatrical release.^[13] However, the film was delayed for seven months due to the COVID-19 pandemic which forced theaters to close, leading to *Top Gun: Maverick* taking the release date, and the delay of *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*.^{[14][15][16]} In April 2021, the distribution rights of the film were sold to Amazon with a cost of over \$200 million. McKay commented that; "It's a movie that we wanted to go theatrically obviously, that was the intent and how we shot it — we shot it like a big movie, we didn't hold back. I know it can play in theaters, I've seen in play in theaters; it's a big, loud, exciting movie, but there's a tradeoff. We're in a world right now where [with] a big original sci-fi movie, there's a bunch of known properties that are coming in for a landing in theaters weekend after weekend. To be able to be a filmmaker who can have a dialogue with audiences in 240 countries at one time... that's also a very exciting proposition and I feel very lucky."^{[17][18]}

On July 18, 2019, it was confirmed that Yvonne Strahovski would be joining the film's cast.^[19] J. K. Simmons, Betty Gilpin, Sam Richardson, Theo Von (who later left the project), Jasmine Mathews, Keith Powers also joined the cast in August,^{[20][21][22][23][24]} with Mary Lynn Rajs kub, Edwin Hodge, and additional cast joining in September.^{[25][26]} On November 10, 2019, Pratt shared a photo of the filming on his Instagram with several actors who also appear in the film, and revealed that Paramount Pictures had officially retitled the film *The Tomorrow War*.^{[27][28]} Although it was not confirmed, it is likely that the film changed its name to ensure a Chinese release, due to the country having banned several films about ghosts and zombies.^{[29][30][31]}

White Spike design

Creature designer Ken Barthelmey was confirmed to be the designer for the film's aliens.^[32] In early 2019, production designer Peter Wenham hired him due to his ability on his previous works. Barthelmey created over 67 different concept ideas for the aliens, taking inspiration from the Tripods of the *War of the Worlds* and the Sentinels from *The Matrix*.^[33] The aliens were described as vicious creatures that attack and eat everything in sight, and needed a compelling design that conveyed the hunger and intelligence of these creatures. The crew also wanted the aliens to have different abilities such as fast swimming and flying. This information eventually led Barthelmey to the film's final design.^[34] Additionally, Barthelmey came up with the idea of spike-shooting-tentacles, which became the major feature of the design.^[35]

Filming

Filming began on September 1, 2019, in Lincolnton, Georgia the historical city in the Central Savannah River Area. The film was also shot at the Graves Mountain Area in 2019. The battle scenes depicting a future Miami were filmed in downtown Atlanta and Buckhead, Georgia, using both CGI and live pyrotechnics to create the post-apocalyptic setting.^{[36][37][38]}

Chris McKay revealed that he wanted the film to feel real rather than hyper-stylised and to shoot on location and limit the amount of green screen used, which is the reason he choose Iceland for the scenes in Russia at the glacier Vatnajökull. The crew revealed that they eventually filmed at the top of a glacier. Chris Pratt revealed that while filming, they were told that a couple froze to death after falling through a fissure, but they still decided to take the risk hoping to impress the audience.^{[39][40][41]} The film wrapped filming on January 12, 2020.^{[42][43]} On July 1, 2021, the film was confirmed to have an estimated production budget of \$200 million.^{[44][45]}

Special effects

The supervisor of the visual effects of the movie was James Price, while Randy Starr was recruited as the producer of the visual effects.^[46] For the effect of the time jump, Chris McKay wanted the time travel of the film to be unique in the film, with Price stating, "We looked at images of the northern lights and the view of Earth from space, and at one point I showed images from the Hubble Space Telescope because there's something kind of intimate and mysterious about them". The visual effects staff decided to create a force field that forms above the draftees right before they jump in time. With the time machine activated the travelers will slowly rise up and eventually be sent at the future. To capture the effect, the special effects team ran tests using an underwater cloud tank to simulate time-displacement. However SFX Supervisor JD Schwalm decided to use a practical wall of smoke. The smoke was made to be thick enough so the camera could not see through it and then a stunt coordinator rigged the actors on wires and flew them through the wall of smoke. CG electrical currents were provided in post-production so the screen can represent the actors materializing out of thin air.^[41]

Music

On August 6, 2020, Lorne Balfe was confirmed to be the composer for *The Tomorrow War*. Balfe had already collaborated with director Chris McKay on the score for the 2017 animated comedy movie *The Lego Batman Movie*.^[47] The soundtrack album was released on July 2, 2021, by Milan Records.^{[48][49]}

Release

The film had been initially scheduled for release on December 25, 2020, by Paramount Pictures, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was rescheduled to July 23, 2021, taking the release date of *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*, then later pulled from the schedule again.^{[50][51][52][53]} In January 2021, Amazon Studios was in final talks to acquire the film for around \$200 million.^[54] In April 2021, it was announced that Amazon had officially acquired the film, and released it on Amazon Prime Video worldwide on July 2, 2021.^{[55][56]} However, the film was confirmed to be released in the theatres in China, being one of the few films to be released in the country, alongside *Free Guy*. In the country, the film was released on September 3, 2021, where it opened in second place at the box office behind *Free Guy*.^{[57][58]}

Reception

Box office

On September 3, 2021, the film was released theatrically only in China and grossed \$8.1 million over the weekend, finishing in second place behind *Free Guy*.^{[59][60]} By the end of its run, the film made \$19.2 million.^[3]

Audience viewership

Samba TV reported that 2.41 million households watched the film from July 2–5, the most ever for an Amazon Original tracked by the service. According to Screen Engine's PostVOD summary, the "definite recommend" audience score for the film was 53%, compared to a normal score for a streaming title of 42%.^[61] From July 5–11 the film garnered 1.1 billion minutes of viewing according to Nielsen ratings, and was the No. 3 most watched subscription video on demand title for the week, just behind *Virgin River* (1.45 billion minutes) and *Manifest* (1.81 billion minutes).^{[62][63]} The film continued to top the charts in subsequent weeks, logging 1.222 billion minutes of viewership between July 21–27 (equal to about 885,507 total watches) according to Nielsen ratings.^[64] According to Samba TV, the film was watched in 5.2 million households in its first 30 days of release.^[65]

By August 2021, the film became the most watched film in the summer by a streaming service, breaking several records from Prime Video and the most watched film for Amazon Prime Video.^{[66][67]} It was reported according to Nielsen that the film was kept in the first place of the most watched movies in the top 10 list, managing to beat films such as *Black Widow* and *Luca* with both being from Disney+. It also managed to beat the viewership of the complete series of *The Fear Street Trilogy* which were released to Netflix.^{[68][69]} Pratt celebrated the film's success calling it a "home run win" and on Instagram he published a new post where he commented: "We couldn't defeat the whitespikes without our fellow soldiers."^{[70][71]}

Critical response

On review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, the film holds an approval rating of 52% based on 207 reviews, with an average rating of 5.7/10. The website's critics consensus reads, "Chris Pratt ably anchors this sci-fi adventure, even if *The Tomorrow War* may not linger in the memory much longer than today."^[72] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 45 out of 100, based on 35 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".^[73]

Richard Roeper of the Chicago Sun-Times gave the film two out of four stars and wrote, "*The Tomorrow War* is an earnest effort to bring something new to the time-travel action genre, but this movie is a 2021 vehicle made of parts from the 2010s and the 1990s and 1980s."^[74] IndieWire's David Ehrlich gave the film a C grade, writing, "Which isn't to say that *The Tomorrow War* is bad — it boasts a clever premise, a killer supporting turn from Sam Richardson, and an uncommonly well-defined sense of place for such a murky CGI gloop-fest... But for all of those laudable attributes, this flavorless loss-leader of a film is neutered by its refusal to put audiences on their heels."^[1] John Defore for the Hollywood Reporter wrote that "the pic may be missing that certain something that would have made it huge in theaters" but that it is entertaining on Amazon stream anyway and praised Pratt's acting.^[75] IGN criticized then described the movie as "Supremely stupid sci-fi", and further stated that Pratt flounders in the movie.^[76] Leah Greenblatt from the Entertainment Weekly gave the film a B- grade and commented "Eventually the storyline dissolves into soft-focus sentiment and a final, snowy set piece whose execution is so patently ludicrous a 1970s Bond villain might file for intellectual property rights (though the climate-change message is sneakily on point). Until then it's enough, almost, just to watch Pratt & Co. race and banter and blast their way through *Tomorrow*'s futures past."^[77]

Robert Daniels from the Los Angeles Times wrote in his review "*The Tomorrow War* tries its hand at throwback '90s action glory, back when cinematic adventures could be everything for everybody. Instead, this post-apocalyptic combat flick lacks the intensity to reach the 1.21 gigawatts worth of power needed to emblazon our screens in escapist flair."^[78] Wendy Ide from The Observer wrote in her review, "The creature design is first-rate – the aliens are ravenous, rapid and equipped with a pair of death tentacles. And Pratt, and in particular Betty Gilpin as his wife, give likable, grounded performances. But the screenplay is a bloated, unwieldy thing that is at least 30 minutes longer than it should be."^[79] Roxana Hadadi from Polygon considered the film to be repetitive and compared it unfavorably with Edge of Tomorrow and Starship Troopers, for which she stated "We get it! This average, blue-collar American is worthy of all our admiration! That approach is so clobbering and clunky that *The Tomorrow War* is constantly tripping over itself while delivering it."^[80] Christy Lemire of RogerEbert.com gave the film one and a half out of four, and stated "The supposedly original script from writer Zach Dean offers very little that's innovative or inspired."^[81]

Barry Hertz from The Globe and Mail compared the film unfavorably with Independence Day and Starship Troopers, criticizing its unoriginality and wrote, "It is a fool's errand to imagine what someone like Verhoeven would have done with *The Tomorrow War*'s material – this is a movie made for the express purposes of delivering some lazy woo-hoo summer fun, not any kind of sneaky subversiveness. But if I had a time machine, I'd punt myself to the past just before *The Tomorrow War* went into production, and save everyone the trouble."^[82] Peter Travers from ABC News' Good Morning America considered the film with a cliched storytelling, gimmicky special effects and borrowed inspiration stating by commenting "*The Tomorrow War* chases its own tail for a crushingly repetitive 140 minutes to reach an ending you could have seen coming from deep space. To quote Yogi Berra, 'It's déjà vu all over again.' There's nothing tomorrow about a recycled jumble that places all its bets on yesterday."^[83] Mick LaSalle from the San Francisco Chronicle praised the visuals, story and action sequences and stated, "Yet it would probably be a mistake to emphasize the relationship aspect of 'The Tomorrow War' too much. At its core, this is just a really good monster movie. All the same, there's a touch of beauty to it."^[84] Allen Adams from The Main Edge gave the film 2.5 out of 5 and stated, "For all that, *The Tomorrow War* isn't a bad watch. It's got some action and some jokes and some decent performances. What it doesn't have is that underlying originality, that expression of ideas that makes the best science fiction work so well. And unfortunately, audiences will distinctly feel that lack."^[85]

Randy Myers from *The Mercury News* gave three and a half out of four by commenting, "Given the scope and spectacle of the action sequences — all tautly choreographed and edited — it's a wonder that Paramount let this one get away. McKay might be best known for 'Robot Chicken' and 'The Lego Batman Movie,' but with 'Tomorrow' he emerges as the next go-to action director."^[86] Chris Agar from *ScreenRant* added in his review as a positive feedback, "*The Tomorrow War* boasts an interesting setup and solid performances by the cast, but it still comes across as unremarkable, if standard, genre fare."^[87] Hoai-Tran Bui gave a positive feedback by scoring 6.5 out of 10 to the film and stated "The Tomorrow War is not by any means great sci-fi, nor is it even significantly good sci-fi. The film is half an hour too long and starts to feel like a slog by the end of the first hour. The sentimentality threatens to veer into melodrama at points, which Pratt struggles to handle. But The Tomorrow War has got a trashy popcorn vibe to it that it wholeheartedly embraces, and a cornball machismo that you can't help but get taken in by, even if just for a second."^[88]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>People's Choice Awards</u>	<u>December 7, 2021</u>	<u>The Movie of 2021</u>	<i>The Tomorrow War</i>	Nominated	^[89]
		<u>The Action Movie of 2021</u>		Nominated	
		<u>The Male Movie Star of 2021</u>	<u>Chris Pratt</u>	Nominated	
		<u>The Action Movie Star of 2021</u>		Nominated	
<u>Annie Awards</u>	<u>February 26, 2022</u>	<u>Best Character Animation – Live Action</u>	Carmelo Leggiero, Cajun Hylton, Michel Alencar Magalhaes, Florent Limouzin, Dave Clayton	Nominated	^[90]
<u>Visual Effects Society Awards</u>	<u>March 8, 2022</u>	<u>Outstanding Special (Practical) Effects in a Photoreal Project</u>	J. D. Schwalm, Wayne Rowe, Jim Schwalm, Haukur Karlsson	Nominated	^[91]
<u>Satellite Awards</u>	<u>April 2, 2022</u>	<u>Best Visual Effects</u>	Carmelo Leggiero, James E. Price, J. D. Schwalm, Randall Starr, and Sheldon Stopsack	Nominated	^[92]

Sequel

On July 8, 2021, it was reported that Skydance and Amazon were in discussions to produce a sequel, due to the film's success with the hopes of creating a new movie franchise for the streaming service of Prime Video. It was reported that director Chris McKay and screenwriter Zach Dean would be returning for the sequel, while stars Chris Pratt, Yvonne Strahovski, Betty Gilpin, Sam Richardson, Edwin Hodge, and J.K. Simmons were expected to reprise their respective roles.^{[93][94]} McKay revealed that he would like for the sequel to expand the worldbuilding and explore more concepts that could be used for the characters further adventures with one of them being the origins of the White Spikes: "I think there's a lot of story on the table from a time travel perspective, from a world-building perspective from the White Spikes. So, there's a lot of things that I think we can mess with and have a lot fun. It's like what they did with The Purge or something

like that, where it's like they start with a really interesting concept and now the next movie and the next movie get to sort of play with those things and explore those things and blow them out."^{[95][96][97]} Besides a sequel, McKay talked about the possibility of developing a spin-off focused on Richardson's character Charlie.^{[98][99]}

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External links

- *The Tomorrow War* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9777666/>) at IMDb
- *The Tomorrow War* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v725273>) at AllMovie

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