

Rent-A-Pal

Rent-A-Pal is a 2020 American thriller film^[3] written and directed by Jon Stevenson, produced by J.D. Lifshitz, Brian Landis Folkins, Jon Stevenson, Annie Elizabeth Baker, Jimmy Weber, Robert B. Martin Jr., Brandon Fryman and Raphael Margules. It stars Wil Wheaton, Brian Landis Folkins, Kathleen Brady, Amy Rutledge, and Adrian Egolf.

Rent-A-Pal was released on September 11, 2020, by IFC Midnight, and received positive reviews from critics.

Plot

In 1990, middle-aged bachelor David Brower uses Video Rendezvous, a video dating service, while also caring for his irritable dementia-stricken mother, Lucille. His father, Frank, a jazz musician, committed suicide ten years prior. After recording a new tape at Video Rendezvous, David stumbles across a tape entitled *Rent-A-Pal* in the bargain bin and purchases it. The tape features host Andy who talks to the viewer and leaves pauses for the viewer to respond, simulating a conversation. David is quickly disillusioned and shuts it off.

Video Rendezvous tells David a woman named Lisa wants to match with him after watching his latest tape. When he goes to retrieve her tape, the receptionist informs him Lisa has found another match. David watches her tape and learns that she likes jazz and is a professional caregiver, which depresses him further. He continues watching *Rent-A-Pal* and confides in Andy that Lucille was physically abusive. David talks about his failures to find a partner, and when Andy shares a story about a girl, David becomes his friend.

David continuously watches the tape, talking, drinking, and playing cards with Andy. Andy presses David for an embarrassing story, and they swap stories about experiences with girls. David begins masturbating to Andy's story, even as Andy inexplicably tells it with David's name instead of his. Lucille catches David masturbating, but mistakes him for Frank. As she gets belligerent, David angrily tells her that her husband is dead. After she breaks down, he recants and says that Frank is alive and well.

Rent-A-Pal



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Jon Stevenson
Written by	Jon Stevenson
Produced by	Jon Stevenson <p>J.D. Lifshitz</p> Jimmy Weber
	Annie Elizabeth Baker
	Robert B. Martin Jr.
	Raphael Margules
	Brandon Fryman
	Brian Landis Folkins
Starring	Wil Wheaton <p>Brian Landis Folkins</p> Kathleen Brady
	Amy Rutledge
	Adrian Egolf
Cinematography	Scott Park
Edited by	Jon Stevenson
Music by	Jimmy Weber

Video Rendezvous informs David that Lisa's previous match didn't work out and that she's once again interested in him. The two go on a date and connect over their experience in caregiving. The date goes successfully, and Lisa sets up another one for the following evening. David tells Andy, but Andy accuses David of casting him aside and forgetting about their plan to play cards. David cancels his date, using his mom as an excuse.

David spends the evening interacting with Andy, but discovers that Lucille has wandered out of the house. Frantic, David calls Lisa for help. Together they find her and bring her home. David shows Lisa his room and shares his father's music with her. As they get intimate on the couch, David accidentally turns on *Rent-A-Pal*. Andy seems to watch David judgingly. David prematurely ejaculates when Lisa touches him, at which Andy laughs hysterically. When Lisa questions David about the tape, he gets angry and defensive, prompting her to leave.

The next morning, as David cleans the house, he finds in his mother's room a picture of him and Andy, seemingly taken during the course of the tape. He finds Lucille cutting up his tape in the kitchen, mistaking it for Scotch tape. Furious, David strikes her in the face with the tape before going out and buying another copy. After rewatching it, he picks up Lucille from the kitchen floor and takes her to the basement stairs. When she addresses him as David, he coldly tells her she's the reason that Frank killed himself, then pushes her down the stairs. All the TVs in the house begin to play *Rent-A-Pal*.

Lisa arrives, wanting to make amends for the previous night, and discovers Lucille's body. David confronts her while speaking like Andy and tries to keep her from calling the police. He then tries to murder her. She manages to stab him in the chest with a pair of scissors before fleeing. David drags himself into the basement and fast-forwards the tape to the end, in which Andy forlornly says goodbye to the viewer, before he bleeds out.

Production companies	Pretty People Pictures <u>BoulderLight Pictures</u>
Distributed by	<u>IFC Midnight</u>
Release date	September 11, 2020
Running time	108 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Box office	\$31,053 ^[2]

Cast

- Wil Wheaton as Andy
- Brian Landis Folkins as David Brower
- Amy Rutledge as Lisa
- Kathleen Brady as Lucille Brower
- Adrian Egolf as Diane
- Josh Staam as Camera man
- Luke Sorge as Customer
- Olivia Hendrick as Susan
- Andrew Vincent as Rollerskater
- Karin Carr as Carla
- Sara Woodyard as Mary
- Brandon Fryman as Skate City employee

Release

The film was released on September 11, 2020.^[4]

Reception

On Rotten Tomatoes the film has an approval rating of 67% based on reviews from 52 critics, with an average score of 6.6/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "*Rent-A-Pal* suffers from untapped thematic potential, but Wil Wheaton's unsettling performance makes this unique horror story worth watching."^[5] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 61 out of 100, based on 7 critics, indicating "Generally Favorable reviews".^[6]

Frank Scheck of *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote: "What makes the film work as well as it does, at least up to a point, are the perfectly calibrated performances."^[4]

Accolades

Award ceremony	Category	Recipient	Result	Ref.
Grimmfest	Best Actor	Brian Landis Folkins	Won	[7]
	Best Screenplay	Jon Stevenson	Won	
Sunset Film Circle Awards	Scene Stealer	<u>Wil Wheaton</u>	Nominated	[8]
	Directors to Watch	Jon Stevenson	Nominated	
<u>Sitges Film Festival</u>	Best Motion Picture	<i>Rent-A-Pal</i>	Nominated	
<u>Strasbourg European Fantastic Film Festival</u>	Best International Feature Film	<i>Rent-A-Pal</i> - Jon Stevenson	Nominated	

References

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8. Neglia, Matt (July 24, 2023). "The 2020 Sunset Film Critics Circle Award Nominations (SFCC)" (<https://nextbestpicture.com/the-2020-sunset-film-critics-circle-award-nominations-sfcc/>). *www.nextbestpicture.com*.

External links

- Official website (<https://www.ifcfilms.com/films/rent-a-pal>)
 - *Rent-A-Pal* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12274228/>) at IMDb
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