

Reality (2023 film)

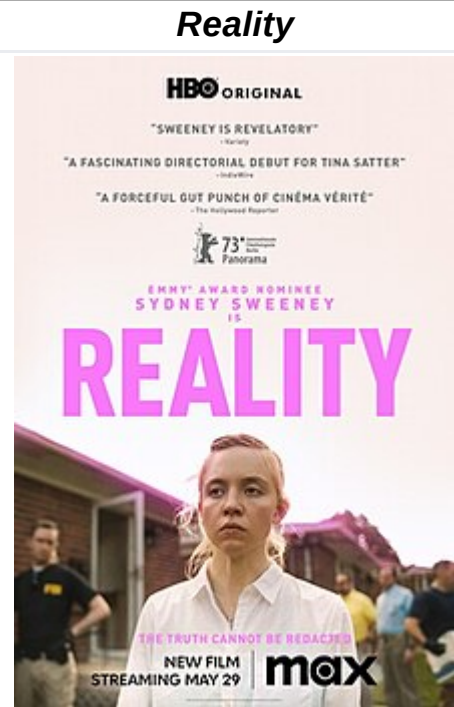
Reality is a 2023 American crime drama film directed by Tina Satter from a screenplay by Satter and James Paul Dallas. It is based on the FBI interrogation transcript of American intelligence leaker Reality Winner, which Satter previously staged as the play *Is This a Room*.^[7] It stars Sydney Sweeney as Winner, with Josh Hamilton and Marchánt Davis in supporting roles.

Reality premiered at the 73rd Berlin International Film Festival on February 18, 2023, and was released on May 29, 2023, by HBO Films. It has received critical acclaim, with praise for Satter's direction and Sweeney's performance.

Plot

On May 9, 2017, Reality Winner watches Fox News coverage on the firing of James Comey by President Donald Trump on the TV at her office. 25 days later, on June 3, Winner returns home from grocery shopping, where she is confronted by FBI agents Taylor and Garrick, who explain they have a warrant to search her house and her belongings. As a team of agents arrive and begin searching the house, Winner engages in casual conversation with the agents, all of which is picked up by recording device, the transcript of which forms the basis of the film's dialogue. During the early portion of the recording, Winner expresses concern for her dog's and cat's safety during the search.

Winner agrees to speak with Taylor and Garrick in an empty, disused bedroom in her house. Garrick and Taylor start to ask her about the specifics of her work. She explains, besides working as a yoga instructor and CrossFit trainer, she is a Persian translator for a government contractor and is hoping to be deployed to Afghanistan as a translator so her fluency in Pashto can be better utilized. The agents eventually reveal they are questioning Winner about the recent leak of classified government documents to an online publication. Winner initially denies knowledge, but over the course of an hour is eventually compelled to confess she printed and leaked a document from the National Security Agency's database. The film initially redacts specifics of the leak, as is done in the transcript, by having the characters briefly disappear when saying redacted



Official release poster

Directed by	<u>Tina Satter</u>
Screenplay by	Tina Satter James Paul Dallas
Based on	<i>Is This a Room</i> by Tina Satter
Produced by	Noah Stahl Brad Becker- Parton Riva Marker Greg Nobile
Starring	<u>Sydney Sweeney</u> <u>Josh Hamilton</u> <u>Marchánt Davis</u>
Cinematography	Paul Yee ^[1]
Edited by	Jennifer Vecchiarello ^[2] Ron Dulin
Music by	Nathan Micay ^[3]
Production companies	Seaview

phrases—but in a fourth wall-breaking sequence Winner forcefully ends the redactions, revealing to the audience that the documents provided proof of Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections and the publication was *The Intercept*, which had put out a call for evidence of Russian interference.

Winner denies wishing to be a whistleblower or to undermine the intelligence community à la Edward Snowden, instead saying she wanted the American public to have the same information the government had about the election. As the interrogation wraps up, she chiefly expresses concern for her pets as she realizes she will be taken into custody. She is escorted out of her house and handcuffed, as footage is shown of media reports about the leak. Winner receives both praise and criticism for her actions, with some accusing her of colluding with the Middle East or denying the veracity of the leaks altogether. Some outlets criticize *The Intercept* for allowing the leak to be traced to Winner, and others theorize that Winner's disproportionate punishment was designed to discourage potential whistleblowers.

A textual epilogue explains that Winner was denied bail and charged under the Espionage Act. She spent four years in jail and will remain on supervised release until November 2024. It notes that the same document Winner leaked was later used on the Senate floor as evidence of Russian interference.

	2 Sq Ft Burn These Words In the Cut Productions Fit Via Vi <u>Cinereach</u> Tanbark Pictures
Distributed by	<u>HBO Films</u> (United States) <u>mk2 Films</u> (International)
Release dates	February 18, 2023 (Berlinale) May 29, 2023 (United States)
Running time	82 minutes ^[4]
Country	United States
Language	English
Box office	\$1.4 million ^{[5][6]}

Cast

- Sydney Sweeney as Reality Winner
- Josh Hamilton as Agent Garrick (Justin C. Garrick)
- Marchánt Davis as Agent Taylor (R. Wallace Taylor)
- Benny Elledge as "Joe" (Unknown Male)^[a]
- John Way as FBI Agent

Production

Development

The film depicts the interrogation of intelligence leaker Reality Winner, which took place on the day of her arrest on June 3, 2017. A former enlisted US Air Force member and NSA translator, Winner leaked an intelligence report about Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections to the news website *The Intercept*. She was confronted at her home in Augusta, Georgia, by FBI agents R. Wallace Taylor and Justin C. Garrick, who interrogated her over the course of an hour in an unused room in the house.^[8]

Tina Satter turned the interrogation transcript into the verbatim theatre performance *Is This a Room* (based on the transcript quote "Is this a room? Is that a room?" spoken in the film by an FBI agent played by John Way), which premiered at The Kitchen in 2019 before an extended off-Broadway run at the Vineyard Theatre later that year. The production starred Emily Davis as Winner, with Pete Simpson and TL Thompson as the interrogators, and Becca Blackwell as "Unknown Male", a classification in the transcript for dialogue from multiple FBI agents who were inspecting Winner's house during the interrogation.^{[9][10]} The play premiered on Broadway at the Lyceum Theatre on October 10, 2021, and closed on November 27, 2021.^[11] Winner was not involved with the production during its initial off-Broadway run due to her imprisonment, and was unable to see the Broadway production due to still being under house arrest, but spoke with the creative team extensively after her release from prison and video-called into the opening night performance's curtain call.^[12]

In June 2022, it was announced that *Is This a Room* would be adapted into a film, with Sydney Sweeney, Josh Hamilton, and Marchánt Davis starring and Satter directing in her film debut, from a screenplay she co-wrote with James Paul Davis.^{[13][14]} In preparation for her role, Sweeney watched interviews and spoke with Winner over Zoom and text. She used these conversations to understand Winner's speaking mannerisms, which she mimicked. Mindful of Winner's job as a yoga trainer and CrossFit instructor, Sweeney also trained to increase her muscle mass, in some cases using workouts Winner posted on her Instagram.^[15] In addition to her conversations with Sweeney, Winner consulted with the wardrobe and art departments throughout the production process.^[15] Despite her involvement and support for the film, Winner claims she will likely never see it, due to finding the prospect of reliving the day of her arrest too traumatic.^[16]

Filming

Principal photography began in May 2022, over the course of 16 days.^[17] Exterior filming was done at the start of production, with the final 9–10 days focused on filming inside the room set. The entire interrogation sequence was filmed in order, which Sweeney found unusual, as most productions she had worked on filmed out of order.^[15]

Release

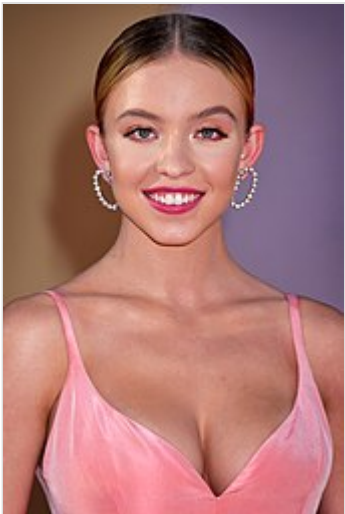
The film received its world premiere at the 73rd Berlin International Film Festival on February 18, 2023.^[18] Prior to, mk2 Films acquired international sales rights to the film.^[19] Shortly thereafter, HBO Films acquired US distribution rights to the film.^[20] It was released on HBO on May 29, 2023.^[21] The film was given a theatrical release in international markets including the United Kingdom and Ireland on June 2,^[22] Australia on June 29,^[23] and France on August 16.^[24]

Reception

Reality received positive reviews from critics at Berlinale, with praise for Satter's direction and the cast performances (particularly Sweeney's).^{[30][31]} On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 93% of 92 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Reality*'s narrow scope and gripping fact-based story add up to a riveting showcase for Sydney Sweeney in the title role."^[32] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 83 out of 100, based on 27 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[33]

David Rooney of *The Hollywood Reporter* praised the transition from the minimalist set design of *Is This a Room* to the film's realistic recreation of Winner's house, noting "Satter shows unfaltering command of the medium for a first-time film director", highlighting the use of the closeup as a direct translation of the play's surreal storytelling.^[34]

Accolades



Sydney Sweeney's performance garnered widespread praise from critics.^{[25][26][27][28][29]}

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Berlin International Film Festival</u>	<u>February 25, 2023</u>	Panorama Audience Award – Feature Film	<i>Reality</i>	Nominated	[35]
		GWFF Best First Feature Award	<u>Tina Satter</u>	Nominated	[36]
<u>Jerusalem Film Festival</u>	July 23, 2023	Best Documentary	<i>Reality</i>	Won	[37]
<u>Gold Derby Awards</u>	August 16, 2023	TV Movie	<i>Reality</i>	Nominated	[38]
Awards Daily Cooler Awards	September 18, 2023	Outstanding Lead Actress in a Limited/Anthology Series	<u>Sydney Sweeney</u>	Nominated	[39]
<u>Gotham Independent Film Awards</u>	<u>November 27, 2023</u>	<u>Best Feature</u>	<i>Reality</i>	Nominated	[40]
<u>Cinema Eye Honors</u>	<u>January 12, 2024</u>	Heterodox Award	<i>Reality</i>	Nominated	[41]
<u>Critics' Choice Awards</u>	<u>January 14, 2024</u>	<u>Best Movie Made for Television</u>	<i>Reality</i>	Nominated	[42]
		<u>Best Actress in a Movie/Miniseries</u>	Sydney Sweeney	Nominated	
<u>Producers Guild of America Awards</u>	<u>February 25th, 2024</u>	<u>Best Streamed or Televised Movie</u>	<i>Reality</i>	Nominated	[43]
<u>Peabody Awards</u>	May 9, 2024	Entertainment	<i>Reality</i>	Won	[44]

Notes

- a. "Unknown Male" is a classification in the transcript referring to multiple FBI agents who were present in Winner's house on June 3, 2017, several of whom were caught on the audio recording.

See also

- *Winner*, an upcoming film also based on Reality Winner

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.hbo.com/movies/reality>) 
 - *Reality* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt24068064/>) at IMDb
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