

The King's Man

The King's Man is a 2021 British-American spy action film directed by Matthew Vaughn from his story and a screenplay he wrote with Karl Gajdusek. The third instalment in the British *Kingsman* film series, which is based on the comic book *The Secret Service* (later retitled to *Kingsman*) by Mark Millar and Dave Gibbons, in-turn based on a concept by Millar and Vaughn, it is a prequel to *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014) and *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017). Its ensemble cast includes Ralph Fiennes (also one of its executive producers), Gemma Arterton, Rhys Ifans, Matthew Goode, Tom Hollander, Harris Dickinson, Daniel Brühl, Djimon Hounsou, and Charles Dance. It focuses on several events during World War I and the birth of the Kingsman organisation.

It was released in the United States on 22 December 2021, and in the United Kingdom on 26 December 2021 by 20th Century Studios^[8] following several release delays partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It received mixed reviews from critics^[9] and grossed \$126 million against nearly a \$100 million budget, making it a box-office bomb.^[10] A direct sequel, titled *The King's Man: The Traitor King*, is currently in development.^[11]

Plot

In 1902, during the Second Boer War, British aristocrat Orlando, Duke of Oxford, his wife Emily, and their young son Conrad visit a concentration camp in South Africa while working for the British Red Cross. Emily is mortally wounded during a sniper attack on the camp. Before dying, she makes Orlando promise never to let their son see war again.

Twelve years later, Orlando has formed a private spy network of domestic servants, including his butler, Shola, and maid, Polly Wilkins, employed by the world's most powerful dignitaries. Conrad is eager to fight, but Orlando forbids him to join the British Army and persuades Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, not to let him do so.

At Kitchener's request, Conrad and Orlando ride with Orlando's friends, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg, through Sarajevo. Conrad

The King's Man



Theatrical release poster.

Directed by	Matthew Vaughn
Screenplay by	Matthew Vaughn <div>Karl Gajdusek</div>
Story by	Matthew Vaughn
Based on	<i>The Secret Service</i> <div>by Mark Millar<div>Matthew Vaughn^[1]<div>Dave Gibbons</div></div></div>
Produced by	Matthew Vaughn <div>David Reid<div>Adam Bohling</div></div>
Starring	<div>Ralph Fiennes<div>Gemma Arterton<div>Rhys Ifans<div>Matthew Goode<div>Tom Hollander<div>Harris Dickinson<div>Daniel Brühl</div></div></div></div></div></div></div>

saves the Archduke from a bomb thrown by Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian intent on sparking a war. Princip later reenounters the Archduke's entourage by chance and fatally shoots him and his wife, starting World War I. Orlando learns that the assassination was orchestrated by "The Flock": a group plotting to pit the German, Russian, and British empires against each other, led by the mysterious "Shepherd", whose ultimate goal is Scottish independence; his operatives include Russian mystic Grigori Rasputin, trusted adviser to Tsar Nicholas of Russia.

Rasputin poisons Nicholas's young son Alexei, only to cure him when Nicholas promises to pull out of the war. Conrad is notified of Rasputin's manipulation by his cousin, Prince Felix Yusupov. Knowing the Western Front will be left vulnerable if Russia exits the war, Conrad delivers this information to Kitchener and his aide-de-camp Major Max Morton, who sets sail for Russia. Their ship, HMS Hampshire, is torpedoed by a submarine and sunk. Word of Kitchener's death reaches Orlando, spurring him to travel to Russia with Shola, Polly, and Conrad to kill Rasputin. After a grueling fight, Orlando, Shola, Conrad, and Polly kill Rasputin at a Christmas party hosted by Felix.

To keep the United States from entering the war, Erik Jan Hanussen, an adviser to Kaiser Wilhelm II, sends the Zimmermann Telegram, encouraging Mexico to invade the United States. Although British Intelligence intercepts the message, Polly deciphers it, but American President Woodrow Wilson refuses to join the war, citing a lack of concrete proof. The Shepherd recruits Vladimir Lenin to overthrow the Tsar and remove Russia from the war, sending an assassin to execute the Romanov family.

Conrad is commissioned into the Grenadier Guards against his father's wishes. King George V arranges to have Conrad assigned to London. Determined to fight in the war, Conrad swaps places with a Scottish soldier named Archie Reid, giving him the nickname "Lancelot" to send his father a message. Disguised as Archie, a member of the Black Watch, Conrad volunteers for a mission into no man's land to retrieve information from a wounded British agent. Upon his return, a fellow soldier who knows Archie accuses him of being a German spy and shoots him dead, devastating Orlando. The information he recovered verifies the authenticity of the Zimmermann Telegram.

After Wilson again refuses to enter the war despite Conrad's proof, Orlando learns that the President is being blackmailed with footage of being seduced by Shepherd's agent, Mata Hari, and resolves to recover the negatives. Upon defeating Mata Hari at the American embassy, Orlando has her cashmere scarf identified and locate its origin. Orlando parachutes onto the mountaintop sanctuary of the Shepherd, who is revealed to be Morton. Morton had arranged Kitchener's assassination and faked his own death. Orlando fights and kills Morton with Shola's help. Polly recovers the film, which is delivered to Wilson. Wilson burns it and brings the United States into the war.

	<u>Djimon Hounsou</u> <u>Charles Dance</u>
Cinematography	<u>Ben Davis</u> ^[2]
Edited by	<u>Jason Ballantine</u> Rob Hall
Music by	<u>Matthew Margeson</u> <u>Dominic Lewis</u>
Production companies	<u>Marv Studios</u> Cloudy Productions
Distributed by	<u>20th Century Studios</u>
Release dates	5 December 2021 (<u>London</u>) 22 December 2021 (<u>United States</u>) 26 December 2021 (<u>United Kingdom</u>)
Running time	131 minutes ^[3]
Countries	<u>United Kingdom</u> <u>United States</u>
Language	English
Budget	\$95–100 million ^[4] ^[5]
Box office	\$126 million ^[6] ^[7]

A year after the war's end, Orlando purchases the Kingsman Tailor Shop as a front for his organisation. Orlando, Shola, Polly, King George V, Archie, and the US Ambassador to the UK form the original Kingsmen, each being assigned a codename from the King Arthur legend to honour Conrad.

In a mid-credit scene, Hanussen, having assumed command of Shepherd's organisation, introduces Lenin to the Romanovs' assassin, Adolf Hitler.

Cast

- Ralph Fiennes as Orlando Oxford: An aristocrat, spy network leader and founding Kingsman Arthur.
- Gemma Arterton as Polly Wilkins: A maid, member of Orlando's spy network and founding Kingsman Galahad.
- Rhys Ifans as Grigori Rasputin: The Tsar's personal physician and also agent and second-in-command of the Shepherd.
- Matthew Goode as Max Morton / The Shepherd: Posing as an English officer in the British Army, in reality a Scotsman seeking Scottish independence, the leader of a plot to pit the German, Russian, and British empires against each other. The character based on Frederick Duquesne
- Tom Hollander as King George and founding Kingsman Percival, Kaiser Wilhelm, (the grandsons of Queen Victoria) and Tsar Nicholas.
- Harris Dickinson as Conrad Oxford: Orlando's son, who switches places with a soldier Archie Reid to fight in the Great War against his father's wishes.
- Daniel Brühl as Erik Jan Hanussen: An occultist and the Shepherd's third-in-command.
- Djimon Hounsou as Shola: A butler, member of Orlando's spy network and founding Kingsman Merlin.
- Charles Dance as Herbert Kitchener: The British Secretary of State for War.
- Valerie Pachner as Mata Hari: An agent of the Shepherd and seducer of Woodrow Wilson.
- Alison Steadman as Rita
- August Diehl as Vladimir Lenin: A Russian revolutionary and the head of government in Soviet Russia.
- David Kross as Moustached Man (Adolf Hitler): An assassin recruited by Hanussen.
- Alexandra Maria Lara as Emily Oxford: Orlando's deceased wife and Conrad's mother.
- Branka Katić as Tsarina Alix: The Russian empress consort.
- Robert Aramayo as Sergeant Major Atkins
- Ron Cook as Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria
- Olivier Richters as Huge Machinery Shack Guard



Ralph Fiennes stars as Orlando Oxford.

In addition, Aaron Taylor-Johnson portrays Archie Reid, a soldier and founding Kingsman Lancelot, while Stanley Tucci appears as the US Ambassador to the UK and founding Kingsman Bedivere.

Production

Development

In June 2018, Matthew Vaughn announced that a prequel film titled *Kingsman: The Great Game* was in active development, stating that the plot would take place during the early 1900s and would depict the formation of the spy agency and that the project would film back-to-back with "the third regular *Kingsman* film" which was scheduled to be released in 2021.^{[12][13]} Vaughn was inspired to write the script for the prequel film after watching *The Man Who Would Be King*.^[14]

Casting

In September 2018, it was announced that Ralph Fiennes and Harris Dickinson would star in the prequel with the former also serving as one of the executive producers of the film.^[15] In November 2018, it was revealed that Daniel Brühl, Charles Dance, Rhys Ifans and Matthew Goode would co-star in the film.^[16]

In February 2019, it was reported that Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Gemma Arterton, Tom Hollander, Djimon Hounsou, Alison Steadman, Stanley Tucci, Robert Aramayo and Neil Jackson had joined the cast.^{[17][18][19]} In April 2019, it was announced Alexandra Maria Lara had joined the cast of the film.^[20] Later in May, Joel Basman joined the cast.^{[21][22]} That same month, as filming concluded, Vaughn denied reports that Liam Neeson had joined the cast.^{[23][24]} Vaughn also said *The Great Game* was a working title and the film would not have that name.^[23]

Filming

Principal photography began 22 January 2019 in the United Kingdom.^[25] In April 2019, some scenes were shot in Piedmont, Italy: Turin, Po river's street, street of city and in two palaces close to it; Venaria Reale: the Palace of Venaria and royal gardens; Nichelino, Palazzina di caccia of Stupinigi and surroundings; Racconigi (Cuneo), Castle of Racconigi.^[26] The film's initial cinematographer Ben Davis had to depart the project during reshoots due to his commitments to *Eternals*.^[27]

Vaughn admitted some scenes had to be cut from the film because they were "way too Kingsman-y.", and that this film needed to find a balance between the fun tone of the other *Kingsman* movies and respect for historical accuracy and the characters. He revealed that he had originally written three scenes featuring Rasputin that would have been so explicit that they likely would have received an NC-17 rating.^[14]

Soundtrack

Matthew Margeson, who worked with Henry Jackman in the previous *Kingsman* films, composed the film score with Dominic Lewis. Hollywood Records released the soundtrack digitally on 22 December 2021.^[28] The ending theme is "Measure of a Man" by FKA Twigs featuring Central Cee.^[29]

Release

The King's Man had its world premiere in London, United Kingdom on 5 December 2021 and was theatrically released on 22 December 2021, its eighth proposed release date and more than two years after it was originally due to come out.^{[30][31]}

It was originally scheduled to be released on 8 November 2019,^[32] but was pushed back first to 15 November 2019,^[33] then to 14 February 2020,^[34] and then to 18 September 2020.^[35] The release date was again pushed back by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures to 26 February 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{[36][37]} Following the delay of Marvel Cinematic Universe: Phase Four films, *The King's Man* was moved up two weeks to 12 February 2021, before being moved again to 12 March 2021.^[38] In January 2021, the release date was delayed again to 20 August 2021.^[39] In March 2021, it was further delayed to the December 2021 date.^[40] The film played in cinemas for 45 days before heading to digital platforms.^[41]

Home media

The film started streaming on Disney+ through Star in the UK, Ireland, Japan, and South Korea on 9 February 2022 and later that February for Australia and New Zealand and Canada.^[42] It streamed on HBO Max and Hulu on 18 February and on Star+ on 2 March.^[43] The film streamed on Disney+ Hotstar on 23 February 2022 in Southeast Asia.^[44] The film was released on Blu-ray, DVD, and 4K Ultra HD by 20th Century Studios Home Entertainment on 22 February.^[45]

Reception

Audience viewership

According to Samba TV, 2.2 million US households watched *The King's Man* during its first four days streaming.^[46] According to Whip Media, *The King's Man* was the most watched film across all platforms in the United States during the week of February 20, 2022.^[47] According to the streaming aggregator JustWatch, *The King's Man* was the top-streamed movie across all platforms during the week of February 21, 2022.^[48]

Box office

The King's Man grossed \$37.2 million in the US and Canada, and \$88.8 million in other territories, for a worldwide total \$126 million.^{[49][50]}

In the US and Canada, *The King's Man* was released alongside *Sing 2* and *The Matrix Resurrections*. It was originally projected to gross \$15–20 million from 3,175 screens over its first five days of release.^[51] It went on to under-perform, grossing \$5.9 million in its opening weekend and an estimated \$10 million over the five days, finishing fifth at the box office, with contributing factors such as the reluctance to go to cinemas during the pandemic, the rise of the Omicron variant of COVID and being released during the second weekend of *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Men made up 65% of the audience during its opening, with those in the age range of 18–34 comprising 54% of ticket sales and those above 35 comprising 40%.^{[52][53]} The film earned \$4.6 million in its second weekend,^[54] \$3.2 million in its third,^[55] \$2.2 million in its fourth,^[56] \$1.8 million in its fifth,^[57] \$1.66 million in its sixth,^[58] \$1.2 million in its seventh,^[59] and \$426,262 in its eighth.^[60]

Outside the US and Canada, the film earned \$6.9 million in its opening weekend, including \$3.5 million in South Korea, \$2.1 million in Japan, and \$600,000 in Indonesia.^[61] In its second weekend, the film made \$14.1 million from 22 markets. In Taiwan, the film opened with \$2.8 million, making it the fourth-best opening of 2021 in the country.^[62] In its third weekend, the film earned \$13.4 million, including \$1.6 million from Germany, where it debuted in second place at the box office.^[63] The film made \$10.2 million in its fourth weekend,^[64] \$6.2 million in its fifth,^[65] \$4.2 million in its sixth,^[66] and \$2.7 million in its seventh.^[67]

Critical response

The review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes reported an approval rating of 41% based on 181 reviews, with an average rating of 5.1/10. The site's critical consensus reads, "Ralph Fiennes' solid central performance in *The King's Man* is done dirty by this tonally confused prequel's descent into action thriller tedium."^[68] On Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, the film has a score of 44 out of 100, based on 40 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".^[69] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "B+" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak reported 77% of audience members gave it a positive score, with 60% saying they would definitely recommend it.^[70]

Sequel

In December 2021, Matthew Vaughn stated that if a sequel were to be developed, he would like to see the story about the first decade of the Kingsman agency with all of the characters that the audience sees at the end.^[71] In October 2023, Vaughn announced a direct sequel, *The King's Man: The Traitor King*, to be in active development, following the fictionalised rise of Adolf Hitler (portrayed by David Kross) across the franchise's alternate history setting, with Ralph Fiennes, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Gemma Arterton, and Djimon Hounsou intended to reprise their roles.^{[72][73]}

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- [Official website \(https://www.20thcenturystudios.com/movies/the-kings-man\)](https://www.20thcenturystudios.com/movies/the-kings-man)
 - *The King's Man* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6856242/>) at [IMDb](#)
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