

Promising Young Woman

Promising Young Woman is a 2020 film written, co-produced, and directed by Emerald Fennell in her feature directorial debut. It stars Carey Mulligan as a troubled young woman haunted by a traumatic past as she navigates balancing forgiveness and vengeance, with Bo Burnham, Alison Brie, Clancy Brown, Chris Lowell, Jennifer Coolidge, Laverne Cox, and Connie Britton in supporting roles. It incorporates film genres including black comedy, crime drama, feminist film, rape and revenge, and vigilante thriller.^{[5][6][7][8]}

Promising Young Woman had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on January 25, 2020, and was theatrically released in the United States on December 25, 2020, by Focus Features. It received positive reviews from critics, with praise for Fennell's direction and screenplay, the editing and Mulligan's performance, and grossed over \$20 million worldwide. The film won Best Original Screenplay at the 93rd Academy Awards, with additional nominations for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress (Mulligan), and Best Film Editing. Fennell also won Best Original Screenplay at the Critics' Choice Awards, Writers' Guild Awards, and British Academy Film Awards.

Plot

Cassie Thomas, a 30-year-old medical school dropout, seeks revenge against those involved in her best friend Nina Fisher's sexual assault and subsequent suicide. Her quest begins when she learns that Al Monroe, the perpetrator, is getting married. Cassie spends her nights pretending to be drunk in clubs, exposing men who attempt to take advantage of her intoxication. She befriends Ryan Cooper, a former classmate, who reveals Al's upcoming wedding and persuades her to go on a date with him.

Cassie confronts Madison McPhee, another former classmate and friend of Nina's, who denies Nina's rape. While Madison gets drunk, Cassie hires a man to take her to a hotel room. Madison later leaves Cassie multiple distressed voicemails. Cassie then targets Elizabeth Walker, the dean who dismissed Nina's case. Pretending to be a makeup artist, she lures Walker's daughter, Amber, into her car and questions Walker

Promising Young Woman



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Emerald Fennell</u>
Written by	<u>Emerald Fennell</u>
Produced by	<u>Margot Robbie</u> <div><u>Josey McNamara</u><u>Tom Ackerley</u><u>Ben Browning</u><u>Ashley Fox</u><u>Emerald Fennell</u></div>
Starring	<u>Carey Mulligan</u> <u>Bo Burnham</u> <u>Alison Brie</u> <u>Clancy Brown</u> <u>Chris Lowell</u> <u>Jennifer Coolidge</u> <u>Laverne Cox</u> <u>Connie Britton</u> <u>Molly Shannon</u>
Cinematography	<u>Benjamin Kračun</u>
Edited by	<u>Frédéric Thoraval</u>

about Nina's case. When Walker justifies her actions, Cassie tells her she dropped Amber off at a dorm with drunk male students. Cassie later reveals Amber's safety, forcing Walker to confront her inaction.

During another revenge attempt, Cassie accidentally runs into Ryan, whom she was supposed to meet for a date. She discovers that Jordan Green, Al's lawyer, is remorseful and on leave after realizing the harm he caused to women. Cassie forgives him, retracting her plan for revenge, and resumes her relationship with Ryan.

Madison confronts Cassie outside her house, and Cassie assures her that nothing harmful occurred. Madison provides a phone containing a video of Nina's rape, revealing Ryan's presence at the party. Cassie confronts Ryan, who claims he was too drunk to remember the incident. Threatening to release the video, Cassie forces Ryan to reveal Al's bachelor party location.

Posing as a stripper at the party, Cassie drugs the attendees, handcuffs Al to a bed, and reveals her identity. During the confrontation, Al breaks free, suffocates Cassie, and with the help of his friend Joe, burns her body in the woods. Cassie's parents report her missing, and the police investigate. Ryan, dishonestly framing Cassie as mentally disturbed, conceals her connection to Al's bachelor party.

At Al's wedding, Ryan and Jordan receive texts from Cassie. Jordan receives a package with the video and instructions in case Cassie doesn't return. Gail, Cassie's friend and manager, finds a half-heart necklace with Cassie's name, and the police discover the matching half with Cassie's burnt remains. Al is arrested for Cassie's murder as Ryan receives a final text from Cassie, signed with her and Nina's names.

Music by	Anthony Willis
Production companies	<u>FilmNation</u> <u>Entertainment</u> <u>LuckyChap</u> <u>Entertainment</u>
Distributed by	<u>Focus Features</u> (United States) <u>Universal Pictures</u> (Select territories) <u>Sky Cinema</u> <u>NOW</u> ^[a] ^[2] (United Kingdom)
Release dates	January 25, 2020 (Sundance) December 25, 2020 (United States)
Running time	114 minutes
Countries	United States United Kingdom
Language	English
Budget	\$10 million ^[3] ^[4]
Box office	\$20.3 million

Cast

- Carey Mulligan as Cassandra "Cassie" Thomas
- Bo Burnham as Ryan Cooper
- Clancy Brown as Stanley Thomas
- Jennifer Coolidge as Susan Thomas
- Laverne Cox as Gail
- Alison Brie as Madison McPhee
- Chris Lowell as Alexander "Al" Monroe
- Molly Shannon as Mrs. Fisher
- Connie Britton as Dean Elizabeth Walker
- Adam Brody as Jerry
- Max Greenfield as Joe
- Christopher Mintz-Plasse as Neil

- [Steve Monroe](#) as Detective Waller
- [Sam Richardson](#) as Paul
- [Ray Nicholson](#) as Jim
- [Gabriel Oliva](#) as Alfred
- [Francisca Estevez](#) as Amber Walker
- [Angela Zhou](#) as Detective Todd
- [Austin Talynn Carpenter](#) as Anastasia
- [Alfred Molina](#) as Jordan Green (uncredited)

Production

Emerald Fennell devised the concept of the film in 2017, and sold the script to [Margot Robbie's](#) production company [LuckyChap Entertainment](#) after pitching the opening scene.^[9] In January 2019, it was announced [Carey Mulligan](#) had been set to star in the film, with Fennell directing.^[10] In March 2019, [Bo Burnham](#), [Alison Brie](#), [Connie Britton](#), [Adam Brody](#), [Jennifer Coolidge](#), [Laverne Cox](#), [Max Greenfield](#), [Christopher Mintz-Plasse](#), [Sam Richardson](#), and [Molly Shannon](#) joined the cast,^[11] with [Angela Zhou](#) and [Clancy Brown](#) being added in April.^{[12][13]} Principal photography began in Los Angeles on March 26, 2019,^[14] lasting 23 days.^[15] The majority of exterior shots were filmed at Campus South, part of the [Lanterman property](#) at [Cal Poly Pomona](#).^[16]

The film production crew deliberately chose male actors who previously played characters known as good or wholesome to reinforce the idea that predators can be anyone.^[17]

Fennell created "mood boards" to illustrate to the crew how Cassie has wildly different facets of her personality.^[18]

Originally, Fennell planned to end the film at the time Cassie's body was burned, but the production's financiers balked at having a negative ending. She also considered an ending where Cassie appears at the wedding and kills the men responsible but deemed it unrealistic. She decided to have the ending where Cassie has a backup revenge plan as she felt Cassie would be thorough in her planning and she would be aware she could die. Additionally, Fennell stated that having Al apprehended at his wedding would reflect Cassie's sense of humor.^[19]

The production had a budget around \$10 million.^{[3][4]}

Music

Release

In February 2019, [Focus Features](#) acquired distribution rights to the film.^[20] It had its world premiere at the [Sundance Film Festival](#) on January 25, 2020.^[21] It was initially scheduled to be released theatrically on April 17, 2020,^[22] but was pulled from the schedule due to the initial closures of movie theaters that



Writer and director [Emerald Fennell](#)

occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.^[23] It was theatrically released on December 25, 2020, instead,^[24] and on video on demand on January 15, 2021.^{[25][26]} The Blu-ray was released on March 16, 2021.^[27]

Reception

Box office

Promising Young Woman grossed \$6.4 million in the United States and Canada, and \$12.3 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$20.3 million.^[28]

In North America, the film was released alongside *Wonder Woman 1984*, *News of the World*, and *Pinocchio*, and was projected to gross around \$2 million in its opening weekend.^[29] It went on to debut to \$719,305, finishing fifth at the box office. Some 63% of the audience were female, and 74% were aged over 25.^[30] The film dropped 4.4% in its second weekend to \$687,900, then made \$586,285 in its third weekend, finishing sixth both times.^{[31][32]} The film continued to hold well in the subsequent weekends, including seeing a 16% bump following its four Golden Globe nominations, with a running total of \$5.1 million by February 21.^[33]

Critical response

Promising Young Woman received highly positive reviews from critics.^{[34][35]} On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 90% of 427 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.1/10. The website's consensus reads: "A boldly provocative, timely thriller, *Promising Young Woman* is an auspicious feature debut for writer-director Emerald Fennell – and a career highlight for Carey Mulligan."^[36] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 72 out of 100, based on 48 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[37] Audiences surveyed by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "B+" on an A+ to F scale, while those polled by PostTrak gave it a 73% overall positive score, with 43% saying they would definitely recommend the film.^[30]

Kate Erbland of IndieWire gave the film a "B+" and wrote "Emerald Fennell's raucous debut, *Promising Young Woman*, twists its buzzword-laden, spoiler-free synopsis—it's a #MeToo rape revenge thriller with bite!—into something fresh and totally wild."^[38] Writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, Justin Chang said "The grimly multitasking finale of *Promising Young Woman* feels both audacious and uncertain of itself, as Fennell tries to meld a cackle of delight and a blast of fury, with a lingering residue of anguish. It doesn't all come together, though there's an undeniable thrill in seeing it come apart."^[39] Linda Holmes of NPR wrote that while Cassie is the film's focus, "Fennell is saying something here, too, about men. About nice men and about men who think they're nice men, or nice enough men."^[40]

In *Variety*, Dennis Harvey praised Mulligan's performance as "skillful, entertaining and challenging", but questioned her casting, writing that she wore her "pickup-bait gear like bad drag; even her long blonde hair seems a put-on". He speculated that producer Margot Robbie may have once been intended for the role



Carey Mulligan's performance garnered widespread critical acclaim, earning her a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress.

instead. Mulligan criticized the comment, saying, "I felt like it was basically saying that I wasn't hot enough to pull off this kind of ruse ... For this film, you're going to write something that is so transparent? Now? In 2020? I just couldn't believe it." *Variety* issued an apology, saying the review had been insensitive and "minimized" her "daring performance".^[41] The National Society of Film Critics defended Harvey's review and criticized *Variety*'s apology. Harvey responded to Mulligan's comments in *The Guardian*: "I did not say or even mean to imply Mulligan is 'not hot enough' for the role." He pointed out that he was a 60-year-old gay man and did not "go around dwelling on the comparative hotnesses of young actresses".^[42]

Aisha Harris of NPR stated that Cassie does not get satisfaction from her acts of revenge, something differing from characters in other thrillers where characters take revenge.^[43] A. A. Dowd of *The A.V. Club* stated that Ryan Cooper initially is contrasted with predatory men and "represents the possibility of forgiveness, a light at the end of the dark tunnel [Cassie has] been traveling through since college."^[44]^[45] In regards to why Ryan chooses to cover for his friends when the police interview him, Fennell said: "He so wants to be good. But he's not going to blow up his own life."^[19] In regards to the reveal showing his true character, Dowd said: "Even those who didn't participate are complicit for their silence, their justifications, their refusal to intervene."^[44] Dowd added that the casting of Burnham, who "comes across as nonthreatening" and has "a boyish quality", assisted the use of the character.^[44] Harris stated that Christopher Mintz-Plasse's portrayal of Neil had "just the right amount of creepy, entitled energy."^[43]

Accolades

Promising Young Woman was nominated for five categories at the 93rd Academy Awards and won Best Original Screenplay.^[46] This film was longlisted in 13 categories at the 74th British Academy Film Awards, including Best Director for Fennell, Best Actress for Mulligan, and Best Supporting Actor for Burnham.^[47] It was finalised at six categories and won two awards, for Best Original Screenplay and Outstanding British Film.^[48] It was nominated for four categories at the 78th Golden Globe Awards,^[49] and six at the 26th Critics' Choice Awards.^[50] It won Best Actress for Mulligan and Best Original Screenplay for Fennell.^[50] It further received a Screen Actors Guild Awards nomination,^[51] and four AACTA Awards nomination, winning Best International Film and Best International Actress for Mulligan.^[52] Most of the awards were directed to Mulligan and Fennell, for the performances, screenplay as well as direction, respectively.

Notes

- a. The film skipped a theatrical release in the United Kingdom and Ireland as a result of the closure of cinemas in April due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, through a partnership between sister companies Focus Features, Universal Pictures and Sky, the film was made available on April 16, 2021, on Sky's services Sky Cinema and NOW as a Sky Original.^[1]

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Further reading

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External links

	United States portal
	Film portal
	United Kingdom portal
	Comedy portal
	2020s portal

- Official website (<https://www.focusfeatures.com/promising-young-woman>) 
- *Promising Young Woman* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9620292/>) at IMDb
- *Promising Young Woman* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v713614>) at AllMovie

- *Promising Young Woman* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/promising_young_woman) at Rotten Tomatoes
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