

The Card Counter

The Card Counter is a 2021 American crime drama film written and directed by Paul Schrader. It stars Oscar Isaac, Tiffany Haddish, Tye Sheridan, and Willem Dafoe. Martin Scorsese is an executive producer.

It had its world premiere at the 78th Venice International Film Festival on September 2, 2021.^[3] It was released on September 10, 2021, by Focus Features.

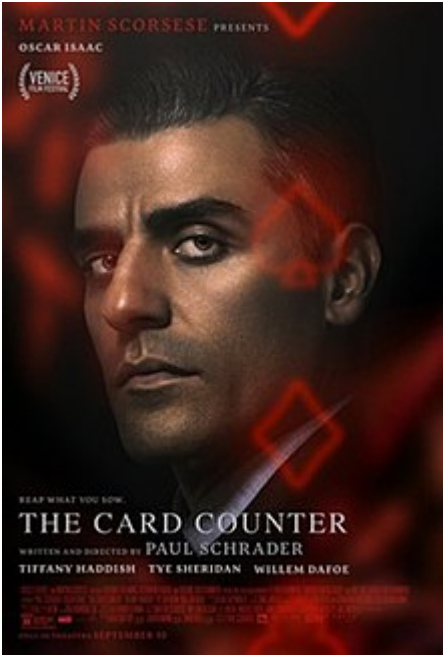
Plot

William Tell is a gambler who taught himself how to count cards during an eight-year stint in military prison. Seeking to avoid attention—either from fame or from casino bouncers—Tell's gambling philosophy is to bet small and win modestly. Despite gambling nearly every day, he avoids scrutiny by never staying in a casino hotel. He lives out of two small suitcases and exclusively stays in motels, where he removes any decor and covers the furniture in plain sheets secured with twine. At a casino, Tell encounters La Linda, an acquaintance from the gambling world. She runs a stable, a group of gamblers who are backed by investors for a portion of their winnings. She offers to stake Tell but he refuses, unwilling to be burdened by the responsibility.

In Atlantic City, a security-industry convention is being held in the same building as the casino. Tell slips into a seminar held by retired Major John Gordo, but decides to leave almost immediately. On the way out, he is recognized and confronted by a young man, Cirk Baufort, who slips him his name and number. After a nightmare about torture in a prison camp, Tell calls Cirk and agrees to meet.

Cirk knows Tell's true identity: PFC William Tillich, a soldier who was tried and convicted for his role in the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Cirk explains that his father, Roger, was also at Abu Ghraib; like Tell, he was dishonorably discharged and served time, but the experience led him to drug addiction and made him violently abusive. Cirk's mother left the family, and Roger eventually killed himself. Gordo trained Tillich and the elder Baufort in "enhanced interrogation techniques" but as he was involved as a "civilian consultant" avoided charges or

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Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Paul Schrader
Written by	Paul Schrader
Produced by	Braxton Pope <div>Lauren Mann</div> <div>David Wulf</div>
Starring	Oscar Isaac <div>Tiffany Haddish</div> <div>Tye Sheridan</div> <div>Willem Dafoe</div>
Cinematography	Alexander Dynan
Edited by	Benjamin Rodriguez Jr.
Music by	Robert Levon Been <div>Giancarlo Vulcano</div>
Production companies	Saturn Streaming <div>Astrakan Films AB</div> <div>RedLine</div> <div>Entertainment</div> <div>LB Entertainment</div>

culpability. Blaming Gordo for what happened to his family, Cirk is planning to capture, torture and kill him for revenge and seeks Tell's help. Tell refuses but offers to take Cirk along as he gambles in an attempt to help the young man avoid a violent life.

At their next stop, Tell informs La Linda that he is interested in making an arrangement. He expresses a desire to go on the World Series of Poker (WSOP) tour in order to win enough money to help Cirk cover his debts and start a new life, after which Tell will retire. After early WSOP matches, Tell makes money but loses to Mr. USA, an obnoxious Ukrainian player who has taken on a jingoistic American persona. He bonds with Cirk and feels a growing attraction to La Linda but avoids getting too close as he continues making money gambling.

At a qualifying round in Panama City, Cirk discloses that he still plans to kill Gordo. Tell takes Cirk back to his motel, confronting the younger man with a harsh interrogator persona. He presents Cirk with \$150,000 from his gambling winnings, enough for Cirk to pay off his and his mother's debts and return to college. He insists Cirk return to his mother and forget about Gordo, threatening violence if he does not comply; Cirk leaves with the money. Tell, who has begun a relationship with La Linda, advances to the final table of the WSOP. While on a break he receives a message from Cirk, revealing that rather than returning home he went to Gordo's house to kill him. Tell is unsettled during the resumed match and abruptly walks off the casino floor. A news report shows that Gordo has killed an armed home intruder, presumably Cirk.

Tell drives through the night to reach Gordo's house, where he covers the furniture as he does in his motel rooms. Gordo returns home and Tell holds him at gunpoint, revealing who he is and why he is there. Rather than shooting him, Tell takes Gordo into another room for a "dramatic reenactment" of their time in Abu Ghraib. Both men are heard screaming in agony and eventually Tell emerges from the room severely wounded and covered in blood. He calls the police to report a homicide. Tell is incarcerated in the same military prison as before, accepting the routine and ascetic setting as he feels it is what he deserves. La Linda arrives for a visit and the two reach out to each other, each placing a single finger on the glass separating them.

Cast

- Oscar Isaac as William Tell
- Tiffany Haddish as La Linda
- Tye Sheridan as Cirk
- Willem Dafoe as Major John Gordo
- Alexander Babara as Mr. USA
- Bobby C. King as Slippery Joe

Production

	Enriched Media Group One Two Twenty Entertainment
Distributed by	<u>Focus Features</u>
Release dates	September 2, 2021 (Venice) September 10, 2021 (United States)
Running time	112 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Box office	\$5 million ^[2]

It was announced in October 2019 that [Oscar Isaac](#) had been cast in the film, written and directed by [Paul Schrader](#).^[4] In January 2020, Schrader announced that [Tye Sheridan](#), [Tiffany Haddish](#) and [Willem Dafoe](#) had been added to the cast.^[5]

Filming began in [Biloxi, Mississippi](#), on February 24, 2020.^{[6][7]} On March 16, 2020, production on the film was paused after an actor with a small role who had flown in from [Los Angeles](#) tested positive for [COVID-19](#) during the [pandemic](#).^[8] Production on the film resumed on July 6, 2020,^[9] and concluded 6 days later on July 12, 2020.^[10]

William's explanation of card counting was taken directly, almost verbatim, from the [Wired](#) YouTube video "Blackjack Expert Explains How Card Counting Works".^[11]



Paul Schrader in 2018, the writer and director of the film

Release

In July 2020, [Focus Features](#) acquired U.S. distribution rights to the film.^[12] The film premiered at the [Venice Film Festival](#) on September 2, 2021, and was given a wide release on September 10, 2021.^[13]

Reception

Box office

In the United States and Canada the film was released alongside *Malignant* and *Show Me the Father*.^[14] It grossed \$1,039,580 from 580 theatres during its opening weekend, and \$2,657,850 in total domestically and \$2,394,691 internationally for a worldwide gross of \$5,052,541.^{[2][15]}

Critical response

On [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film has an approval rating of 87% based on 223 reviews, with an average rating of 7.5/10. The website's critical consensus reads, "Led by Oscar Isaac's gripping performance, *The Card Counter* adds another weighty chapter to Paul Schrader's long inquiry into man's moral responsibility."^[16] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a weighted average score of 77 out of 100, based on 48 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[17]

Reviewing the film for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, critic [Richard Roeper](#) gave *The Card Counter* four stars, labeling it as "searing," "stunning" and praising Oscar Isaac's performance as "magnetic" in what Roeper called "one of the best films of the year."^[18]

David Rooney also gave the film a positive review for *The Hollywood Reporter*, calling it a "bruising character study" and, although noting some moments of slack storytelling, praised the film as a "highly controlled piece of filmmaking with an unerring command of tone" and Isaac as a "remarkably compelling force."^[19] For *The Atlantic*, [David Sims](#) also praised the film as a compelling, impressive character study with larger implications as a metaphor for "America's struggle to overcome its grimmest failures."^[20]

In a three-star review for *The Washington Post*, Ann Hornaday had a mixed response to the film and criticized it for being occasionally perfunctory and tedious, overly schematic and missing polish. However, she commended the film for its "haunting power" and praised the acting, calling Isaac "mesmerizing."^[21]

The Card Counter was included on a number of year-end critic best of lists,^{[22][23]} including *Time*,^[24] — which also named Isaac's performance as one of the top 10 of the year,^[25] *The New Yorker*,^[26] *RogerEbert.com*,^[27] *IndieWire*,^[28] *The A.V. Club*,^[29] and *Cahiers du Cinéma*^[30] included the film as one of the best of 2021.

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Hollywood Music in Media Awards</u>	<u>November 17, 2021</u>	<u>Best Original Score in an Independent Film</u>	<u>Robert Levon Been & Giancarlo Vulcano</u>	Nominated	^[31]
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	<u>November 29, 2021</u>	<u>Best Screenplay</u>	<u>Paul Schrader</u>	Nominated	^[32]
		<u>Outstanding Lead Performance</u>	<u>Oscar Isaac</u>	Nominated	
<u>National Board of Review</u>	<u>December 2, 2021</u>	<u>Top 10 Independent Films</u>	<i>The Card Counter</i>	Won	^[33]
<u>Detroit Film Critics Society</u>	<u>December 6, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>Oscar Isaac</u>	Nominated	^[34]
<u>Chicago Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 15, 2021</u>	<u>Best Original Screenplay</u>	<u>Paul Schrader</u>	Nominated	^[35]
<u>Florida Film Critics Circle Awards</u>	<u>December 22, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>Oscar Isaac</u>	Nominated	^[36]
<u>Dublin Film Critics' Circle</u>	<u>December 21, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>		3rd place	^[37]
<u>London Film Critics' Circle</u>	<u>February 6, 2022</u>	<u>Actor of the Year</u>		Nominated	^[38]

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External links

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