

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken is a 2023 American animated teen comedy film^{[5][6]} directed by Kirk DeMicco and written by Brian C. Brown, Elliott DiGuseppi and Pam Brady. Produced by DreamWorks Animation and distributed by Universal Pictures, the film stars the voices of Lana Condor, Toni Collette, Annie Murphy, Colman Domingo, and Jane Fonda. The film follows a shy Kraken girl named Ruby Gillman (Condor) who is desperate to fit in at Oceanside High. When she breaks her mother's (Collette) rule by going into the ocean with any would-be friends, she discovers that she is a direct descendant of battle-hardened krakens who have protected the sea from evil mermaids for generations, and is also destined to inherit the throne from her grandmother (Fonda).

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken had its world premiere at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival on June 15, 2023, and was released in the United States on June 30. The film received mixed reviews from critics, who praised the voice acting and characters but criticized the screenplay. It was a box-office failure, grossing \$46 million against a \$70 million budget.

Plot

In the town of Oceanside, 16-year-old Ruby Gillman and her family are secretly Krakens. Determined to fit in with humans, Ruby's mother Agatha forbids her from going near the ocean, including her school's prom at sea. Ruby's friends Margot, Trevin, and Bliss convince her to ask out her crush Connor anyway, but she accidentally knocks him into the water. Ruby jumps in and saves Connor — unknowingly triggering an underwater transformation — but new student Chelsea Van Der Zee takes the credit.

Noticing bioluminescent suction cups on her fingers, Ruby hides in the school library but transforms into a Giant Kraken. She is spotted by Chelsea and by Agatha, whose ocean-dwelling brother Brill has been summoned by Ruby's transformation. Agatha calms her distressed daughter down to human size, and Ruby confronts her parents, who explain that the women in their family turn into powerful Giant Krakens while underwater.

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Kirk DeMicco</u>
Written by	<u>Pam Brady</u> <u>Brian C. Brown</u> <u>Elliott</u> <u>DiGuseppi</u>
Produced by	<u>Kelly Cooney</u> <u>Cilella</u>
Starring	<u>Lana Condor</u> <u>Toni Collette</u> <u>Annie Murphy</u> <u>Colman</u> <u>Domingo</u> <u>Jane Fonda</u>
Cinematography	<u>Jon Gutman</u>
Edited by	<u>Michelle</u> <u>Mendenhall</u>
Music by	<u>Stephanie</u> <u>Economou</u>

With a reluctant Brill's help, Ruby sneaks into the ocean to meet her grandmother, the Warrior Queen of the Seven Seas, who reveals that Ruby is in line to rule as protector of the ocean. Other creatures have tried to seize power, including Leviathans, Umibōzu, and most dangerous of all, Mermaids. The evil Mermaid Queen Nerissa found the Trident of Oceanus but was defeated by Agatha, who hid the Trident before abandoning her kingdom for a life on land.

Returning home, Ruby is attacked by vengeful sea captain Gordon Lighthouse, but is saved by Chelsea, who is actually a mermaid. Gordon's footage of Ruby in Kraken form goes viral, but Chelsea befriends Ruby, taking her on a "Super Sea Girl Ditch Day". Chelsea suggests that by finding the Trident, they can end the war between Krakens and Mermaids; her mother, Nerissa, was killed trying to recover the Trident from the Well of Seas.

Production company	<u>DreamWorks Animation</u>
Distributed by	<u>Universal Pictures</u>
Release dates	June 15, 2023 (<u>Annecy</u>) June 30, 2023 (United States)
Running time	91 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$70 million ^[2]
Box office	\$46.1 million ^{[3][4]}

Grandmamah trains her granddaughter to master her Kraken powers, unaware she is using them to practice entering the Well of Seas, and Ruby neglects her friends to spend time with Chelsea. Ruby's father Arthur, younger brother Sam, and Brill trick Gordon into "capturing" their pet sea creature Nessie, letting him believe he has ended the Kraken threat. Ruby introduces Chelsea to her mother, but Agatha is unwilling to trust a Mermaid and forbids her daughter from returning to the ocean, but an angry Ruby transforms and storms off.

Agatha confronts Grandmamah, who explains that Nerissa never had a daughter, while Ruby retrieves the Trident but is betrayed by Chelsea, who is revealed to be Nerissa herself. Trapping Ruby underwater, Nerissa surfaces to use the Trident to destroy the Krakens, interrupting prom night as she fights off Agatha and Grandmamah. With encouragement from Brill, Ruby arrives to face Nerissa and saves the prom ship. Combining their powers, Ruby, her mother, and grandmother destroy the trident, and Nerissa is captured by Gordon.

Ruby's classmates hail her as their Kraken hero and she reunites with her family and friends while Connor accepts her invitation to prom, and Agatha and Grandmamah reconcile. Sometime later, Ruby and her family have embraced their identity as Krakens, while Ruby and Connor become a couple. Brill warns that a Devil Whale is heading toward the Kraken Kingdom, and Ruby leaps into action as the protector of the seas.

Voice cast

- Lana Condor as Ruby Gillman, a 16-year old kraken girl who is desperate to fit in at Oceanside High and has the ability to turn into a giant three-legged kraken when she is in the ocean like all royal female krakens do.^[7] She is described by the film's producer Kelly Cooney Cilella as "a really normal teenager".^[8]
- Toni Collette as Agatha Gillman,^[9] Ruby's overprotective real estate agent mother who has the ability to turn into a giant four-legged kraken when she is in the ocean.^[7]
- Annie Murphy as Queen Nerissa, the evil queen of the mermaids with a vendetta against the Gillman family who poses as Chelsea Van Der Zee, the snobbish, popular new girl at Oceanside High.^[9]

- Colman Domingo as Arthur Gillman,^[9] a male kraken who is Agatha's husband and Ruby's supportive father.^[7]
- Blue Chapman as Sam Gillman, Ruby's 7-year-old energetic and loyal younger brother who loves to play dodge ball. He is loosely based on co-writer Brian C. Brown.^[7]
- Jane Fonda as Grandmamah Gillman,^[9] the Warrior Queen of the Seven Seas, the mother of Agatha, and Ruby and Sam's maternal grandmother.^[7]
- Sam Richardson as Brill Gillman,^[9] a kraken male who is Ruby's dim-witted and enthusiastic maternal uncle, Grandmamah's son and Agatha's brother.^[7]
- Will Forte as Captain Gordon Lighthouse, a kraken-obsessed old sailor with a peg leg who works as a tour guide and has a crab named "Davy".^[7]
- Jaboukie Young-White as Connor, a skater-boy who became Ruby's love interest.^[7]
- Liza Koshy as Margot,^[9] a dramatic girl and Ruby's best friend.^[7]
- Eduardo Franco as Trevin, a gamer and one of Ruby's friends.^[7]
- Ramona Young as Bliss, a goth girl and one of Ruby's friends.^[7]

Additionally, Echo Kellum and Nicole Byer respectively voice Doug and Janice,^[7] Internet personalities Preston and Bri Arsement portray a home buyer and a tourist respectively, web film commentator and newcomer Juju Green voices a gym teacher, father and daughter webstars Salish and Jordan Matter portray a kraken kid and the school principal respectively, sound designer Randy Thom voices the Gillman family's pet sea creature Nessie and a confetti cannon, *Spirit Untamed* producer Karen Foster voices the school librarian, newcomer Atticus Shaindlin voices Topher, folk musician-songwriter Suzanne Buirgy voices Carol, and vlogger/podcaster Emma Chamberlain voices a reporter.^[10]

Production

Development

In 2016, screenwriters Brian C Brown & Elliott DiGuseppi pitched the story of a family of sea monsters living on land in plain sight to many major studios and producers, including Brad Grey at Paramount Pictures, Nancy Utley at Fox Searchlight Pictures, Kim Zubick of Zubick Films, Ivan Reitman of The Montecito Picture Company, Wyck Godfrey of Temple Hill Entertainment, Julie Yorn, and Todd Garner of Broken Road, but was rejected by all of them. Eventually, they pitched it to Chris Kuser, a development executive at Dreamworks Animation. Titled *Meet the Gillmans*, the script drew from their shared memories of growing up in Oviedo, Florida as well as Brown's personal experiences as a first generation Cuban American, The Gillman family are loosely based on Brown's real life family.^[11]



The film's original title.

First time feature producer Kelly Cooney Cilella came on board as producer in April of 2019. She previously worked as a story coordinator on *Shrek 2*, a development executive at Dreamworks Animation and a producer on the short film *Bilby*.

With original director Paul Tibbitt at the helm, and the addition of another writer, *Neighbors from Hell* creator Pam Brady, the film slowly started moving forward. In 2020 Faryn Pearl, who had known Cooney Cilella while working on *Trolls World Tour* came on board as the film's first head of story.^{[12][13][14]}

Cooney Cilella assembled her crew for the film, with Pierre-Oliver Vincent as production designer and Dave Walvoord as visual effects supervisor, the two having worked together in their respective roles on *How to Train Your Dragon 2* and *How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World*. Jon Gutman as Head of Layout, who had worked on this position on *The Croods: A New Age*. First time lead editor Michelle Mendenhall, and first time art director Frederic William Stewart gave the film a unique look, and promoted some of the people that worked on *Trolls World Tour* into first time leadership roles during the production, and also brought in some talent from Dreamworks's TV division for this film.^[15]

Cooney Cilella wanted to bring the film in a whole new direction, so after Tibbit step down from his role as director, Cooney Cilella contacted Academy Award nominee Kirk DeMicco, who had recently made *Vivo* to be director with Pearl being promoted as co-director.^[16]

Additional material for the film's screenplay was provided by *Baby Mama* writer/director Michael McCullers, Meghan Malloy, and the film's co-directors.^[17]

In June 2021, website *TheGWW* reported the film to be in production.^[18] Production was also expected to start in 2022.^[19] On March 14, 2023, the cast and crew were announced via Universal Pictures Ireland's website. Many of the main cast was confirmed, while the director, co-director and producer were confirmed also respectively. DreamWorks Animation also announced its official title as *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken*.^[7] The cast, crew, and official title were publicly announced two days later.^[20] Following the release of the film's second trailer in May 2023, Mike Mitchell, a longtime DreamWorks director who had recently set up his own production company Mike Mitchell Productions, was revealed to have served as executive producer.^[21]

According to *Animation Magazine*, Cilella stated that the film had been in the works for several years. It was first pitched to DreamWorks about a family of sea monsters that were moved to the land and are hiding in plain sight. She stated: "Our heroine is such a lovable character and I'm so excited for audiences to meet her and fall in love with her the way we have because she starts the movie as a quirky, slightly insecure but bighearted character, but she's harboring a secret that she can't tell her friends." DeMicco stated that he cited John Hughes films, *Easy A* (2010), *Lady Bird* (2017) and *Booksmart* (2019) as his inspirations. Pierre-Olivier Vincent serves as the production designer, taking inspiration for the main character from the body of an octopus and bringing the "curviness to all the design language of the film", from the cars to the underwater world.^[22]

DeMicco stated that they had intended to showcase more things, such as going more in-depth about the mermaids; "In our dreams, but maybe not in our budget. No, but there was an opportunity, but we had to make choices. And, so we always felt like if we had done that, we would've lost so much of the time, the personality of who is really getting to know Chelsea. And it worked well for our themes of the fact that they are all in hiding."^[23]

The film was dedicated to Nick Levenduski, a crowds artist of the film who died before the film was released.

Animation and design

Character designers Timothy Lamb & Guillermo "Willie" Real designed hundreds of different design iterations of Ruby and her family, eventually leading to the final look modeled by Charles Ellison, with additional tweaks by modeler Hannah Kang, supervisor Megan Lea Walker, and surface artists, Andy

Harbeck and Rachael Yang.^[24] Additional characters were designed by [Craig Kellman](#), Annie Award winning character designer of *The Bad Guys* Taylor Krahenbahl, Julien Le Rolland and many others.^[25]

One challenge was the design of the hair for the film's villain Nerissa. The VFX department headed by Lawrence Lee created a Fluid Implicit Particle (FLIP) simulation which was used to simulate the character's interaction with the surrounding ocean. With an additional level set fillet generation technique was used to blend the ocean mesh with the water hair geometry.^[26]

Two mixed-media sequences for the film were designed and animated by Richard Ramazinski.^[27]

Music

[Stephanie Economou](#) composed the film's score.^[28] British singer-songwriter [Mimi Webb](#) performed the original song "This Moment", released on June 23 as a single, a week before the film's release. The song was a last minute addition after using a tempt song "As It Was" by Harry Styles in a particular scene in the film, where it was replaced by "This Moment", which was written by [DallasK](#), [Lauv](#), Jacob Kashner and Amanda "Kiddo AI" Ibanez, and was originally going to be performed by Lauv, but he passed on it and it was given to Webb.^[29] The soundtrack album was released on June 30, 2023, the same day as the theatrical release, in addition to the original song "Rise" performed by [Freya Ridings](#), which plays during the end credits. She first performed the song live 3 days earlier at Dreamworks's Glendale campus.^[30]

Release

Theatrical

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken debuted at the [Annecy International Animation Film Festival](#) on June 15, 2023,^[31] and was theatrically released in the United States on June 30.^[22] The film was screened early on June 19, 2023, at various [Regal Cinemas](#) theaters as part of the chain's "Monday Mystery Movie" promotion.^[32]

In December 2022, Deputy Manager Director of Universal Pictures International Italy Massimo Proietti revealed that the film would be released in mid-2023.^[33] On March 16, 2023, following the release of the first trailer, it was revealed that the film would be released on June 30, 2023, taking over the original release date of [Illumination's](#) *Migration*.^[22]

Home media

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken was released on [Digital HD](#) on July 18, 2023, 18 days after its theatrical release. It was released on [DVD](#) and [Blu-ray](#) on September 26, 2023.^[34]

The film was released on [NBCUniversal's Peacock](#) streaming service on October 20, 2023, and streamed on the service for four months as part of their 18-month deal with [Netflix](#).^{[35][36]} The film moved to Netflix on February 20, 2024, becoming the most watched movie on the platform, having topped the chart for three days, and three weeks in the top 10 chart. It was seen by over 12.3 million viewers.^{[37][38]} The film is expected to return to Peacock in December 2024.

Reception

Box office

Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken grossed \$15.7 million in the United States and Canada, and \$30.4 million in other territories, for a worldwide gross of \$46.1 million. The film is the second-lowest-grossing film from [DreamWorks Animation](#) after *Spirit Untamed* in 2021, and was considered a [box-office failure](#).^{[39][3][4]}

In the United States and Canada, *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken* was released alongside *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*.^{[2][40]} The film made \$2.3 million on its first day, including \$725,000 from Thursday night previews.^[41] The film debuted with \$5.5 million, becoming DreamWorks Animation's lowest-grossing opening weekend of any of their feature films to date.^[42] The film's sixth-place finish also made it the studio's lowest-ranking three-day opening weekend, tying *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* from 2003. Several publications attributed the reasons for its low opening to the film's limited three-month marketing, unclear target age group, an original film not based on an existing IP, its title, the trailers, and competition from *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* and *Elemental*.^{[43][44][45][46]}

Critical response

On the [review aggregator](#) website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 65% of 98 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.8/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken* is littered with too much flotsam and jetsam from better animated features to stand as a true original, but its inherent sweetness and lively style make for likable enough family entertainment."^[47] [Metacritic](#), which uses a [weighted average](#), assigned the film a score of 50 out of 100, based on 27 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.^[48] Audiences polled by [CinemaScore](#) gave the film an average grade of "A−" on an A+ to F scale, while [PostTrak](#) reported 68% of filmgoers gave it a positive score.^[41]

Peter Debruge of [Variety](#) gave the film a positive review, writing, "*South Park* veteran Pam Brady, who shares screenwriting credit with Brian C. Brown and Elliott DiGuseppi, brings all kinds of funny ideas to the film, which DeMicco does an admirable job of executing. But there's a simpler, more sincere movie underneath it all that seems to be taunting audiences, like a glowing shape from deep below."^[49] Tara McNamara of [Common Sense Media](#) gave the film 4 out of 5 stars, writing: "A parenting gold mine, this literal fish out of water story is completely entertaining and enjoyable for all ages, with plenty of positive messages. The message to kids can be applied in a variety of ways: "shine your light".^[50] Kate Erbland of [IndieWire](#) gave the film a C+, and wrote in her review, "Kids are always in need of gracious tales about the power of being yourself in a world not necessarily built to embrace differences and stories like "*Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken*" can do that, with fun to spare. But why not get more splashy?"^[51]

Other critics felt that the storyline was underdeveloped and that the film failed to live up to its potential.^[52] Rachel LeBonte of *Screen Rant* rates it 2.5 out of 5 stars, calling the film "endearing" and praising the voice cast, but saying that it may have trouble making an impression with so many other options. She wrote,

"That is *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken*'s biggest flaw: It doesn't go beyond surface-level. As Ruby gets more involved with the ocean and her burgeoning friendship with fellow sea creature Chelsea, her ties to the human world fall away, lessening the overall impact of her arc."^[53] Leigh Paatsch of *Herald Sun* awarded the film 1.5 out of 5 stars, writing, "Visually, the movie becomes more of an eyesore as it slithers along, while the story mashes up some confusing marine mythology with contemporary plotting points seen to better effect in *Pixar*'s recent release *Turning Red*."^[54] James Berardinelli, film critic for *ReelViews*, awarded the film 2 out of 4, stars writing, "*Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken* is one of the most inconsequential big-screen cartoons to reach theaters this year."^[55]

Alonso Duralde of *The Film Verdict* gave the film a negative review, writing, "Plays like the result of feeding the screenplays of recent *Pixar* titles *Luca* and *Turning Red* into *ChatGPT* and then animating the results. Unfortunately, this new coming-of-age tale doesn't come anywhere near the depth or delight of its predecessors."^[56] Greg Nussen of *Slant Magazine* awarded the film 2 out of 4 stars, writing, "Sweet but narratively thin and didactic, the latest from *DreamWorks Animation* always seems as if it's trying to find its footing."^[57] Robert Kojder of *Flickering Myth* gave the film a negative review, writing "Even though the voiceover performances and some character relationship dynamics are serviceable, *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken* drowns itself in flat animation, questionable plot choices, and too many ideas."^[58]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
Hollywood Music in Media Awards	November 15, 2023	Best Original Score in an Animated Film	Stephanie Economou	Nominated	^[59]
Annie Awards	February 17, 2024	Outstanding Achievement for Character Animation in an Animated Feature Production	Prashanth Cavale	Nominated	^[60]

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Further reading

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External links

-  Quotations related to *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken* at Wikiquote

-  Media related to Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken at Wikimedia Commons
 - Official website (<https://www.teenagekrakenmovie.com/>)
 - *Ruby Gillman, Teenage Kraken* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt27155038/>) at IMDb
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