

Onward (film)

Onward is a 2020 American animated urban fantasy adventure film produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios, and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. The film was directed by Dan Scanlon, produced by Kori Rae, and written by Scanlon, Jason Headley, and Keith Bunin. [a] The film stars the voices of Tom Holland, Chris Pratt, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Octavia Spencer. Set in a suburban fantasy world for the modern day, the film follows two elf brothers named Ian and Barley Lightfoot (Holland and Pratt) who set out on a quest to find an artifact that will temporarily bring back their deceased father, Wilden (Kyle Bornheimer) for twenty-four hours.

After directing *Monsters University* (2013), Scanlon was encouraged to develop personal stories. The concept of *Onward* is inspired by the death of Scanlon's father, who died in a car accident when Scanlon and his older brother were very young children, and their relationship with each other. He began to write the story after hearing an audio clip of his father. The film was announced at <u>D23 Expo</u> in July 2017, with the title being revealed in December 2018, alongside the voice cast. The animation team chose to give the film's magic a unique style after studying several animated films featuring magic in order to fit with its suburban setting. Development on *Onward* lasted for six years, on an approximate between \$175-200 million budget. Composers <u>Mychael</u> and <u>Jeff Danna</u> were hired to compose the film's musical score, with <u>Brandi Carlile</u> contributing an original song for the film.

Onward premiered at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival on February 21, 2020, and was theatrically released in the United States on March 6, 2020. The film received generally positive reviews from critics, but underperformed at the box office, grossing \$142 million worldwide against its between \$175–200 million budget. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to its financial shortcomings, due to the widespread closure of theaters. Like several other films released in the early months of 2020, it found far greater success on VOD. The film was nominated for Best Animated Feature Film at the 78th Golden Globe Awards and 93rd Academy Awards, but lost both

Onward



Theatrical release poster

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Directed by	Dan Scanlon
Screenplay by	Dan Scanlon
	Jason Headley
	Keith Bunin
Story by	Dan Scanlon
	Keith Bunin
	Jason Headley
Produced by	Kori Rae
Starring	Tom Holland
	Chris Pratt
	Julia Louis-
	Dreyfus
	Octavia Spencer
Cinematography	Sharon Calahan
	Adam Habib
Edited by	Catherine $Apple^{[1]}$
Music by	Mychael Danna
	Jeff Danna

awards to <u>Soul</u>, another Pixar film released in the same year. *Onward* was the last Pixar film released in theaters worldwide until *Lightyear* in June 2022.

Plot

In a world inhabited by <u>mythic creatures</u>, <u>magic</u> was commonplace millennia ago, though difficult to master. After technological advances over the centuries, magic became obsolete and was largely discarded.

In the modern day, Ian Lightfoot is a teenaged <u>elf</u> struggling with self-confidence; his older brother, Barley, is an enthusiastic and impulsive <u>role-playing gamer</u>, who live in the city of New Mushroomton. On Ian's sixteenth birthday, the boys' mother, Laurel, gives her sons a gift from their father, Wilden, who died shortly before Ian was born: a magical staff, a rare Phoenix gem, and a letter describing a "visitation spell" that can resurrect Wilden for a single day. Ian succeeds in casting the spell, but, interrupted by Barley, is unable to finish it. As a result, only the lower half of Wilden's body is reformed before the gem

Production companies	Walt Disney Pictures Pixar Animation Studios
Distributed by	Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures
Release dates	February 21, 2020 (Berlinale) March 6, 2020 (United States)
Running time	102 minutes ^[2]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$175–200 million ^[3]
Box office	\$142 million ^[4]

disintegrates. The brothers embark on a quest to acquire another gem and complete the spell before sunset, taking Barley's beloved van "Guinevere". Finding the boys gone, Laurel leaves to find them.

In search of a map to another gem, Ian and Barley visit the <u>Manticore</u>'s Tavern—once a gathering place for would-be adventurers, now a <u>family restaurant</u> managed by the Manticore ("Corey"). Arguing with Ian over the map, Corey drives the customers away in a fit of rage, accidentally setting fire to the restaurant and the map. The brothers' only clue to the gem is a children's menu suggesting "Raven's Point", a nearby mountain. Laurel later arrives to befriends Corey, who warns that the brothers' journey may awaken a curse which can only be defeated by her special sword, which she and Laurel steal from a pawn shop.

Traveling to the mountains, Ian and Barley narrowly escape the police and a motorcycle gang of sprites, relying on Ian's new spell-casting abilities and Barley's role-playing game tricks. Colt Bronco catches up to the boys and forces them to come home, Ian agrees, but as he starts the van, he drives away, leading to a wild police chase. When they are pursued by the police, Barley sacrifices Guinevere to cause a landslide, blocking their pursuers. "Raven's Point" turns out to be a series of raven statues leading them into a cave. As they explore the cave, Barley confesses that he was too afraid to say goodbye to Wilden when he was dying. The brothers evade a series of traps, including a Gelatinous Cube that dissolves anything it touches. Emerging from the cave, they find themselves back in front of Ian's high school. Ian lashes out at Barley for leading them on a wild-goose chase and walks away with Wilden after he goes as far as to calling Barley a screwup and for ruining his chance to have the one thing he never had.

Rereading his list of things he always wished to do with his father, Ian realizes that Barley has been a father figure throughout his entire life and returns to make amends. Barley discovers the gem inside a historic fountain and retrieves it, triggering the curse, which uses parts of the high school to form an artificial dragon bent on claiming the gem. Ian faces the artificial dragon, but his staff is knocked into the ocean; he reforms it from a splinter and continues the fight. Corey flies in carrying Laurel, who plunges the magic sword into the artificial dragon's heart, buying Ian time to cast the visitation spell and fully reform Wilden's body. Ian

sends Barley ahead to give his goodbye to Wilden and holds off the artificial dragon long enough for Laurel to destroy it. After Wilden dissipates, Barley tells Ian that their father is proud of him, and the brothers share a hug.

Some time later, as the world begins to rediscover the past's magical arts, the brothers set off on a new quest.

Voice cast

- Tom Holland as Ian Lightfoot, [5][6] a teenage elf.
- Chris Pratt as Barley Lightfoot, [5][6] Ian's older brother, who longs for a magical quest.
- Julia Louis-Dreyfus as Laurel Lightfoot, [5][6][7] the widowed mother of lan and Barley
- Octavia Spencer as "Corey" The Manticore, [8][9] a manticore who is the proprietor of the Manticore's Tavern.
- <u>Kyle Bornheimer</u> as Wilden Lightfoot, lan and Barley's late father. lan and Barley's objective is to resurrect him for 24 hours. [10]
- Mel Rodriguez as Colt Bronco, a centaur police officer and Laurel's boyfriend. [11]
- Lena Waithe as Specter, a cyclops police officer. [11][12]
- Ali Wong as Gore, a faun police officer.
- Grey Griffin as Dewdrop, a pixie and the leader of the Pixie Dusters biker gang.
- <u>Tracey Ullman</u> as Grecklin, a <u>goblin</u> pawn shop owner. [10]
- Wilmer Valderrama as Gaxton, an elf and college friend of Wilden. [10]
- George Psarras as Avel, an elf police officer.[10]
- John Ratzenberger as Fennwick, a cyclops construction worker. This was Ratzenberger's final role in a Pixar feature film until <u>Inside Out 2</u> (2024), having voiced a character in every prior feature film.

Production

Development

While directing <u>Monsters University</u> (2013), <u>Dan Scanlon</u> was encouraged to develop personal stories. He did not talk to his brother about the film, because he wanted to keep him in the dark as these movies take so long to make. <u>[13]</u> In July 2017, then-studio head of Pixar <u>John Lasseter</u> announced that a "suburban fantasy world" film at the <u>D23 Expo</u> was in development, with Scanlon directing and <u>Kori Rae</u> producing. <u>[14]</u> The film was inspired by the death of Scanlon's father, when he was just a year old and his older brother only three, and their relationship with each other. They had seen home videos about their father, but there was no audio. Scanlon became inspired to write the story after a family member found an old cassette with his father's voice on it. He listened to it along with his brother and mother, and at the very end just two words from the father could be heard; "Hii" and "Goodbye", which Scanlon described as "magical". <u>[15][16]</u> On December 12, 2018, the title was revealed. <u>[17]</u> In 2019, Jason Headley and <u>Keith Bunin</u> were hired to rewrite the screenplay and story. According to Scanlon, *Onward* spent six years in development.

Casting

On December 12, 2018, Tom Holland, Chris Pratt, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Octavia Spencer were announced as starring in the film. While having recorded most of their lines separately, Holland and Pratt had some of their recording sessions together since, according to Scanlon, "they've worked together before and hung out together." Rae stated that Holland and Pratt improvised some of their lines while recording together. On December 17, 2019, Ali Wong, Lena Waithe and Mel Rodriguez joined the cast of the film. On February 18, 2020, Wilmer Valderrama, Tracey Ullman, Kyle Bornheimer, and George Psarras were revealed to have voice roles as well, and John Ratzenberger's appearance was officially confirmed.

Deleted scene

One storyboard scene featured Ian, Barley, and Wilden joining with a goat girl in the journey. Ian and the goat girl come across a booth hosted by three evil mermaids. The mermaids sing their mesmerizing song to lure the two into staying in one of three houses put for rent. Ian tries to silence them with the staff but the spell is too weak. When Ian and the goat girl are finally in a trance, the mermaids place them in one of the houses. The house they are in starts to sink into the ground.

The goat girl was omitted because the filmmakers wanted the film to focus on the relationship between Ian and Barley. The scene itself was removed because the filmmakers felt it was too grim. [21][22]

Animation

According to effects supervisor Vincent Serritella, the animators wanted the spells to be "something that's abstract" but also "personify it", so they "had to converge on the idea of an image of magic, go back to the base level of the sequences and the spells, and what level [of complexity] would be given, and how it affects the environment". Director Dan Scanlon said that Ian's arc "was helpful to [the animators] because [they] could use that for all of the magic we designed". The animators chose to give the film's magic a unique style after studying several animated films featuring magic such as *Fantasia*, *Aladdin*, and *Hercules*. Animators wanted the film's magic to fit with its suburban setting.

Animators first developed the film's magic using hand-drawn animated drawings, before turning them into computer-animated effects, with Serritella saying that "[they] made shapes and graphic elements that really lend themselves to what's happening in a 2D environment". Serritella also said that "the key" was mixing hand-drawn and computer animation, arguing that "[g]oing one way or the other didn't work. Going too graphic didn't fit into the world that the background and the characters were created in. And going too physical in an animated world seemed too real", so "[they] found the right balance" by turning hand-drawn animated graphics into "light objects" and giving them "[a] true volumetric, glowing atmosphere". He further added that the choreography during the "visitation spell" sequence "came directly from 2D", while the CGI animation and lighting provided "depth perception". The film was completed on November 21, 2019.

Music

On April 16, 2019, <u>Mychael</u> and <u>Jeff Danna</u>, who both previously worked with the studio on <u>The Good Dinosaur</u> (2015), were revealed to be the film's composers. On February 12, 2020, <u>Brandi Carlile</u> revealed she recorded the song "Carried Me With You" for the film's end credits, co-written with <u>Phil and</u>

<u>Tim Hanseroth. [26]</u> The film's soundtrack was released on February 28, 2020, seven days ahead of the film's release. [26]

Marketing

In the month of the release of the film, the <u>world builder</u> video game <u>Disney Magic Kingdoms</u> included a limited time "*Onward* Event" to promote it, with the characters involved in a new storyline unrelated to the events of the film, including Ian, Barley, Wilden (referred to as "Dad"), Laurel, The Manticore, Officer Colt and Blazey as playable characters, in addition to some attractions based on locations of the film. [27]

Release

Theatrical

Onward premiered at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival on February 21, 2020^[28] and was theatrically released in the United States on March 6.^[5] A short film titled *Playdate with Destiny*, which is centered around Maggie Simpson from *The Simpsons*, appeared before the feature film.^{[29][30]} As the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to recede, the film was released in Australia and New Zealand on April 24, 2020, South Korea on June 17, 2020, Italy on August 19, 2020, and Japan on August 21, 2020.

The movie was also released in 3D, 2D, Dolby Cinema, 4DX and ScreenX worldwide and in IMAX and Dolby Atmos in selected theaters. [31]

Ban and censorship

The film was banned in the <u>Arab</u> countries of <u>Kuwait</u>, <u>Oman</u>, <u>Qatar</u>, and <u>Saudi Arabia</u>, as one female cyclops police officer character in the film named Specter (voiced by Lena Waithe) briefly indicates that she is a <u>lesbian</u>. The scene in question is a brief scene in which a simulacrum of Colt Bronco is lamenting about how Ian and Barley Lightfoot do not respect him as a father figure. Specter replies to him by saying, "It's not easy being a new parent—my girlfriend's daughter got me pulling my hair out, okay?" [32][33][34] Homosexual acts are criminalized in the four countries, which are predominantly Muslim, although Kuwait does not criminalize female homosexual acts. The ban is not universal, and the film was screened in <u>Bahrain</u>, the <u>United Arab Emirates</u>, <u>Lebanon</u>, and <u>Egypt</u>, albeit the line was changed in the <u>Arabic</u> dub to "my sister's daughter". [35]

The <u>Russian</u> dub, due to the <u>Russian gay propaganda law</u> officially criminalizing the dissemination of LGBT-related content to minors under 18, changed the line to "my partner's daughter". The Russian dub also avoided referring to Specter with gender-specific pronouns. [32][33][34] The scene was also changed similarly in Poland[36][37] and Hungary. [38]

Home media

Onward was released <u>digitally</u> on the night of March 20, 2020, and became available for <u>Disney+</u> subscribers on April 3, 2020 due to the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u>. The digital date was just two weeks after the film's theatrical debut and before the end of the usual 90-day theatrical run. The announcement followed Disney's earlier than planned release of <u>Frozen II</u> on Disney+ as well as <u>Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker</u> on <u>Digital HD</u> in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over its first week of home release, the film was the

sixth-most watched on <u>Amazon Prime</u> and second-most on the <u>iTunes Store</u>. The film was later released by <u>Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment</u> on <u>DVD</u>, <u>Blu-ray</u>, and <u>Ultra HD Blu-ray</u> on May 19, 2020. [42][43]

Reception

Box office

Onward grossed \$61.6 million in the United States and Canada, and \$80.4 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$142 million. The gross of the film was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which first reduced movie theater attendance, then forced most to shut down within two weeks of the film's release. [44][45][46]

In the United States and Canada, the film was released alongside $\underline{The\ Way\ Back}$ and the wide expansion of \underline{Emma} , and was projected to gross \$45–50 million from 4,200 theaters in its opening weekend. The film held early advance screenings on February 29, making \$650,000 from 470 theaters. It then grossed \$12.1 million on its first day, the 6th, including \$2 million from Thursday night previews. The film went on to debut to \$39.1 million, topping the box office but marking the third-ever lowest start for a Pixar film. While the film remained in first in its second weekend, it dropped 73% to \$10.5 million (the lowest-ever second weekend for a Pixar film), and was part of the lowest grossing box office weekend since October 1998, with all films combining for just \$55.3 million. In the film's third weekend, due to the mass theater closures around the country, it made \$71,000 from 135 locations, mostly drive-in theaters.

Critical response

On Rotten Tomatoes, the film has an approval rating of 89% based on 348 reviews, with an average rating of 7.2/10. The website's critics consensus reads, "It may suffer in comparison to Pixar's classics, but *Onward* makes effective use of the studio's formula – and stands on its own merits as a funny, heartwarming, dazzlingly animated adventure." On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 01 out of 100, based on 56 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews". Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A-" on an A+ to F scale (tied with Cars 2 for the lowest score received by a Pixar film), and PostTrak reported filmgoers gave it 4.5 out of 5 stars.

Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* rated the film three out of five stars, and called it "a likable family comedy that finds an easy rhythm without effort," though he felt that the movie's "attitude towards death" is not as radically powerful as in *Coco*. In a same star review Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* said "It's no *Toy Story*—but the animation juggernaut's latest, about two elf brothers on a quest, is still worth your while."

Reviewer James Berardinelli praised the film's originality and emotional weight and called it "engaging and enjoyable", adding "there's something here for everyone", though concluded it is not the next Disney/Pixar classic. Ben Travis of *Empire* gave the film five out of five stars, and wrote, "Pixar returns with a great big power-chord of a movie—heart-pumping, resonant, and positively harmonious."

<u>Richard Roeper</u> of the <u>Chicago Sun-Times</u> called *Onward* a step back for Pixar, giving it two out of four stars. He said, "The story fluctuates between the uninspired and the just plain weird and then gets even weirder." While he praised the animation and said that the movie "begins with an intriguing premise", he concluded that it "doesn't come close to fully fleshing out the possibilities." [59]

Year-end lists

- 1st Kyle Smith National Review
- 5th Max Evry Comingsoon.net

Accolades

Year	Award	Category	Recipients	Result	Ref.
2020	BMI Film & TV Awards	Film Music	Mychael Danna and Jeff Danna	Won	[60]
	People's Choice Awards	The Family Movie of 2020	Onward	Won	[61]
	Dublin International Film Festival	Feature Film		Won	[62]
	Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Awards	Best Picture		Nominated	[63]
	Houston Film Critics Society Awards	Best Animated Feature Film		Nominated	[64]
	San Diego Film Critics Society Awards	Best Animated Film		Nominated	[65]
	St. Louis Film Critics Association Awards	Best Animated Film		Nominated	[66]
2021	Academy Awards	Best Animated Feature	Dan Scanlon and Kori Rae	Nominated	[67]
	American Cinema Editors Awards	Best Edited Animated Feature Film	Catherine Apple	Nominated	[68]
	Annie Awards	Best Animated Feature	Kori Rae	Nominated	[69]
		Writing in an Animated Feature Production	Dan Scanlon, Jason Headley and Keith Bunin	Nominated	
		Editorial in an Animated Feature Production	Catherine Apple, Anna Wolitzky and Dave Suther	Nominated	
		Outstanding Achievement for Character Animation in an Animated Feature Production	Shaun Chacko	Nominated	
		Outstanding Achievement for Music in an Animated Feature Production	Mychael Danna and Jeff Danna	Nominated	
		Outstanding Achievement for Production Design in an Animated Feature Production	Noah Klocek, Sharon Calahan, Huy Nguyen, Bert Berry and Paul Conrad	Nominated	
		Outstanding Achievement for Voice	Tom Holland	Nominated	

	Acting in an Animated Feature Production			
Art Directors Guild Awards	Excellence in Production Design for an Animated Film	Noah Klocek	Nominated	[70]
Austin Film Critics Association Awards	Best Animated Film	Onward	Nominated	[71]
British Academy Film Awards	Best Animated Film	Dan Scanlon and Kori Rae	Nominated	[72]
Cinema Audio Society Awards	Outstanding Achievement in Sound Mixing for a Motion Picture – Animated	Vincent Caro, Doc Kane, Michael Semanick, Juan Peralta, Brad Haehnel and Scott Curtis	Nominated	[73]
	Best Animated Movie	Onward	Nominated	
Critics' Choice	Best Voice Actor In An	Tom Holland	Nominated	
Super Awards	Animated Movie	Chris Pratt	Nominated	[74]
	Best Voice Actress In An Animated Movie	Octavia Spencer	Nominated	
Golden Globe Awards	Best Animated Feature Film	Onward	Nominated	
Grammy Awards	Best Song Written for Visual Media	"Carried Me with You" – <u>Brandi</u> <u>Carlile</u> , Phil Hanseroth and Tim <u>Hanseroth</u>	Nominated	[75]
Hollywood Music in Media Awards	Best Original Score in an Animated Film	Mychael Danna and Jeff Danna	Nominated	[76]
	Best Original Song in an Animated Film	"Carried Me with You" – Brandi Carlile, Phil Hanseroth and Tim Hanseroth	Nominated	
	Best Soundtrack Album	Onward	Nominated	
Motion Picture Sound Editors Awards	Outstanding Achievement in Sound Editing – Feature Animation	Shannon Mills, Nia Hansen, Chris Gridley, Josh Gold, David C. Hughes, Samson Neslund, Kimberly Patrick, Christopher Flick, Steve Orlando, Erich Stratmann, Shelley Roden and John Roesch	Nominated	[77]
Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards	Favorite Animated Movie	Onward	Nominated	[78]
	Favorite Voice from an Animated Movie	Chris Pratt	Nominated	[10]
Saturn Awards	Best Animated Film	Onward	Won	[79]
Visual Effects Society Awards	Outstanding Visual Effects in an Animated Feature	Dan Scanlon, Kori Rae, Sanjay Bakshi and Vincent Serritella	Nominated	[80]
	Outstanding Animated Character in an Animated Feature	Kristopher Campbell, Jonas Jarvers, Rob Jensen and Jacob Kuenzel (for Dad Pants)	Nominated	
	Outstanding Created Environment in an	Eric Andraos, Laura Grieve, Nick Pitera and Michael Rutter (for Swamp	Nominated	

Animated Feature	Gas)		
Outstanding Effects Simulations in an Animated Feature	Dave Hale, Jonah Blue Laird, Stephen Marshall and Ricardo Nadu	Nominated	

Lawsuit

In January 2020, San Francisco tattoo artist Sweet Cicely Daniher filed a copyright lawsuit against Disney, Pixar, and *Onward* producer Kori Rae. In September 2018, Pixar rented Daniher's "Vanicorn", a van decorated with a <u>unicorn</u>-themed mural, for use at the <u>LA Auto Show</u> in 2019. She learned about the production of *Onward* in May 2019 and, after seeing images of the van used by Ian and Barley Lightfoot in the film, came to believe that Pixar had copied the design of the Vanicorn in violation of her rental agreement with the company, as well as the <u>Digital Millennium Copyright Act</u>, the <u>Visual Artists Rights Act</u>, and the California Artists Protection Act. She sought in her suit to prohibit distribution of the film and any infringing advertisement or merchandise. [81]

Notes

a. Scanlon, Headley, and Bunin were both credited as "Screenplay by" and "Story by".

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External links

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