

# Strange World (film)

Strange World is a 2022 American animated science-fiction adventure film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. It was directed by Don Hall, co-directed and written by Qui Nguyen, and produced by Roy Conli. The film stars the voices of Jake Gyllenhaal, Dennis Quaid, Jaboukie Young-White, Gabrielle Union, and Lucy Liu. Strange World follows a legendary family of explorers called the Clades (Gyllenhaal, Quaid, Young-White, and Union), who must set aside their differences as they embark on a journey to a mysterious subterranean land inhabited by surreal lifeforms, in order to save a miracle plant Pando that is their society's source of energy.

Hall conceived *Strange World* in 2017 while finishing codirecting *Moana* (2016). *Strange World* draws inspiration from pulp magazines, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *King Kong* (1933). To communicate non-verbally, several animators worked to create the movement of the character Splat. While the film is predominantly CGI, the film does incorporate 2D animation from Randy Haycock, with additional 2D animation by *Eric Goldberg* and *Mark Henn* in certain scenes. *Henry Jackman* provided the musical score. The film was noted for introducing Walt Disney Animation Studios' first openly *LGBTQ* lead character, leading to the film being pulled out for a theatrical release in some regions.

Strange World premiered at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles, on November 15, 2022, and was theatrically released in the United States on November 23. The film received generally positive reviews from critics but mixed to negative reviews from audiences, and grossed only \$73.6 million with a projected loss of \$197 million for Disney, making it one of the biggest box-office bombs of all time. Following its streaming release on Disney+, however, Strange World ranked as the top streaming film on Disney+ for 19 days.

### **Plot**

#### Strange World



Theatrical release poster

Triedirical release poster			
Directed by	Don Hall		
Written by	Qui Nguyen		
Produced by	Roy Conli		
Starring	Jake Gyllenhaal		
	Dennis Quaid		
	Jaboukie Young-		
	White		
	Gabrielle Union		
	Lucy Liu		
Cinematography			
Cinematography	Tracy Scott Beattie		
Cinematography	Tracy Scott Beattie (layout)		
Cinematography	•		
Cinematography	(layout)		
Cinematography  Edited by	(layout) Brian Leach		
	(layout) Brian Leach (lighting)		
Edited by Music by Production	(layout) Brian Leach (lighting) Sarah K. Reimers		
Edited by Music by	(layout) Brian Leach (lighting) Sarah K. Reimers Henry Jackman		
Edited by Music by Production	(layout) Brian Leach (lighting) Sarah K. Reimers Henry Jackman Walt Disney		
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In Avalonia, a land surrounded by an endless wall of mountains, adventurers Jaeger Clade and his teenage son Searcher brave the wilderness to explore new worlds. While trying to traverse the mountains, Searcher discovers a green plant that gives off energy. He and the rest of the expedition team decide to return to Avalonia with the plant while Jaeger angrily continues his mission alone.

25 years later, Searcher has made a name for himself by introducing the miracle plant, dubbed Pando, as a fuel source for Avalonia. He and his wife Meridian are Pando farmers, while their son, Ethan, has a crush on his friend Diazo and chafes at his father's expectation of becoming a farmer like him. One night, Callisto Mal, the president of Avalonia and one of Jaeger's former expedition teammates, shows up in her

Distributed by	Walt Disney Studios  Motion Pictures
Release dates	November 15, 2022 (El Capitan Theatre) November 23, 2022 (United States)
Running time	102 minutes $^{[1]}$
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$135–180 million <sup>[a]</sup>
Box office	\$73.6 million <sup>[4][5]</sup>

airship, the *Venture*, to inform the Clades that Pando is losing its power and asks Searcher to help find the cause. He joins an expedition to travel into a giant sinkhole, in which the roots of Pando have been located. On the way down, Meridian tries catching up in her <u>crop-duster</u> when Ethan and their three-legged dog Legend stows away on the *Venture*. The *Venture*, attacked by red <u>wyvern-like</u> creatures, crash-lands in a subterranean world, where Searcher and Legend are separated from the group. They are attacked by a creature called a "Reaper", but are rescued by Jaeger, who has been living underground all these years. He has been trying to cross the mountains from below, but is blocked by an acidic ocean, and states his intention to board the *Venture* to attempt to cross it.

Meanwhile, Ethan sneaks away from the *Venture* to find Searcher. He befriends an amorphous blue creature, naming it Splat, before being reunited with Searcher, Legend and Jaeger. They are attacked by more Reapers, but are rescued by Meridian and Callisto and return to the *Venture*. Searcher insists on completing their mission, while Jaeger wants to continue journeying across the Strange World. Ethan becomes frustrated with them and their opposing worldviews. After another wild encounter, Searcher and Jaeger finally have a heart-to-heart talk and realize that they do respect each other's goals in life. They eventually find a cluster of Pando's roots, which is being attacked by the Strange World's creatures. When Searcher learns that Ethan wants to explore more of the Strange World, he blames Jaeger's influence on him. Ethan angrily jumps off the *Venture* and on to one of the Reapers. Searcher follows him aboard a small flying vehicle, but as they are reconciling, they realize that they have passed through the mountains to the ocean beyond, where they see the eye of a giant turtle-like creature. The two realize that Avalonia is on the creature's back, and that they have been traveling through its body, meaning that the Reapers and all the other creatures are its immune system.

Seeing that Pando is an infection attacking the creature's heart, they head back to inform the expedition team that Pando must be destroyed, but Callisto has them locked up to prevent them from stopping the mission, while Jaeger furiously sails off to see for himself. After Legend and Splat free the family, Searcher and Ethan head to the creature's heart to clear a path for the Reapers, while Meridian takes over the ship and convinces Callisto to help. Jaeger returns, and with his help, they break through Pando, and the creatures appear and destroy it, bringing the heart back to life and saving the land.

One year later, Ethan is in a relationship with Diazo as they and their friends collect resources from the Strange World. Avalonia has shifted from Pando energy to <u>wind turbines</u>. Jaeger revisits his ex-wife Penelope who has remarried during his absence, and Searcher and Jaeger's relationship has improved. The

camera zooms away from Avalonia to show the giant turtle-like creature on an ocean-covered planet.

### **Voice cast**

- <u>Jake Gyllenhaal</u> as Searcher Clade, a 40-year-old man who is Jaeger's son, Meridian's husband, and Ethan's father as well as a farmer of the Pando power source. [6]
- <u>Dennis Quaid</u> as Jaeger Clade, Searcher's father and Ethan's grandfather who is more of a larger-than-life explorer.
- <u>Jaboukie Young-White</u> as Ethan Clade, Searcher's 16-year-old son who longs for adventure beyond his father's farm while also navigating a school crush on Diazo. Being a gay character, Ethan is Walt Disney Animation Studios' first openly LGBTQ main character.
- Gabrielle Union as Meridian Clade, Ethan's mother, and Searcher's wife who is a pilot and natural leader in the *Venture*. [7]
- <u>Lucy Liu</u> as Callisto Mal, the president of Avalonia and leader of the exploration into the strange world who helps the Clades to lead the adventures in her airship called the Venture. [7][9]
- Karan Soni as Caspian, a nerdy member of the expedition to Strange World. [10]
- Alan Tudyk as:
  - Duffle, a pilot for the expedition to Strange World in the Venture who is killed by red wyvern-like creatures. [10] His role is a reference to Tudyk's Firefly character Hoban "Wash" Washburn. [11]
  - The Newsreel Narrator at the beginning of the film.
  - Radio Host #1
- Adelina Anthony as Captain Pulk, the second-in-command of the expedition to Strange World. [10]
- Abraham Benrubi as Lonnie Redshirt, a member of Jaeger's expedition crew before he disappeared. His last name refers to the trend in <u>Star Trek</u> for those wearing red shirts to die insignificantly.
- Jonathan Melo as Diazo, Ethan's love-interest and boyfriend at the end. [10]
- Nik Dodani as Kardez, one of Ethan's friends.
- Francesca Reale as Azimuth, one of Ethan's friends.
- Emily Kuroda as Ro
- Reed Buck as Rory
- Katie Lowes as Radio Host #2
- LaNisa Frederick as Client #2
- Dave Kohut as Client #3
- Alice Kina Diehl as Client #4

Additional voice cast for *Strange World* include <u>Terri Douglas</u>, <u>Liza Del Mundo</u>, <u>Shondalia White</u>, <u>Melanie</u> <u>Minichino</u>, <u>Michael Ralph</u>, <u>Shane Sweet</u>, Arthur Ortiz, and Matt Yang King. [12]

Non-speaking roles in the film include Legend, the Clades' three-legged dog who resembles an <u>Old English Sheepdog</u>; Splat, the blue creature from the Strange World; the other Avalonia creatures; and Penelope Clade, Jaeger's ex-wife and Searcher's mother who retired from adventuring and remarried to a man named Sheldon. In the end credits, Legend and Splat are listed as playing "themselves".

### **Production**

#### **Development**

Development of *Strange World* began in 2017, after <u>Don Hall</u> finished co-directing <u>Moana</u> (2016). His frequent creative partner <u>Chris Williams</u> also involved the project before leaving Disney in November 2018 to direct the <u>Netflix Animation</u> film <u>The Sea Beast</u> (2022). Hall pondered the origins of a generational family with the concept of "environmental overtones", which was described as "<u>Indiana Jones</u> meets <u>National Lampoon's Vacation</u>". Shortly after the announcement of <u>Raya and the Last Dragon</u> (2021) at the <u>D23 Expo</u> in August 2019, a major redone happened, with the creative leadership on the film were being swapped, while some cast members were replaced. Hall reteams with <u>Qui Nguyen</u>, who serves as codirector and writer. During a story meeting, Disney artist <u>Burny Mattinson</u> suggested adding a dog character for the Clades, which ultimately became the character Legend in the final film. Overall, the budget of *Strange World* was approximately between \$135–180 million.

### Writing

Nguyen adds that filmmakers wanted to make sure that, at the end of the film, viewers "could go backward and — like watching *The Sixth Sense* — be able to track all those moments and go, 'They told us all along what this was, and only now have we realized we got that last puzzle piece." [15]

### Casting

On June 6, 2022, following the release of the teaser trailer, <u>Jake Gyllenhaal</u> was announced as the voice of Searcher Clade. Eleven days later, the rest of the main cast for the film was announced at France's <u>Annecy Animation Festival</u>, including <u>Jaboukie Young-White</u> as Ethan Clade, <u>Gabrielle Union</u> as Meridian Clade, <u>Lucy Liu</u> as Callisto Mal, and <u>Dennis Quaid</u> as Jaeger Clade. The inclusion of Young-White voicing a gay character named Ethan marks Walt Disney Animation Studios' first openly LGBTQ main character.

### Animation, design, and influences

According to Hall, *Strange World* takes heavy influence from <u>pulp magazines</u>—popular fiction from the first half of the 20th century that was printed on inexpensive wood pulp papers, in addition to science fiction works such as <u>Journey to the Center of the Earth</u>, <u>Fantastic Voyage</u> and <u>King Kong</u>. [9] He also said "[he] loved reading the old issues of pulps growing up. They were big adventures in which a group of explorers might discover a hidden world or ancient creatures. They've been a huge inspiration for *Strange World*."[16]

The miracle plant Pando is named after <u>a forest in Utah</u> in America. [17] The land of Avalonia was given a "warm, nostalgic" <u>color scheme</u> to contrast with the titular strange world inside the creature, for which the filmmakers "avoided earth tones and leaned into reds and magentas." They also created a way for the

character Splat to communicate non-verbally, similar to the magic carpet in Aladdin. [9]

The production team for the film conducted research on climatologists, paleontologists and biologists, as well as a farmer, while filmmakers visited National Geographic for research, which is reflected not just in the film's setting, but in its inhabitants. [15]

### Music

Henry Jackman was announced to compose the score for the film on September 5, 2022, marking his third collaboration with Don Hall, after *Winnie the Pooh* and *Big Hero 6*, and his fifth overall feature-length scoring work with Walt Disney Animation Studios, which includes the *Wreck-It Ralph* films. Walt Disney Records released the score album on November 23, 2022, in addition to the song "They're The Clades!" performed by James Hayden, also having a reprised version of the tracks, the same day as the theatrical release.

### Release

#### **Theatrical**

*Strange World* premiered at the <u>El Capitan Theatre</u> in <u>Hollywood</u>, <u>Los Angeles</u>, on November 15, 2022, and was theatrically released in the United States on November 23, 2022.

Despite being theatrically released in most regions, *Strange World* was not released theatrically in some regions; due to Disney's opposition to local regulations regarding theatrical windows, the company announced on June 8, 2022, that *Strange World* would not see a theatrical release in France and would instead go straight to <u>Disney+</u> in the region following its theatrical release in other regions. <u>Deadline Hollywood</u> reported that Disney pulled out for a theatrical release in 20 countries, mainly the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, Russia and China; a Russian release had already been pulled due to the <u>ongoing invasion of Ukraine</u>, while Disney opted to exclude release in other regions due to the inclusion of a gay main character, Ethan Clade. This was done to prevent those regions' censorship of LGBTQ+ references, as a main storyline in the film revolves around Ethan having a crush on another boy called Diazo. <u>[23]</u>

This was the first film to feature the commemorative 100th anniversary <u>Disney logo</u> in celebration of <u>the company</u>'s centennial in 2023, created by Disney Studios Content and <u>Industrial Light & Magic</u>, which was revealed at the 2022 <u>D23 Expo</u>. <u>Christophe Beck</u> composed a new arrangement of "<u>When You Wish Upon</u> a Star", while Tim Davies conducted it. [24]

### Marketing

Following the project announcement, the first look concept art of the film was released on December 9, 2021. [21] Max Evry of [Film] said the image "[looked] a lot like Avatar, or at the very least the Pandora section of Disney World's Animal Kingdom." [25] The marketing campaign for Strange World began on June 6, 2022, with the release of a teaser trailer. Petrana Radulovic for Polygon felt it was "an homage to retro sci-fi flicks" and similar to Raya and the Last Dragon, it "definitely seems to lean more into the action than Disney's typical musical fantasies." [26] A new trailer was shown at the 2022 D23 Expo and the official trailer was released on September 21, 2022, [27] followed by a cast reaction video a day later. Lex Briscuso of [78] Film says it "honestly looks like a breath of fresh air when it comes to animated family stories."

"special look" trailer was released on October 19, 2022. Rafael Motamayor of /Film said "Though the upbeat song and the focus on laughs kind of sells this as a more formulaic Disney film in terms of tone, the prominent use of monsters and big action hopefully makes this more of an inventive film from the studio."[29] Two featurettes "Welcome To Strange World" and "100 Years of Amazing Characters", which showcased the characters of Splat and Legend, were released on November 3, 2022, and November 8, 2022, respectively.

### Streaming and home media

Strange World began streaming on Disney+ on December 23, 2022. [30]

According to Flix Patrol, *Strange World* was the most streamed film on Disney+ upon its release on the streaming service. [31][32] According Whip Media's TV Time, *Strange World* was the 8th most streamed film across all platforms in the United States, during the week ending December 25, 2022, [33] and the 6th during the week of December 30, 2022. [34] *Strange World* was the 6th most popular film on Fandango's transactional digital service Vudu, during the week ending January 1, 2023. [35][36][37][38]

Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment released *Strange World* on <u>Ultra HD Blu-ray</u>, <u>Blu-ray</u>, and <u>DVD</u> on February 14, 2023. [39]

### Reception

### **Box office**

*Strange World* grossed \$38 million in the United States and Canada, and \$35.6 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$73.6 million. Following its poor opening weekend,  $\underline{Variety}$  and  $\underline{Deadline}$  *Hollywood* estimated the film would lose the studio \$100–197 million. [3][40][41]

In the United States and Canada, Strange World was released alongside Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery  $\frac{[42]}{}$  and Devotion, as well as the wide expansions of The Fabelmans and Bones and All, and was initially projected to gross \$30–40 million from 4,174 theaters over its five-day opening weekend. [2][43] The film made \$4.2 million on its first day (including \$800,000 from Tuesday night previews), which led to less optimism about it meeting initial box office projections and could debut to as low as \$23 million. [44] The film ended up debuting even lower than initial re-adjustments, making \$11.9 million in its opening weekend (a five-day total of \$18.6 million). Overall, it ranked in second place at the box office behind Disney's own *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. [45][46] Several publications labeled the film a box office bomb, with *The Hollywood Reporter* saying was "the worst opening for a Disney Animation Thanksgiving" title in modern times" and *Variety* calling it a "catastrophic result for Disney". The poor box-office opening was attributed to poor word-of-mouth, large budget overall, the lack of movie theater attendance, the expectation of its streaming release on Disney+ as the result of COVID-19 pandemic, rocky company politics, conservative backlash over inclusion of gay characters, mediocre critical reviews, a vague and unremarkable premise, and lackluster marketing compared to other Disney animated films. [b] Some analysts believe that then-Disney CEO Bob Chapek's decision to send three films produced by Pixar, Soul, Luca and *Turning Red*, straight to Disney+ so that Disney could focus on building its streaming service caused

consumer confusion for families. When <u>Bob Iger</u> returned as Disney CEO prior its release, the distribution division - which was formerly led by Kareem Daniel - was quickly dismantled. [51] *Strange World* completed its theatrical run in the United States and Canada on February 2, 2023. [52]

### **Streaming**

*Strange World* was the most watched movie worldwide on Disney+ for the last week of 2022 and the first two weeks of 2023. It topped the Disney+ chart in almost every country where it was available. [53][54][55]

### Critical response

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 72% of 169 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.3/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Strange World* is a Disney milestone in terms of representation – but as a storytelling experience, this dazzlingly animated adventure offers little audiences haven't already seen." Metacritic, which uses a <u>weighted average</u>, assigned the film a score of 65 out of 100, based on 35 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews. Audiences polled by <u>CinemaScore</u> gave the film an average grade of "B" on an A+ to F scale, while those at <u>PostTrak</u> gave it an overall positive score of 82%, including an average four out of five stars. *Strange World* was the first film from Walt Disney Animation to earn lower than "A—" and is considered the lowest CinemaScore rating of all Disney animated films since 1991. [47][58]

Peter Debruge of <u>Variety</u> wrote "it's the characters as much as the environment that make this vibrant, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*-style adventure movie colorful and diverse in all the best ways. Great as the people and places they explore may be, however, the relatively unimaginative story consigns this gorgeous toon to second-tier status ... instead of cracking the pantheon of Disney classics." Lovia Gyarke of <u>The Hollywood Reporter</u> praised the visuals, writing it was "meticulously and wondrously rendered by the *Strange World* animators, who drew much of their inspiration from pulp magazines of the 30s and 40s. There's a painterly feel to the landscape, which, combined with the film's sci-fi bent, might trigger memories of Disney's <u>Treasure Planet</u>." Srown of the <u>Los Angeles Times</u> also praised the visuals as "vibrant, weird, visually stunning... From its lush palette to its cute and deadly flora and fauna, this strange, mysterious world is very much deserving of its status as the film's title character."

Richard Roeper of the *Chicago Sun-Times* wrote while the film is not in the same category as "*Frozen*, *Zootopia* and *Encanto*, it's a family-friendly fun fest with the expected ingredients of fast-paced action, ingenious visuals, terrific voice performances and, yes, some heaping spoonfuls of upbeat messaging about family ties, the importance of being true to oneself and how we should all take great measures to take care of not only each other but the world in which we live, no matter how STRANGE that world might be."<sup>[62]</sup> Brian Truitt of *USA Today* gave the film three stars out of four, stating *Strange World* is "an enjoyable piece of vibrant world building that steps away from the musical bent of recent non-Pixar efforts like *Encanto* and the *Frozen* flicks."<sup>[63]</sup> Odie Henderson of *The Boston Globe* praised the film's environmental and fatherson messages, as well as the "excellent voice-over work plus the score by Henry Jackman make the preachiness palatable and the film fun. The look of Avalonia's underworld is a lovely distraction; its garish and bright pinks, reds, and greens look lifted from the colored roofs of a suburban New Jersey neighborhood in the 1970s."<sup>[64]</sup>

For *The Washington Post*, Kristen Page-Kirby found "the story is too basic and the characters too slight for *Strange World* to pack a punch. The visual beauty of the film isn't enough. After all, pretty is as pretty does—and in *Strange World*, pretty doesn't do much." Jacob Stoller of *Paste Magazine* admitted that while the film "can be arresting—especially with its inventive setting and bulbous creatures—and its attempts at deconstructing the sweaty, macho-man ethos hawked by its inspiration are admirable. But with muddled themes and slight characters, remnants of the old dime magazines coordinate to bring *Strange World* down on the wrong side of familiar." Cath Clarke of *The Guardian* felt the characters "aren't half-bad", but the "clunky script feels like it's been re-drafted and re-drafted to the point of incomprehension—blowing any chance of conveying a message. However well-meaning, it makes for a surprisingly dull watch."

#### **Accolades**

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
Annie Awards	e Awards February 25, 2023	Outstanding Achievement for	Jeff Snow	Nominated	[68]
7 time 7 tweeds		Storyboarding in a Feature Production	Javier Ledesma Barbolla	Nominated	
Black Reel Awards	February 6, 2023	Outstanding Voice Performance	Gabrielle Union	Nominated	[69] [70]
GLAAD Media Awards	March 30, 2023	Outstanding Film – Wide Release	Strange World	Nominated	[71]
International Film Music Critics Association Awards	February 23, 2023	Best Original Score for an Animated Film	Henry Jackman	Nominated	[72] [73]
Visual Effects Society Awards  February 15, 2023		Outstanding Visual Effects in an Animated Feature	Steve Goldberg, Laurie Au, Mark Hammel, and Mehrdad Isvandi	Nominated	
	Eabruany	Outstanding Animated Character in an Animated Feature	Leticia Gillett, Cameron Black, Dan Lipson, and Louis Jones for "Splat"	Nominated	[74]
		Outstanding Created Environment in an Animated Feature	Ki Jong Hong, Ryan Smith, Jesse Erickson, and Benjamin Fiske for "The Windy Jungle"	Nominated	
		Outstanding Effects Simulations in an Animated Feature	Deborah Carlson, Scott Townsend, Stuart Griese, and Yasser Hamed	Nominated	

### **Notes**

- a. <u>Deadline Hollywood</u> reported the film's budget to be \$135 million, while <u>Variety</u> reported the budget to be \$180 million. [2][3]
- b. Attributed to multiple references.[3][47][48][49][50]

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## **External links**

- Official website (https://movies.disney.com/strange-world/)
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