

Bullet Train (film)

Bullet Train is a 2022 American action comedy film directed by David Leitch and starring Brad Pitt as a former assassin who must battle fellow killers while riding a bullet train. It is based on the 2010 novel *Maria Beetle* (titled *Bullet Train* in the UK and US editions), written by Kōtarō Isaka and translated by Sam Malissa, the second novel in Isaka's *Hitman* trilogy, of which the first novel was previously adapted as the 2015 Japanese film *Grasshopper*. The film also features an ensemble supporting cast including Joey King, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Brian Tyree Henry, Andrew Koji, Hiroyuki Sanada, Michael Shannon, Benito A. Martínez Ocasio, and Sandra Bullock.

Principal photography began in Los Angeles in November 2020 and wrapped up in March 2021. *Bullet Train* premiered in Paris on July 18, 2022, and was theatrically released in the United States on August 5, 2022, by Sony Pictures Releasing. The film received mixed reviews from critics who praised the casting and action sequences but criticized its story and race-swapping of characters. It grossed \$239.3 million worldwide on a production budget of around \$85.9–90 million.

Plot

Yuichi Kimura, "The Father", boards a bullet train in Tokyo in search of the attacker of his son Wataru. Meanwhile, guided by his handler Maria Beetle, operative "Ladybug" is assigned to retrieve a briefcase full of cash from the same train, replacing a sick colleague, Carver. Ladybug is reluctant, as his recent string of bad luck during his jobs resulted in accidental deaths. Also on the train are two British assassin brothers codenamed "Lemon" and "Tangerine", who just rescued a man ("The Son") from kidnappers and are taking him and the briefcase to his father, a Russian-born *Yakuza* crime lord called "The White Death".

During the trip, The Son is killed by poisoning. Ladybug discreetly steals the briefcase, but on his way off the train, is attacked by another assassin, codenamed "The Wolf", who recognizes Ladybug from his wedding, where his wife was killed. The Wolf mistakenly believes Ladybug to be one of her killers. Ladybug confusedly fights The Wolf, who accidentally kills himself with a deflected knife throw. Yuichi finds the person who pushed Wataru, a young woman codenamed "The Prince", but she outsmarts him.

Bullet Train



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>David Leitch</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Zak Olkewicz</u>
Based on	<i><u>Maria Beetle</u></i> (<i><u>Bullet Train</u></i>) by <u>Kōtarō Isaka</u>
Produced by	<u>Kelly McCormick</u> <u>David Leitch</u> <u>Antoine Fuqua</u>
Starring	<u>Brad Pitt</u> <u>Joey King</u> <u>Aaron Taylor-Johnson</u> <u>Brian Tyree Henry</u> <u>Andrew Koji</u> <u>Hiroyuki Sanada</u> <u>Michael Shannon</u>

She lured Yuichi to the train as part of a plan to have him kill his boss: the White Death. To ensure his cooperation, she has a henchman holding Wataru hostage in the hospital.

Recognizing Lemon from a job in Johannesburg gone wrong, Ladybug offers to return the case in exchange for being allowed to leave. Lemon suspects that Ladybug killed The Son, leading to a fight. Lemon is knocked unconscious during the fight and Ladybug spikes his water with sleeping powder. Tangerine wakes Lemon up and they both split off to find Ladybug and frame him for the Son's murder. The Prince finds the briefcase, booby-traps it with explosives, and rigs Yuichi's gun to explode if fired. Ladybug encounters Tangerine and, after avoiding the White Death's men, kicks Tangerine off the train as the train departs, but Tangerine manages to climb back aboard from outside.

Suspicious of the two, Lemon shoots Yuichi and is about to shoot the Prince, but collapses after drinking from his water, which Ladybug had previously spiked with sleeping powder. The Prince shoots Lemon and conceals him and Yuichi in a bathroom. Ladybug encounters another assassin, codenamed "The Hornet", who poisoned both the Wolf's wedding party and the Son with boomslang snake venom. After a struggle, both are exposed to the venom, but Ladybug takes Hornet's antivenom before she can, killing her. Tangerine runs into the Prince and notices one of Lemon's train stickers on her, realizing that she shot Lemon. Ladybug interrupts them, and Tangerine is killed before he can shoot the Prince. At the next stop, Yuichi's father, "The Elder", boards the train. He recognizes the Prince's voice and informs her that Wataru is safe as her henchman has been killed.

After she flees, the Elder tells Ladybug he will remain to confront the White Death, who killed his wife while taking over the *Yakuza*. Finding Yuichi and Lemon still alive, the four work together and prepare to face the White Death. At Kyoto, Ladybug gives the White Death the briefcase. The Prince, revealed to be the White Death's daughter, fails to goad him into shooting her with the rigged gun. The White Death explains that everyone on the train was linked to the death of his wife. He hired them hoping they would kill each other, not knowing Carver (his wife's killer) was replaced by Ladybug. The White Death's henchmen open the briefcase, which explodes, knocking Ladybug and the White Death back onto the train.

The White Death's remaining henchmen board and battle the assassins, while the Elder duels the White Death. The train crashes into downtown Kyoto. Emerging from the wreck, impaled with the Elder's katana, the White Death tries to kill Ladybug, but the Prince's rigged gun explodes in his face. The Prince threatens Ladybug, Yuichi, and the Elder with a machine gun but is run over by a truck full of tangerines driven by Lemon.^[6] Maria arrives to retrieve Ladybug, while Japanese authorities begin to clean up the damage caused by the train crash.

Cast

	<div>Benito A. Martínez Ocasio Sandra Bullock</div>
Cinematography	<div>Jonathan Sela</div>
Edited by	<div>Elísabet Ronaldsdóttir</div>
Music by	<div>Dominic Lewis</div>
Production companies	<div>Columbia Pictures 87North Productions</div>
Distributed by	<div>Sony Pictures Releasing</div>
Release dates	<div>July 18, 2022 (Grand Rex) August 5, 2022 (United States)</div>
Running time	<div>126 minutes^[1]</div>
Country	<div>United States^[2]</div>
Language	<div>English</div>
Budget	<div>\$85.9–90 million^{[3][4]}</div>
Box office	<div>\$239.3 million^{[5][3]}</div>

- Brad Pitt as Ladybug, an American assassin who is suffering from anxiety and considers himself unlucky.
- Joey King as The Prince, a manipulative young assassin disguised as a schoolgirl, who seeks vengeance on The White Death, her estranged father.
- Aaron Taylor-Johnson as Tangerine, a British assassin, Lemon's twin brother.
- Brian Tyree Henry as Lemon, a British assassin, Tangerine's twin brother with an obsession with *Thomas the Tank Engine*.
- Andrew Koji as Yuichi Kimura / The Father, a *Yakuza* member whose son Wataru was pushed off a building by The Prince.
- Hiroyuki Sanada as The Elder, Yuichi's father and Wataru's grandfather.
 - Yoshi Sudarso as young Elder.
- Michael Shannon as The White Death, a Russian Crime Lord, who took over a *Yakuza* group.
- Benito A. Martínez Ocasio as The Wolf, a Mexican assassin, who seeks vengeance on the Hornet.
- Sandra Bullock as Maria Beetle, Ladybug's contact and handler.
- Zazie Beetz as The Hornet, an assassin who specializes in poisons.
- Logan Lerman as The Son, the White Death's son.
- Masi Oka as the train conductor.
- Karen Fukuhara as Kayda Izumi, the concession girl.

In addition, Channing Tatum and Ryan Reynolds appear in uncredited cameo roles as a train passenger and as assassin Carver, respectively.^[7] Reynolds accepted the cameo as a thank-you to Pitt for his own cameo in *Deadpool 2* (2018).^[8] The film's director, David Leitch, appears briefly as the 17th person killed (albeit unintentionally) by Lemon and Tangerine while rescuing The Son.^[9]

Production

Development and casting

Bullet Train had been initially developed by Antoine Fuqua—who co-produced the film—through his Fuqua Films banner.^[10] It was originally intended to be a serious action thriller, but the project turned into a light-hearted action comedy during the development process.^{[11][12]}

It was announced in June 2020 that Sony Pictures had hired David Leitch to direct the adaptation of the Kōtarō Isaka sequel novel from a screenplay by Zak Olkewicz,^[10] with Brad Pitt being cast in the film the following month.^[13] *Variety* reported that Pitt was paid \$20 million.^[14] Joey King subsequently entered negotiations for a supporting role,^[15] while in September, Andrew Koji was added,^[16] with Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Brian Tyree Henry joining in October.^{[17][18]} In November 2020, Zazie Beetz,^[19] Masi Oka,^[20] Michael Shannon,^[21] Logan Lerman,^[22] and Hiroyuki Sanada joined the cast,^[23] with Leitch revealing in December that Karen Fukuhara had also joined, and that Jonathan Sela would serve as cinematographer.^[24] That same month, singer Bad Bunny (credited as his real name, Benito



High-speed bullet train Tokaido Shinkansen upon which the film was based.

A [Martínez Ocasio](#)) was also added to the cast,^[25] and [Sandra Bullock](#) joined the following year in February to replace [Lady Gaga](#), who had dropped out due to scheduling conflicts with *[House of Gucci](#)* (2021).^{[26][27]}

Filming

Production for *Bullet Train* began in October 2020 in Los Angeles.^[28] The production budget was reportedly \$85.9 to 90 million.^{[3][4]} Filming started on November 16, 2020,^[29] and wrapped in March 2021.^[30] The producers constructed three full train cars, and LED screens with video footage of the Japanese countryside were hung outside the windows of the train set to help immerse the actors.^[31] Stunt coordinator Greg Rementer said Pitt performed 95% of his own stunts in the film.^[32]

Music

The film features a number of original tracks. Most notably, the film contains Japanese-language covers of "Stayin' Alive" by [Bee Gees](#) and "Holding Out for a Hero" by [Bonnie Tyler](#). Composer Dominic Lewis noted that the film's soundtrack represents "all vibe and no technique".^[33]

Release

Bullet Train was originally set to be released on April 8, 2022, before being delayed to July 15, 2022,^[34] again to July 29,^[35] and then to August 5.^[36] Its world premiere occurred at the [Grand Rex](#) in [Paris, France](#) on July 18, 2022.^[37]

The film was released on 4K UHD, Blu-ray and DVD on October 18, 2022, with the digital version released on September 27, 2022.^{[38][3]} *Bullet Train* was released on Netflix in the US on December 3, 2022, as part of a deal made by Sony and Netflix in 2021.^[39] Sony signed a deal giving Disney access to their legacy content, including *Bullet Train* to stream on [Disney+](#) and [Hulu](#) and appear on Disney's linear television networks. Disney's access to Sony's titles would come following their availability on [Netflix](#).^[40]

Reception

Box office

Bullet Train grossed \$103.4 million in the United States and Canada, and \$135.9 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$239.3 million.^{[5][3]}

In the United States and Canada, *Bullet Train* was released alongside *Easter Sunday*, and was projected to gross \$26–30 million from 4,357 theaters in its opening weekend.^{[4][41]} It made \$12.6 million on its first day, including \$4.6 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to debut to \$30 million, topping the box office.^[42] It made \$13.4 million in its sophomore weekend, remaining in first.^[43] It made \$8 million in its third weekend, falling to third.^[44]

Outside of the United States and Canada, the top five highest grossing markets were the United Kingdom, France, Mexico, Australia and Spain.^[5] In Japan, the film grossed \$7,092,566.^[5]

Critical response

On Rotten Tomatoes, 54% of 340 critics gave the film a positive review, with an average rating of 5.6/10. The website's critics consensus reads, "*Bullet Train*'s colorful cast and high-speed action are almost enough to keep things going after the story runs out of track."^[45] Metacritic gave the film a weighted average score of 49 out of 100, based on 61 critics, indicating "mixed or average reviews".^[46] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "B+" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak gave the film an 82% overall positive score, with 63% saying they would definitely recommend it.^[42]

Richard Roeper of the Chicago Sun-Times rated the film three and a half out of four stars, calling it "wildly entertaining" and praised the performances, "the creative and blood-spattered action sequences" and most of all the writing.^[47] Peter Debruge of Variety wrote, "*Bullet Train* feels like it comes from the same brain as *Snatch*, wearing its pop style on its sleeve – a *Kill Bill*-like mix of martial arts, manga and gabby hitman movie influences, minus the vision or wit that implies."^[48]

Representation of race in casting

The casting of several non-Asian actors, including Brad Pitt and Joey King, prompted accusations of whitewashing characters who were Japanese in Kōtarō Isaka's novel. David Inoue, executive director of the Japanese American Citizens League, criticized the casting, stating that while American actors would have been appropriate if the setting were changed to the United States, the filmmakers used the novel's Japanese setting while keeping Japanese characters in the film's background, strengthening charges of whitewashing. Inoue also questioned the actors' allyship to the Asian community for knowingly accepting whitewashed roles, and further criticized the film for pushing the "belief that Asian actors in the leading roles cannot carry a blockbuster", despite the recent successes of Asian-led films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) or *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021).^[49]

Eric Francisco of Inverse wrote, "Unless you saw the individual character posters, you'd be unlikely to think *Bullet Train* actually stars any Asian talent. Hollywood supposedly doesn't cast Asian leads because they aren't stars, but the truth is, they aren't stars because Hollywood won't cast Asian leads. How can audiences get excited about buying tickets to see Asian actors when their existence in a movie is barely acknowledged?"^[50]

When asked about the casting, Isaka defended the film and described his characters as "ethnically malleable", maintaining that his original Japanese setting and context were irrelevant as they were "not real people, maybe they're not even Japanese."^[51] Sony Pictures Motion Picture Group president Sanford Panitch highlighted Isaka's views to defend the casting, reassuring that the film would honor the novel's "Japanese soul" while giving the opportunity to cast big name stars and adapt it on a "global scale". *Bullet Train* screenwriter Zak Olkewicz argued that the decision to cast beyond Japanese or Asian actors proved "the strength of [Isaka]'s work" as it was a story that could "transcend race". Director David Leitch noted that discussions had taken place during pre-production to change the film's setting, but it was ultimately decided to keep Isaka's original location Tokyo due to its international appeal.^[49]

Guy Aoki, President of Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA), responded, considering it to be "a laughable statement" and noted that the characters in the book were "clearly Japanese". He criticized Isaka as well.^[52]

Francisco mentioned that the Japanese author and most audiences in Asia "enjoy their own domestic film industry and go to Hollywood for the spectacle of foreigners", noting the differences between Asians in Asia and Asian American issues.^[53]

Accolades

At the 2022 People's Choice Awards, the film was nominated for Movie of 2022, and Action Movie of 2022, Brad Pitt was nominated for Male Movie Star of 2022, and Joey King was nominated for Female Movie Star of 2022, and Action Movie Star of 2022.^[54] At the 51st Saturn Awards, the film was nominated Best Action/Adventure Film.^[55]

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