

Ron's Gone Wrong

Ron's Gone Wrong is a 2021 animated science fiction comedy film directed by Sarah Smith and Jean-Philippe Vine (in his feature directorial debut) and written by Peter Baynham and Smith. The film features the voice of Jack Dylan Grazer as Barney, a socially awkward middle-schooler who befriends a defective robot he names Ron, voiced by Zach Galifianakis. Barney must find a way to protect Ron, who comes under danger from corporate employees. Additional voices include Ed Helms, Justice Smith, Rob Delaney, Kylie Cantrall, Ricardo Hurtado, and Olivia Colman.

Ron's Gone Wrong is the first feature film from <u>Locksmith Animation</u>, and was animated by <u>DNEG Animation</u>. Animation and voice acting for the film were all done remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The film had its world premiere at the 2021 BFI London Film Festival on October 9, 2021, and was theatrically released in the United Kingdom on October 15, 2021, and in the United States on October 22, 2021, by 20th Century Studios. It is the first animated feature film to be theatrically released under the studio's new name, 20th Century Studios, following the acquisition of 21st Century Fox by Disney. The film grossed \$61 million worldwide and received generally positive reviews from critics.

Plot

Tech giant Bubble unveils their latest creation: the B-bot, created by Bubble's <u>CEO</u> Marc Wydell with the intent to make a robot buddy that is designed to help make friends via <u>algorithm</u>. In the town of Nonsuch, <u>California</u>, middle schooler Barney Pudowski, whose mother passed away, is the only kid in his class who does not have a B-bot. His former childhood friends, Savannah Meades, Rich Belcher, Noah, and Ava have all become absorbed by their individual B-bots. On Barney's birthday, his father, Graham, and his grandmother, Donka, come to realize that he does not have any friends. They hastily go to a Bubble store, but it closes for the day, leading them to buy a slightly damaged one from the store's delivery driver.

Ron's Gone Wrong



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Sarah Smith Jean-Philippe Vine
Written by	Peter Baynham Sarah Smith
Produced by	Julie Lockhart Lara Breay
Starring	Zach Galifianakis Jack Dylan Grazer Ed Helms Justice Smith Rob Delaney Kylie Cantrall Ricardo Hurtado Olivia Colman
Cinematography	David Peers Hailey White
Edited by	David Burrows $^{[1]}$

Barney receives the B-bot as his late-birthday gift, but upon activating it, he quickly learns that it is defective and glitchy. Not wanting to upset his father, Barney decides to take it back to the Bubble store to get it fixed, but ends up running into Rich and his friends, who taunt and try to humiliate Barney. The B-bot begins to fight back as his safety functions have been disabled, with him and Barney happily running off. However, Rich calls the police and they, along with Graham and Donka, are taken to the Bubble store so that the B-bot can be recycled. Not wanting to see him go, Barney secretly rescues him and names him Ron Bintscatsco, after his model number.

When Barney and Ron's actions are reported, Marc is happy to see Ron go against his programming while his fellow executive Andrew Morris views it as bad publicity, believing Ron must be destroyed for the issue to be resolved. Barney teaches Ron how to be a good friend and, while hanging out, runs into Savannah, who shows Ron that his purpose is to help Barney get friends. Despite Barney telling Savannah not to, she posts Ron's actions online, alerting Bubble. The next day, Ron gets out of the house and tries to get "friends" for Barney, bringing a series of random people to school. After Barney gets in trouble, Rich discovers Ron's unlocked function and downloads it, causing all the other B-bots to have their safety features turned off. The B-bots run wild, prompting a patch update to be sent to them, but not before Savannah is publicly humiliated.

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Music by	Henry Jackman	
Production companies	20th Century Animation	
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	TSG	
	Entertainment	
	Locksmith	
	Animation	
Distributed by	20th Century	
	Studios ^{[2][3]}	
Release dates	October 0, 2021	
neicase uales	October 9, 2021	
	(BFI London Film	
	Festival)	
	October 15, 2021	
	(United Kingdom)	
	October 22, 2021	
	(United States)	
Running time	107 minutes ^[4]	
Countries	United Kingdom	
	United States	
Language	English	
	\$60.7 million ^{[5][2]}	
Box office	300 / millionial	

Barney is kicked out from school and tells Ron off, but upon returning home, realizes that Ron was just trying to be a friend exactly the way he was taught. He decides to run away with Ron when Bubble employees come for them. They briefly run into Savannah, still upset over her incident, and tells her that he's going to hide in the woods. Meanwhile, while Andrew warns Marc about the ramifications of the B-bot, Marc sneaks away so that he can meet Ron while Bubble uses their resources to take control of all the B-bots to go looking for Ron and Barney in the woods. Due to the cold weather and Barney's asthma, he becomes weak and Ron brings him back to civilization just outside the school where Savannah, Rich, Noah and Ava rush out to help him.

Barney is taken to the hospital and recuperates before meeting Marc, who has patched Ron to make him like every other B-Bot. Barney demands that Marc access the cloud to get Ron's original personality, but Andrew has since taken over the company and locked Marc out. Through an elaborate plan in which Barney, Graham, Donka and Marc break into Bubble HQ, Barney manages to make it to the Bubble database, finds Ron's original data and uploads him back into his body, restoring him back to his original code. Seeing that Bubble has direct access to everyone's B-bot and realizing that several other people are just as lonely as he was, Barney suggests upgrading all the B-bots to have Ron's flaws. However, this means that Ron will be dispersed. Barney reluctantly says goodbye to Ron as his programming is spread to everyone, mixing Marc's friendship algorithm with Ron's code. Marc <u>blackmails</u> Andrew into giving his position of CEO back after secretly recording him admitting that the B-bots <u>spy</u> on their owners for profit.

Three months later, everyone has a faulty B-bot, but are happy with their weird and wild personalities. Barney (who is now allowed back in school) no longer has one, but has become much more sociable and has gotten close with his former friends (which includes deleting that humiliating video of Savannah). As they hang out at recess, a giant Bubble tower that overlooks Nonsuch produces Ron's face, implying that Ron could still be alive.

Voice cast

- Jack Dylan Grazer as Barney Pudowski, a socially awkward and lonesome middle-schooler.
- Zach Galifianakis as R0NB1NT5CAT5CO ("Ron"), Barney's malfunctioning B-bot.
- Ed Helms as Graham Pudowski, Barney's father and Donka's son.
- Olivia Colman as Donka Pudowski, Barney's grandmother and Graham's mother who was born in Bulgaria.
- Rob Delaney as Andrew Morris, an executive of Bubble corporation.
- Justice Smith as Marc Wydell, the creator of the B-bot and the CEO of Bubble.
- Kylie Cantrall as Savannah Meades, Barney's popular classmate.
- Ricardo Hurtado as Rich Belcher, Barney's prankster classmate who teases Barney.
- Cullen James McCarthy as Noah, Barney's classmate who loves video games.
- Ava Morse as Ava, Barney's classmate who loves science.
- Marcus Scribner as Alex, one of Rich's cronies.
- Thomas Barbusca as Jayden, one of Rich's cronies.
- Ruby Wax as Ms. Hartley, Barney's middle school principal.
- Sarah Miller as Bree, a Bubble store manager.
- Krupa Pattani as Sita, a colleague of Andrew Morris.
- Megan Maczko as Miss Thomas, Barney's middle school teacher.
- Bentley Kalu as a cop.
- John Macmillan as Shayne the Biker.
- David Menkin as Mr. Cleaver, Barney's extremely strict middle school coach.
- lara Nemirovsky as Ellie.
- Liam Payne as a B-bot who gets kicked by Andrew in a cameo appearance.
- Brianna Denski as a Bunny B-bot (Uncredited).

Production

Development and production

After founding <u>Locksmith Animation</u>, <u>Sarah Smith</u> wanted to create a film that observed the impact of the internet on children's relationships and self-esteem, which she realised could be made into a film after watching <u>Her</u> (2013), commenting "we have to make that film for kids, to [help] them evaluate those experiences". Smith approached <u>Peter Baynham</u> with one paragraph of story where a robot learns through imitation, Smith said that Baynham



The film's title logo

asked "what if it was an idiot and it was annoying?" Despite creating a British animated film, a creative decision was made to set it in a United States suburb. Locksmith co-founder Julie Lockhart explained,

"From a design perspective, the fact that all the big tech companies are in California made it feel that's where it should be. We're also making films for a global audience that may not specifically be about British culture." [10]

Locksmith had a troubled history in securing a distributor for the project. In May 2016, the studio formed a production deal with Paramount Pictures in which they would distribute Locksmith's films under their Paramount Animation banner. However, the following year Paramount abandoned the deal when Paramount chairman and CEO Brad Grey was replaced by Jim Gianopulos. In September 2017, Locksmith formed a multi-year production deal with 20th Century Fox, which would distribute their films under the 20th Century Fox Animation label with Locksmith aiming to theatrically release a film every 12–18 months. In acquisition of 20th Century Fox by Disney led to concern that the distribution deal would be lost again. Smith said the resulting acquisition was "terrifying", and described the prospect of promoting the project to Disney executives as "carrying coals to Newcastle", but ultimately they were supportive of the project. After production began on the film, Locksmith moved to Warner Bros. Pictures for its future projects.

On October 12, 2017, it was announced that the project would be titled *Ron's Gone Wrong*, and will serve as the first animated feature film from Locksmith Animation. <u>Alessandro Carloni</u> and Jean-Phillipe Vine were announced to serve as the film's co-directors with Octavio E. Rodriguez. The visual effects company <u>DNEG Animation</u> was on board as a digital production partner to provide the film's computer animation (being credited under "Feature Animation by DNEG"). <u>[17]</u> Also, Baynham, who previously worked with Smith on <u>Arthur Christmas</u> (2011), and <u>Elisabeth Murdoch</u> were announced to executive produce the film with Smith. <u>[1]</u>

In test screenings, Smith was surprised to find that Donka was a popular character with children. The scene where Donka dances on a table with Ron was a favorite scene for children, and Smith viewed this as "comedy there that they haven't seen before". $\frac{[15]}{}$

Casting

Grazer first began recording lines for the role of Barney in 2017 when he was 13 and did not finalize his role until early 2021 by the time he was 18. Grazer said that it became difficult to maintain his 13-year-old prepubescent voice throughout the years of recording. [18] He was originally introduced as a <u>test voice</u> for early animatics, but Smith kept him on after being astounded by the emotional range of his performance. [19]

Galifianakis was instructed to perform much of his lines for the role of Ron in a deadpan voice, to convey that Ron is run by an algorithm and is not very emotional. He commented that this was challenging and unusual, because he had never had directors in the past ask for "less" emotion. Smith praised Helms' performance in the role of Graham for skillfully improvising lines and contributing additional "touches" to the film, saying "You give him the lines and he'll do six versions of his own and he's hilarious". [15]

Animation

The character of Ron was designed to be aesthetically reminiscent of "stripped-down" computer software, with the pixelated interfaces of the $\underline{\text{MS-DOS}}$ operating system being a source of inspiration. Emphasis was placed on allowing Ron's animated performance to be versatile within the constraints of his design, which demanded precise control over his motion graphics $\underline{\text{skin}}$ that deliver his facial expressions. [20] This included allowing his face slide all across his body, such as his eyeballs appearing between his legs when picked

up.^[21] Baynham explained "he doesn't have a face that you can do all the classic things with, but somehow he does... like the way his eye might slip a little bit... that speaks to his simple clownishness."^[22] Vine referred to Ron's behaviour as being alike to the <u>Clippy</u> personal assistant, describing him "cheerfully and annoyingly helpful all the time".^[23] Locksmith consulted with the toy designer <u>Sphero</u> to investigate what would be a realistic design for a social media robot.^[24] Vine said, "we wanted the movie to feel like it's set right around now so the bot needs to feel tangible".^[9] Animation director Eric Leighton explained that it was important to track the emotional state of Ron to determine his range of behaviour. The scene where Ron physically attacks children is where he is "the most broken that a robot could possibly be", and the scene where he is reprogrammed is at his most benign. The whole movie was shot out of sequence in favor of doing scenes across his degrees of "brokeness".^[20] The character design of Barney was distinguished through coordinated color palettes; Barney's clothes are patterned in "earth tones" to indicate his love of nature, and his home is vibrant in contrast to the muted colors of other homes in the town he lives in.^[20]

DNEG had to develop a new "shot-based" animation process for creating the film, in changeover from previously specializing in <u>visual effects</u> for live-action cinema. The animation software <u>Pixar RenderMan</u> was used for the film, and the <u>Universal Scene Description</u> file format was adopted a third of the way during production. [25]

Production was impacted by the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u> in 2020. Animation for the film was done remotely with crew members working from home, which included digital modelling, rigging, and lighting. Editors faced difficulty assembling footage with temporarily out-of-sync audio, which impaired judgement over the timing of edits. Voice acting was also done remotely, and involved makeshift home recording setups where blankets were used for soundproofing. A voice actor even had to ask family members sharing an internet connection to come offline, in order to free bandwidth for a recording session. [26][27][8]

A labor dispute arose over DNEG announcing 20%-25% pay cuts to employees earning more than £35,000 per year, which it said was due to business disruption caused by $\underline{COVID-19}$. This led to 169 employees signing a collective grievance statement. The move was later partially reversed; DNEG was forced to reach deals with its business partners, this included Locksmith who agreed to offer a salary top-up and completion bonus to employees working on the film. The trade union \underline{BECTU} condemned DNEG for its refusal to communicate with the union, and said its response to the collective grievance was deliberately indirect. [28][29] The film took approximately five years to complete.

Musical score and soundtrack album

<u>Henry Jackman</u> composed the film score. Speaking about the score, Jackman said that "it has its own identity, similar to <u>Wreck-It Ralph</u> or <u>Big Hero 6</u>" having the "same musical landscape and color in this film", and also had enjoyed working in the film, calling the scoring sessions as "enormous fun". Vine and Smith expressed gratitude to Jackman on how his score elevated the film. Smith wanted the score to have a "contemporary <u>John Hughes</u> feel along with a classic 'high school movie' vibe and the orchestral scale and emotion of <u>E.T.</u> on top". The score was recorded at <u>Abbey Road Studios</u> and <u>Air Studios</u> in <u>London, England</u>.

Jackman composed most of the tracks, with two songs in collaboration with <u>Dave Bayley</u> of the indie-pop band <u>Glass Animals. [36] Liam Payne</u> performed an original song titled "Sunshine" and its music video was released on August 27, 2021. [30][31] The soundtrack was released digitally on October 15, 2021, by <u>Walt Disney Records</u> and in physical formats on October 22. [37]

Release

In October 2017, *Ron's Gone Wrong* was scheduled for a theatrical release on November 6, 2020. [38] In November 2019, the film was moved to February 26, 2021. [39] In May 2020, the film was moved to April 23, 2021, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. [40][41] On January 22, 2021, the film was then delayed further to October 22, 2021, in RealD 3D originally. [42] The film also had its world premiere as the headlining act of the 2021 BFI London Film Festival on October 9, 2021, making it a Special BFI Presentation. [43][4] On the same date, the film premiered at the 36th Guadalajara International Film Festival's Guadalajara opening celebration event. [43] The film was premiered in United Kingdom on October 15, 2021. The film also held a special surprise screening premiere at the El Capitan Theatre on the day of its USA theatrical release date of



<u>Liam Payne</u> performed an original song titled "Sunshine" and its music video was released on August 27, 2021. [30][31]

October 22, 2021. The film played exclusively in theaters for 45 days before heading to digital platforms. [45]

The film is also the only film under Locksmith's deal with 20th Century Studios, as the animation studio's next film, *That Christmas*, is set to be released on Netflix. Following this, Locksmith had also struck a new deal with Warner Bros. Pictures to distribute future films under Warner Bros. Pictures Animation afterwards. [16]

Marketing and promotion

<u>TOMY</u> made a deal with <u>20th Century Studios</u> and <u>Locksmith Animation</u> to develop and promote the film's toys including plush toys and action figures. [46]

Home media

Ron's Gone Wrong was released on DVD, Blu-ray and Ultra HD Blu-ray on December 7, 2021, and on Digital on December 15, 2021, by Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment. [47] Special features include Questions and Answers with Jack Dylan Grazer and Zach Galifianakis called "A Boy and His B-bot", a Making Ron Right featurette and the music video of the film's soundtrack album's one and only original hit song called "Sunshine" by English singer and songwriter Liam Payne. Ron's Gone Wrong became available for streaming on HBO Max and Disney+ on December 15, 2021, after Disney reached a deal with WarnerMedia for a majority of the upcoming films from 20th Century Studios to be streamed

collaboratively between Disney+, HBO Max and <u>Hulu</u> until HBO's deal with 20th Century, signed before Disney's acquisition of the company in 2012, runs out at the end of 2022. *Ron's Gone Wrong* also made its American television premiere on HBO on December 18, 2021. [48]

Reception

Box office

Ron's Gone Wrong grossed \$23 million in the United States and Canada and \$37.7 million in other territories for a worldwide total of \$60.7 million. In the United States and Canada, the film was released alongside *Dune* and was projected to gross around \$10 million from 3,065 theaters in its opening weekend. The film made \$2.3 million on its first day, including \$260,000 from Thursday night previews. It went on to debut in fifth place with \$7.3 million. On its second weekend, the film fell 48% and made \$3.7 million. Brennan Klein of *Screen Rant* speculated the film to be a box office disappointment due to its low performance and undisclosed budget. [51]

Critical response

Ron's Gone Wrong received generally positive reviews. On the review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes, the film holds an approval rating of 81%, based on 103 reviews, with an average rating of 6.6/10. The website's critical consensus reads: "It isn't the first animated film to confront technology creep, but in terms of striking an entertaining balance between humor and heart, Ron's Gone Wrong gets it right." On Metacritic, the film has a score of 65 out of 100 based on 23 critics. Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A" on an A+ to F scale.

James Mottram of <u>The South China Morning Post</u> wrote: "sweet, heart-warming and frighteningly prescient, *Ron's Gone Wrong* is one of the best animated films in recent memory". [55] Tim Robey of <u>The Daily Telegraph</u> gave the film four out of five and said that the film is "visualised with verve" and that "it's a zingy and mercilessly funny satire on how devices, with their ever-so-friendly interfaces, have in fact become our despots". [56] Ben Kenigsberg of <u>The New York Times</u> said "As family entertainment, it's fine." [57] Peter Bradshaw of <u>The Guardian</u> gave the film three out of five, saying that the film was "entertaining, though composed with algorithmic precision", adding that "it winds up suspiciously neutral about whether kids really should abandon digital enslavement in favour of real-life human friends." [58] Pat Padua of <u>The Washington Post</u> gave the film three out of four, writing that it "has plenty of slapstick and potty humor for kids. But adults will also be intrigued by its frequently scathing (albeit somewhat conflicted) critique of consumerism." [59] Mark Kermode said that the film was "really good fun and a real surprise". [60]

Anna Smith of <u>Deadline Hollywood Daily</u> wrote that the film was "one for all the family - just put your cellphones away first". Brandon Zachary of <u>CBR</u> wrote "What starts as a movie you'd expect to know every twist to transcends into something far more interesting." Charles Bramesco of <u>The A.V. Club</u> wrote: "As in the curiously similar <u>The Mitchells vs. the Machines</u>, the misadventures transmit a light-hearted commentary on the wonders and hazards of our screen-saturated culture." Wendy Ide of <u>Screen International</u> said that the film "transcends the familiarity of the story with deft writing, appealing animation and a big heart crammed into a small malfunctioning robot". Angie Han of <u>The Hollywood Reporter</u> wrote "What the animated feature lacks in daring imagination, it makes up for with endearing good humor, thoughtful cultural critique and one heck of a cute robot."

more critical of the film, describing it as "a derivative tale about a middle schooler and his quirky computer sidekick" and writing that it "seems to want to preach we should all disconnect from our devices and restore human contact. But then what will the filmmakers do with all that adorable merch?" [65] Michael Ordoña of *The Los Angeles Times* wrote that the film "dots its primer on friendship with chase scenes and warnings about Big Tech with only mixed success". [66] Yolanda Machando of *TheWrap* wrote that the film "offers partially realized messaging about social media while populating the story with elementary sight gags, too many overused "fish out of water" tropes and attractive merchandise options". [67]

Audience viewership

According to <u>Nielsen ratings</u>, *Ron's Gone Wrong* was the third most streamed feature film worldwide across all major platforms between December 13 and December 19, 2021. <u>[68]</u> <u>Screen Rant</u> reported that within the United States it was the most viewed feature film on Disney+ after two days of appearing on the service on December 15. <u>[51]</u>

Accolades, awards and nominations

Year	Award	Category	Nominees and recipients	Result
2022	Annie Awards ^[69]	Outstanding Achievement for Character Design in an Animated Feature	Julien Bizat	Nominated
		Outstanding Achievement for Production Design on an Animated Feature	Aurélien Predal, Till Nowak and Nathan Crowley	Nominated
	British Animation Awards ^[70]	Best Long Form	Sarah Smith, Jean-Philippe Vine and Octavio E. Rodriguez	Won
		Best Design		Won
		Writers Award	Sarah Smith and Peter Baynham	Nominated

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External links

- Official website (https://family.20thcenturystudios.com/movies/rons-gone-wrong)
- Ron's Gone Wrong (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7504818/) at IMDb

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