

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom is a 2023 American superhero film based on DC Comics featuring the character Aquaman. Produced by DC Studios, Atomic Monster, the Safran Company, and Domain Entertainment, and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures, it is the sequel to *Aquaman* (2018), and the 15th and final film in the DC Extended Universe (DCEU). Directed by James Wan from a screenplay by David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick, the film stars Jason Momoa as Arthur Curry / Aquaman, who must work with his half-brother Orm (Patrick Wilson) to prevent Black Manta (Yahya Abdul-Mateen II) from killing his family and using the cursed Black Trident to overheat the world while searching for the lost seventh kingdom of the seas. Amber Heard, Randall Park, Dolph Lundgren, Temuera Morrison, Martin Short, and Nicole Kidman also star in supporting roles.

Momoa pitched a story for an *Aquaman* sequel during production of the first film. Wan did not want to rush a sequel but agreed in January 2019 to oversee development. Johnson-McGoldrick signed on to return as screenwriter a month later, and Wan was confirmed to be returning as director in August 2020. He said the film would expand on *Aquaman*'s worldbuilding, have a more serious tone, and feature themes such as climate change. It is a buddy comedy between Aquaman and Orm, and was inspired by the Silver Age of Comic Books with a retro science fiction vibe similar to the works of animator Ray Harryhausen and the horror films of the 1960s, specifically *Planet of the Vampires* (1965). Wan announced the sequel's title in June 2021, ahead of the start of filming at the end of the month. Filming concluded in January 2022, taking place in the United Kingdom, Hawaii, Los Angeles, and New Jersey, with additional filming in New Zealand.

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom premiered at a fan event at the Grove, Los Angeles on December 19, 2023, and was released in the United States on December 22. The film

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>James Wan</u>
Screenplay by	<u>David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick</u>
Story by	<u>James Wan</u> <u>David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick</u> <u>Jason Momoa</u> <u>Thomas Pa'a Sibbett</u>
Based on	<u>Characters</u> from <u>DC</u>
Produced by	<u>Peter Safran</u> <u>James Wan</u> <u>Rob Cowan</u>
Starring	<u>Jason Momoa</u> <u>Patrick Wilson</u> <u>Amber Heard</u>

received generally negative reviews from critics and grossed \$434 million worldwide against a production budget of \$205–215 million.

Plot

Four years after becoming king of Atlantis,^[a] Arthur Curry has married Mera and had a son, Arthur Jr., while splitting his life between land and sea. Meanwhile, David Kane / Black Manta continues to seek revenge against Arthur for his father's death, working with marine biologist Stephen Shin to find Atlantean artifacts. When Shin accidentally discovers a cavern in Antarctica, Manta finds a Black Trident that possesses him, its creator promising to give him the power to destroy Arthur and Atlantis.

Five months later, Manta breaks into an Orichalcum reserve on Atlantis to steal them to power his Atlantean machines that are of ancient origin, but are of unknown design to modern Atlanteans. They are caught midway and chased by Atlantean forces, with Mera injured in the ensuing battle. Arthur learns that this usage of Orichalcum, which emits high quantities of greenhouse gases, has not only raised planetary temperatures and caused extreme weather and ocean acidification, but nearly caused a planetary extinction in the past when used by an ancient Atlantean kingdom. To learn where Manta is hiding, Arthur breaks his half-brother, Orm, out of prison, and they visit a pirate haven called the Sunken Citadel, meeting Kingfish to learn of Manta's whereabouts.

The information they obtain leads them to a volcanic island in the South Pacific, where they battle Manta's forces after getting themselves through flora and fauna mutated by the Orichalcum. There, Orm comes into contact with the Black Trident, which shows him visions of its provenance. Orm learns the trident was created by Kordax, the brother of King Atlan and ruler of the lost kingdom of Necrus. Kordax was imprisoned with blood magic following a failed attempt to usurp the throne. Realizing the blood of any of Atlan's descendants could release Kordax; the pair deduce Manta has kidnapped Arthur Jr. The Atlanteans, with Shin's help, determine that Kordax' prison and the lost kingdom of Necrus is located in Antarctica.

In Necrus, Arthur fights Manta and is almost killed before Mera arrives and saves him. Manta throws the Black Trident at Mera, but Orm catches it before it strikes her. The spirit of Kordax leaves Manta for Orm, who proceeds to fight Arthur and uses Arthur's blood to free Kordax. Arthur convinces his brother to give up his hatred for him, allowing him to destroy both Kordax and the Black Trident. With Kordax's magic vanishing, Necrus starts to collapse. Manta refuses Arthur's help and allows himself to fall into a fissure. The Atlanteans and Shin escape to safety and decide that Orm has redeemed himself. They plan to inform

	<div><div><div><div><div></div><div>Yahya Abdul-Mateen II</div></div><div><div></div><div>Randall Park</div></div><div><div></div><div>Dolph Lundgren</div></div><div><div></div><div>Temuera Morrison</div></div><div><div></div><div>Martin Short</div></div><div><div></div><div>Nicole Kidman</div></div></div></div></div>
Cinematography	<div><div><div></div><div>Don Burgess</div></div></div>
Edited by	<div><div><div></div><div>Kirk Morri</div></div></div>
Music by	<div><div><div></div><div>Rupert Gregson-Williams</div></div></div>
Production companies	<div><div><div></div><div>DC Studios^[1]</div></div><div><div></div><div>Atomic Monster^[2]</div></div><div><div></div><div>The Safran Company^[2]</div></div><div><div></div><div>Domain Entertainment^{[3][4]}</div></div></div>
Distributed by	<div><div><div></div><div>Warner Bros. Pictures</div></div></div>
Release dates	<div><div><div></div><div>December 19, 2023 (The Grove)</div></div><div><div></div><div>December 22, 2023 (United States)</div></div></div>
Running time	<div><div><div></div><div>124 minutes^[5]</div></div></div>
Country	<div><div><div></div><div>United States</div></div></div>
Language	<div><div><div></div><div>English</div></div></div>
Budget	<div><div><div></div><div>\$205–215 million^{[6][7]}</div></div></div>
Box office	<div><div><div></div><div>\$434.4 million^{[8][9]}</div></div></div>

Atlantis that Orm died on the condition that he remains hidden, vacating to the surface world. Believing the unification of the underwater kingdoms and the surface world is necessary to prevent further damage to the oceans and planet, Arthur reveals Atlantis' existence through an announcement at the United Nations and declares his intentions of making the kingdom a member state.

Cast

- **Jason Momoa as Arthur Curry / Aquaman:**
The half-Atlantean, half-human king of Atlantis who can swim at supersonic speeds and summon and command aquatic life,^[10] and is the father of Arthur Jr. with Mera.^[11] Producer Peter Safran called Arthur the "ultimate outsider", explaining he "doesn't believe he's part of the surface world or Atlantis" and he never felt he belonged in either world.^[12] Director James Wan said the film was a true continuation of the character's story from the first film *Aquaman* (2018), explaining that Arthur is forced to juggle his duties as the king of Atlantis with his role as a father while protecting both his family and kingdom. Safran said the heart of the story was that Arthur is a superhero who is both human and a superhuman involved in an epic battle with high stakes.^[13] Wan felt including Arthur Jr. in the film was a natural extension of the first film and contrasted Arthur's role as king with the juxtaposition of his domestic responsibilities as a father.^[11]
- **Patrick Wilson as Orm Marius:**
Arthur's Atlantean half-brother and the former king of Atlantis who is stripped of his title as the Ocean Master. He is imprisoned in the Sahara desert by the Deserter tribe for assassinating the Fisherman King, with a limited water supply to dampen his powers causing him to bear a gaunt and scraggly appearance. Orm is freed from prison and recruited by Arthur to help find and defeat Black Manta.^{[13][14][15]}
- **Amber Heard as Mera:**
The queen of Atlantis and former princess of Xebel, Arthur's wife and mother of Arthur Jr., and King Nereus' daughter who can control water.^{[16][17][18]} The character is injured early in the film and recovers for much of its events, before joining Aquaman, Orm, and Atlanna in their journey to defeat Black Manta. Several of Heard's scenes were cut during reshoots.^[19]
- **Yahya Abdul-Mateen II as David Kane / Black Manta:**
A ruthless pirate and high-seas mercenary who uses an Atlantean armored suit and wields the powerful Black Trident, seeking to kill Arthur and his family as revenge for the death of his father.^{[20][21][22]} Wan said Black Manta's love for his father and need to avenge his death take a darker turn in the film, with the character becoming more powerful.^[13] The director had planned while working on the first film to have Black Manta, who he described as having been a "glorified side character", return as the main antagonist in its sequel, opting to establish his conflictive relationship with Arthur to give him a bigger role in this film.^[23] Black Manta seeks to obtain blood from a descendant of the Atlantean king Atlan to free the Black Trident's creator Kordax from his imprisonment in the lost kingdom of Necrus, and commands an army of undead warriors from Necrus using the Black Trident which possesses him.^{[24][25]} Wan said Black Manta's suit, which forgoes the all-black power suit from the first film for a design that was remade in all-silver and more accurate to the comics' version, as well as his ship and technology, were inspired by the aesthetic of the Silver Age Aquaman comics and Ivan Reis's *The New 52* comics.^{[26][15]}
- **Randall Park as Dr. Stephen Shin:** A marine biologist obsessed with finding Atlantis who works for Black Manta after rescuing him in the first film.^{[27][18]}
- **Dolph Lundgren as Nereus:** The king of Xebel and Mera's father.^[28] Lundgren had a larger role in the original version of the film which he said was reduced during reshoots.^[19]

- Temuera Morrison as Thomas Curry: Arthur's father who works as a lighthouse keeper at Amnesty Bay.^{[29][24]}
- Martin Short as the voice of Kingfish: A gigantic piscine humanoid of indeterminate species and the confident ruler of the Sunken Citadel, an underwater pirate haven, who Arthur and Orm visit to locate Black Manta. He has a smarmy and cocky voice and behaves like a classical Roman emperor with an extravagant surrounding and lady servants, and is guarded by humanoid hammerhead shark bodyguards.^{[30][31]}
- Nicole Kidman as Atlanna: Arthur and Orm's mother and the former queen of Atlantis.^[32] Atlanna's role as Arthur's advisor on how the underwater world works was able to be expanded upon given the absence of Nuidis Vulko, who served in that role in the first film and is revealed to have been killed off-screen due to a plague indirectly caused by Black Manta's actions in this film and humanity's pollution from the land affecting the oceans.^{[33][34][15]}

Also appearing are Vincent Regan as Atlan, the first king of Atlantis, replacing Graham McTavish from the first film;^[27] Jani Zhao as Stingray, a loyal member of Black Manta's crew;^{[27][18]} Indya Moore as Karshon,^[27] an Atlantean and the leader of the High Council of the Seven Kingdoms who serves as a political barrier for Arthur by opposing his desire to reveal Atlantis to the human world. The character is not depicted as a shark-like character as she is in the comics;^{[18][15][35]} and Pilou Asbæk as Kordax, Atlan's brother who was the creator of the cursed Black Trident and the undead king of the lost kingdom of Necrus, also called the Black City, whose evil spirit possesses Black Manta. This version of Kordax is a composite character of the comics' version and Orin, which was the name of Atlan's brother and Aquaman in some iterations of the comics.^{[36][37][15]} Arthur and Mera's son Arthur Jr., who has similar water-based abilities as his parents,^[25] is portrayed by various babies including Tyler Burger, Maddox Cruz-Porter, River Ao Moemoea Green, Nikau Keats Green, Bodhi McCabe, Elliot Oben-Pepira, Lucian Oben-Pepira, Arthur Rowe-Mayer, and Noah Rowe-Mayer.^[38] Natalia Safran, wife of producer Peter Safran, makes a cameo appearance as a member of the High Council, while Michael Beach appears uncredited as Black Manta's father Jesse Kane through archive footage from the first film.^[39]

Also returning from the first film are John Rhys-Davies as the voice of the Brine King,^[40] as well as the giant seahorse Storm, Arthur's steed,^{[41][42]} and the octopus T.O.P.O., which stands for "Tactical Observation and Pursuit Operative",^[43] who is a tactical covert operative for Atlantis that aids Arthur in freeing Orm and on their quest, in addition to playing several instruments, such as the drums.^{[17][44][45][15]} Wan said T.O.P.O., who was created through visual effects, was a "*real* character" in the film after briefly appearing in the first film, with an actor occasionally standing in for T.O.P.O. with a stick puppet for Momoa to act against.^[44] The director described the character and Arthur as having a fun slightly antagonistic relationship, while Momoa said T.O.P.O. added a lot of comedy which complemented Arthur being "very salty".^[45]

Production

Development

During the production of Aquaman (2018), star Jason Momoa developed a story pitch for a sequel that he gave to Warner Bros. Pictures Group chairman Toby Emmerich and producer Peter Safran. In October 2018, before the film's release, Momoa said he would be more involved in the development of a potential sequel and expected filming to begin in 2019. Director James Wan said there were several storylines that

could spin out from *Aquaman*, with that film introducing seven underwater kingdoms that had yet to be fully explored.^{[10][46]} Momoa and his producing partner Brian Mendoza wrote a 50-page treatment for the sequel, which Warner Bros. bought but did not entirely follow,^[12] and the actor was paid \$15 million for his involvement.^[47] Emmerich had enough confidence in box office projections for the film by early December to begin discussing a sequel.^[48] By the end of January 2019, when *Aquaman* was set to become the highest-grossing film based on a single DC Comics character, Warner Bros. was in negotiations with Wan to oversee the development and writing of a sequel with the potential to return as director. Geoff Boucher of *Deadline Hollywood* noted that Wan had been very protective of sequels to his previous films *Insidious* (2010) and *The Conjuring* (2013), and was "deeply invested" in the worldbuilding of *Aquaman*. Wan had previously compared the world of *Aquaman* to other fictional worlds such as Middle-earth, the *Star Wars* galaxy, and the Wizarding World.^[49]

In early February 2019, Warner Bros. hired Noah Gardner and Aidan Fitzgerald to write the script for a "horror-tinged" *Aquaman* spin-off film titled *The Trench*, based on one of the kingdoms introduced in the first film. It was expected to have a smaller budget and not feature the main cast of *Aquaman*, with Wan and Safran producing. Borys Kit of *The Hollywood Reporter* reported then that there had not yet been serious discussions about a direct sequel to *Aquaman* between the studio, Wan, and Momoa, due to them wanting to have a "breather" first,^[50] but several days later he reported that active development on a sequel was getting underway with the first film's co-writer, and frequent Wan collaborator, David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick signing on to write the screenplay. Wan and Safran were producing the sequel, though it was still unclear if Wan would direct it.^[51] At the end of February, Warner Bros. scheduled *Aquaman 2* for release on December 16, 2022.^[52] The next month, Safran explained that he and Wan did not want to rush a sequel, and Warner Bros. had been supportive of that which is why the film's release was scheduled for four years after the first film. He added that they were approaching the *Aquaman* franchise in a similar way to *The Conjuring Universe*, with spin-offs like *The Trench* exploring stories about the underwater kingdoms alongside the "mothership" films starring *Aquaman*. Safran said Wan knew "the architecture, the armory, the military, the look, the feel, the general vibe" of each of the seven kingdoms and wanted to explore them all in future projects.^[53]

In July 2019, Wan was set to direct the film *Malignant* (2021) before beginning work on *Aquaman 2*.^[55] Patrick Wilson said in November that he had discussed plans for the sequel with Wan and indicated that he would be reprising his role as Orm Marius / Ocean Master from the first film.^[56] A month later, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II confirmed that he was returning as David Kane / Black Manta, and was looking to flesh out the character.^[20] Johnson-McGoldrick stated in March 2020 that the sequel would not be based on a specific comic book, but was taking inspiration from the *Aquaman* stories of the Silver Age of Comic Books that featured Black Manta as the villain.^[57] Wan was confirmed to be directing the sequel at the virtual DC FanDome event in August,^[54] when Wilson was also confirmed to return.^[58] Wan said it would be more serious than the first film and feature themes that were more relevant to the real world,^[54] such as climate change. He said the creatives were not afraid to address it in a big way through the film, and cited the *Aquaman* character being environmentally conscious in the comic books as someone who fights to keep the ocean clean. He also affirmed that the film would still remain a "fun action-fantasy movie".^[59] Momoa said a scene was featured in the film in which *Aquaman* addresses the United Nations



James Wan returned as director from the first film after choosing not to rush a sequel^{[54][53]}

on climate change, with the actor having also done so at the UN's Ocean Conference.^[60] Wan added that it would include more worldbuilding and exploration of the underwater kingdoms,^[54] and would feature some horror elements similar to the Trench sequence in the first film.^[61] Being able to expand on the worldbuilding of the first film was one of the key reasons that Wan chose to direct the sequel, along with Johnson-McGoldrick's script which Wan felt had a "really cool story to bring all these characters back, and then growing them in a big way".^[62] Safran felt embracing the mythic nature of the Aquaman character and pairing that with the film's worldbuilding and visual storytelling made the film compelling,^[13] and he and Momoa both believed the film's humor exceeded that of the first film,^{[60][42]} while Wan said Aquaman was at the center of the film with his charm and humor.^[13]

Amber Heard debunked rumors in November 2020 that she would not be reprising her role as Mera from the first film following allegations of domestic abuse made against her by her ex-husband Johnny Depp. That month, a petition to have Heard fired from the franchise received more than 1.5 million signatures, and came after Warner Bros. removed Depp from *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (2022) when allegations made by The Sun that Depp abused Heard were ruled to be "substantially true" in a defamation lawsuit filed by Depp against The Sun.^{[16][63]} Safran said they never considered making the film without Heard and would not react to the "pure fan pressure" of the petition and other social media conversations.^[64] However, Heard later stated, during a defamation trial brought against her by Depp over a column in *The Washington Post*, that "they didn't want to include" her in the film, and that she had to fight to keep her part. She claimed that revisions were made to the script that reduced her role to a "very pared down version", including removing action sequences for her character, and she was unable to renegotiate her option contract that stipulated she would earn \$2 million for the sequel, which was double what she made for the first film.^{[65][66][67]} By that point, in May 2022, the petition to have Heard removed from the film had received more than four million signatures.^[65] DC Films president Walter Hamada testified during the trial that the studio did consider recasting Mera, but this was due to concerns over Heard's lack of chemistry with Momoa rather than the abuse allegations. He added that it was the studio's philosophy to "hold people to their options" and not to renegotiate contracts, and said the size of Heard's role had not changed during development of the sequel.^{[68][69]}

Tatiana Siegel at Variety reported that Heard had been "nearly fired" from the sequel after the first film's release due to the chemistry concerns, but these plans were abandoned after her ex-boyfriend Elon Musk intervened. Siegel also reported that the "lack-of-chemistry narrative" had been disputed, citing that Heard had performed a chemistry test with Momoa on the first film and had been cast over two other actresses, including Abbey Lee. Heard described her experience with Momoa and Wan on the film's set as hostile, which was refuted by a DC spokesperson who called the production positive and collaborative.^[7] The defamation trial's jury found that both Heard and Depp defamed each other, with Heard having defamed Depp on three counts and Depp having defamed her on one count.^[70] Social media responses to the trial heavily favored Depp over Heard, with several memes and videos "mocking her testimony". In June 2022, reports emerged that Heard had been fired from the film following the trial, but these were also debunked.^[71] Heard ultimately appeared for around 20 minutes in the film,^[72] with two of her scenes—a fight sequence with Black Manta and a love scene with Momoa—reportedly cut during production.^[7] Several commentators noted upon the film's release that many of Heard's scenes had been removed and that the remaining scenes appeared to be clunky and awkward.^[72]

Hamada explained during the trial that the film was always intended to be a buddy comedy that focused on the relationship between Aquaman and Orm.^{[68][69]} Safran compared this relationship to that of Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy's characters in the film *48 Hrs.* (1982), while Wan said the film was written as a

"bromance action-adventure" story focused on that relationship with the two brothers "overcoming their differences to save the world", compared to the first film which focused on Aquaman's relationship with Mera.^{[42][13]} Actor Dolph Lundgren, who portrays Mera's father Nereus, later said that he and Heard had larger roles in the original script and cut before they were reduced during reshoots.^{[19][73]}

Pre-production

Lundgren said in February 2021 that he was reprising his role as Nereus in the sequel, with filming expected to begin later that year in London.^[28] A month later, the planned start date for filming was revealed to be in June, though there was potential for this to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.^[74] Richard Sale was also revealed to be serving as the costume designer, after previously serving as an assistant costume designer on DC's Wonder Woman 1984 (2020).^{[74][75]} IWC Schaffhausen created red and blue glowing Super-LumiNova prop watches for the film, which were worn by Abdul-Mateen II and Randall Park.^[76] In April, Warner Bros. and DC announced that development on *The Trench* was no longer moving forward, with the studios not having room for the spin-off on their slate of films and believing *Aquaman 2* to be enough of an expansion of the franchise for the time being.^[77] Wan later revealed that *The Trench* had been the working title and a misdirect for a planned Black Manta film.^[26] Later that month, Pilou Asbæk entered talks to join the film's cast.^[78] Momoa said in May that he would begin filming in July,^[79] and Wan announced a month later that the sequel was titled *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*,^[80] with Temuera Morrison confirming his return as Aquaman's father Thomas Curry.^[29] Willem Dafoe was also reported to be reprising his role as Nuidis Vulko from the first film,^{[81][82]} but he ultimately did not appear, which Wan attributed to scheduling conflicts. The director felt that Vulko's absence allowed for Atlanna's role to be expanded as her son's advisor on how the underwater world works.^[33]

Filming

Principal photography began at Warner Bros. Studios, Leavesden in Watford on June 28, 2021,^{[28][83]} using five stages, the studio backlot, and an external tank.^[84] Filming occurred under the working title *Necrus*,^[74] a reference to the lost underwater kingdom of Necrus,^{[74][36][85][86]} which debuted in *Aquaman* #30 from 1966 as an unstable underwater city, also known as "the Black City", rivaling Atlantis that cannot be in the same location twice and originated from an alien satellite. Commentators felt this working title implied Necrus would be featured in the film,^{[87][74][85][86]} which was later confirmed.^[36] Wan said designing the lost kingdom of Necrus was fun, detailing it as a society with various vehicles and weapons, such as the one-man operated machines called the Octobots that move in-and-out of water which Orm encounters. He was inspired for the kingdom's design by the *Aquaman* comics from the Silver Age of Comic Books in the 1960s and their retro vibe.^{[42][13]} Wan felt Antarctica and its landscape were familiar while remaining largely unvisited by much of the world, which allowed him to explore a heightened version of it in the lost kingdom. For the lost kingdom, the creatives incorporated ancient Atlantean technology that was more advanced than typical modern technology used by humans and incorporated it in the uniforms and weapons of Black Manta's crew, his colossal submarine, and the Octobots. The kingdom featured a retro sci-fi look similar to what the Silver Age comics in the 1950s believed the future would have looked like, evoking a different age but with a modern spin.^[13]

Many of the crew members returned from the first film,^{[75][13]} including Don Burgess as the cinematographer and Bill Brzeski as production designer,^{[88][75]} with the latter serving alongside Sahby Mehalla.^[2] The special effects and visual effects crew invented new technology and VFX rigs for the

underwater scenes in the film so it would be easier for the actors to shoot their scenes, with 100 cameras capturing the performances and action scenes, which was then applied to 3D versions of the actors. This new setup came after Wan found the rigging system used on the first film to be complex and it caused physical pain for the actors with its equipment, and Wan found the new setup to be more versatile and safe.^{[89][90]} Wan said the creatives wanted the sequel to provide a more immersive and exciting experience for audiences while expanding the story and characters, and explained that the depiction of Atlantis in the film was expanded upon from the first film by providing the city depths, residential areas, and an area inspired by Times Square, while also exploring some of its politics. Atlantis was also given more color and vibrancy.^[13] Safran felt the different look and feel of Atlantis was still anchored in what audiences liked from the first film while still feeling fresh and new, highlighting Wan's ability to capture the fantasy and colors of the new worlds being explored. To create the various underwater worlds and creatures, Wan and the creatives transitioned away from the blue screen method used on the first film, and instead used new technology called Eyeline Studio, which saw the actors in circular booths surrounded by 136 cameras, which producer Rob Cowan said changed the creative and practical methods of shooting the film.^[13]

In August 2021, Wan said the sequel was strongly influenced by the film *Planet of the Vampires* (1965),^[91] as well as "old-school Euro-horror" and the stop motion monsters created by animator Ray Harryhausen. He said the film had a "very retro" look similar to the horror films of the 1960s, and featured unsettling mechanical creatures which had an "old-school sci-fi and horror" feeling, which was connected to Black Manta's role in the film.^[92] Brzeski compared the film to Harryhausen's work on the films *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) for being a fantastical adventure with a "great quest and monsters",^[42] such as the Deserter tribe which are located in the Sahara desert and evolved into vampiric creatures by relying on blood for moisture,^[15] while incorporating issues modern audiences could relate to.^[42] Wilson said they pushed the fight scenes and stunts further than the first film in addition to exploring the characters' relationships. He also revealed that the character T.O.P.O., an octopus playing drums, appears in the film.^[93] Wan said that, following the positive reception to T.O.P.O.'s brief appearance in the first film, he and Johnson-McGoldrick decided to give the character a significant role in the sequel,^[41] and believed the inclusion of T.O.P.O. and other creatures from the Aquaman comics allowed audiences to know they were embracing the character's fictional world.^[41]

Location shooting took place at Saunton Sands beach, Devon, in early September 2021,^{[84][94]} and at Piccadilly in the City of Westminster, London.^[84] Later that month, Asbæk's casting was confirmed,^[95] portraying Kordax, the undead king of the lost kingdom of Necrus;^{[36][37]} Randall Park was revealed to be returning from the first film as Dr. Stephen Shin; Vincent Regan had been cast as the ancient king Atlan, replacing Graham McTavish who briefly portrayed the character in the first film; Jani Zhao was set to portray Stingray, an original character for the film, in her first English-language feature role; and Indya Moore was revealed to be portraying Karshon in the sequel.^[27] After shooting 95 percent of the film in the United Kingdom,^[96] production moved to Hawaii until December 9,^[97] for on-location shooting.^[98] Filming also occurred in Jersey City, New Jersey that year.^[98] Nicole Kidman was confirmed to have reprised her role as Aquaman's mother Atlanna shortly after that.^[32] Filming then moved to Los Angeles, and officially wrapped on January 12, 2022, in Malibu.^[96] Filming was completed on time and under budget, and reportedly needed around a week of reshoots.^[7]

Post-production

Warner Bros. adjusted its release schedule in March 2022 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workload of visual effects vendors. *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* was moved to March 17, 2023, and *The Flash* was also moved from 2022 to 2023, to allow time for their visual effects work to be completed, while *Shazam! Fury of the Gods* was moved up to this film's previous release date because it would be ready for release earlier.^[99] Wan said that while he loved the Christmas release timeframe for the film, he was thankful for this delay as it allowed more time for work on the visual effects and the new technology for it, which he called groundbreaking, and said the film would not have made its prior release date.^{[100][101]} He had also been working on his director's cut at this time.^[101] Wilson also said that new VFX techniques were used for *The Lost Kingdom*.^[93] In June 2022, the final writing credits were revealed: Johnson-McGoldrick received screenplay credit, while the duos of Wan and Johnson-McGoldrick, and Momoa and his producing partner Thomas Pa'a Sibbett received story credit.^{[102][12]}

Momoa revealed in July 2022 that Ben Affleck was reprising his DC Extended Universe (DCEU) role of Bruce Wayne / Batman for reshoots on the Warner Bros. backlot in Burbank, California.^[103] Aaron Couch of *The Hollywood Reporter* reported soon after that Michael Keaton had filmed a scene as his version of Bruce Wayne / Batman from Tim Burton's Batman (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992). Keaton's version was set to be introduced to the DCEU in *The Flash* before that film's release was pushed to after *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*'s. The scene reportedly confused audiences during test screenings, and Couch felt this was why Affleck joined the reshoots.^[104] The film was tested at this time and received mixed results, which continued after it was recut in mid-2022, prompting a new cut to be made.^[7] The next month, after Warner Bros.' parent company WarnerMedia merged with Discovery, Inc. to form Warner Bros. Discovery earlier that year, the studio delayed the film to December 25, 2023, to help spread out the marketing and distribution costs for its feature films.^[105] This pushed the film's release to after the planned release of *The Flash*, which meant there was potential for Keaton's version of Batman to appear in the film instead of Affleck's.^[106] In October, *The Hollywood Reporter* reported that Keaton's cameo had potentially been cut.^[107] Around that time, Warner Bros. film chairs Michael De Luca and Pamela Abdy told Wan to reduce the budget for reshoots, as the film's budget had reached \$205 million during production.^[108] By mid-November, Safran had been "fixing" the film, after he had become the co-CEO of the newly formed DC Studios with James Gunn,^[109] who had provided notes on the film by the following month.^[110] Momoa said in January 2023 that he had shot scenes with a couple of actors as Batman, but was unsure which would be included in the final cut.^[111]

In April 2023, the film's release date was moved up five days earlier to December 20, 2023.^[112] Between mid-2022 and the start of 2023, two sets of reshoots took place following several test screenings, with De Luca and Abdy involved in editing the film. After further test screenings in early 2023, Gunn then consulted on the film.^[113] Those reshoots concluded right before the 2023 Writers Guild of America strike began that May,^[7] and the studios approached a third set of reshoots, which increased the film's budget, to occur in New Zealand over five days in mid-June with Momoa and Wilson, and was completed in four days. By then, both Affleck and Keaton were excluded from the latest cut of the film due to Gunn and Safran's plans to reboot the DCEU into their new franchise the DC Universe (DCU),^[113] neither actor appeared in the final version of the film.^[114] Following the reshoots, the film's budget ultimately reached \$215 million.^[7] Around that time, Wan said he had to make some adjustments during production as it had been challenging to keep track of the different versions of the DCEU while remaining mindful of other plans for the franchise, but was fortunate that the *Aquaman* films were "far removed" from the rest of the DCEU films and characters.^[59] In September, Wan said the film would not be connected to any previous DCEU films as he was uncertain if it was going to be released before or after *The Flash*.^[42] He explained that he had directed a relatively small amount of additional photography, which he described as a routine part of the

production process, due to some actors being unavailable during some parts of principal photography.^[42] Lundgren later said that the studio decided to reshoot much of the footage to rebuild it with a slightly different storyline, resulting in his and Heard's roles being reduced.^{[19][73]}

In October 2023, the film's release was delayed by two days to December 22, 2023.^[115] The following month, Warner Bros. signed a new multi-year co-financing deal with Domain Capital for their theatrical films, including *The Lost Kingdom*, through that company's \$700 million fund for media and entertainment, Domain Entertainment.^{[3][4]} Kirk Morri returned as the editor from the first film,^{[37][75]} and Nick Davis served as the visual effects supervisor, having previously worked on *The Dark Knight* (2008).^[75] Nearly each frame in the film featured visual effects,^{[101][113]} which were provided by Cinesite, DNEG, Industrial Light & Magic (ILM), Moving Picture Company (MPC), Scanline VFX,^[116] and Rodeo FX.^[117]

Music

Rupert Gregson-Williams revealed in August 2021 that he was returning to compose the score for the sequel after doing so for the first film and DC's *Wonder Woman* (2017).^[118] The song "Deep End" was performed by X Ambassadors and released as a single on November 17, 2023.^[119] The soundtrack album for Gregson-Williams' score was released by WaterTower Music on December 22.^[120]

Marketing

Wan and Wilson teased plans for the film in a panel at the virtual DC FanDome event in August 2020.^[54] A year later, at DC FanDome 2021, concept art and behind-the-scenes footage from filming were revealed.^[21] In February 2022, the first footage from the film was released as part of a teaser for Warner Bros.' 2022 slate of DC films, which also included *The Batman*, *Black Adam*, and *The Flash* (before *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* and *The Flash* were delayed to 2023 the following month).^{[121][99]} Wan promoted the film at Warner Bros.' CinemaCon panel in April 2022, showing a recorded message of Momoa as well as some brief footage from the film.^[122] He then revealed more concept art for the film when its release date was delayed in August.^[106] The first trailer was showcased during Warner Bros.' CinemaCon panel in April 2023, showing the "bromance" between Arthur and Orm among other footage.^[123] Steve Weintraub at *Collider* said the footage looked "absolutely massive in scale" and featured several action sequences.^[22] The first theatrical trailer was released on September 14, 2023.^[124] The cast were not able to participate in marketing during the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike,^[7] until the strike's conclusion in November.^[1] IWC Schaffhausen, in collaboration with Warner Bros. Pictures, released an Aquatimer Perpetual Calendar Digital Date-Month diving watch, inspired by the watches worn by Abdul-Mateen II and Park in the film.^[76]

Release

Theatrical

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom premiered on December 19, 2023, at a fan event screening at the Grove at Farmers Market in Los Angeles.^{[125][126][127]} This was noted by Borys Kit of *The Hollywood Reporter* for not having a red carpet event and after party, with Wan and Momoa attending after a series of blue carpet photo calls and small-scale fan events in London, Beijing, and Los Angeles.^[125] The film was released in China on December 20,^[1] and in the United States on December 22,^[115] in IMAX, 3D, 4DX, and

ScreenX, among other premium large formats (PLFs).^{[127][128]} It was originally set for release on December 16, 2022,^[52] but was moved to March 17, 2023, when Warner Bros. adjusted its release schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the workload of visual effects vendors.^[99] It was then moved to December 25, 2023, when Warner Bros. Discovery was trying to spread out marketing and distribution costs,^[105] before moving forward to December 20,^[112] and then pushed back by two days to December 22.^[115]

Home media

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom was released by Warner Bros. Home Entertainment on digital download on January 23, 2024,^[43] on Warner Bros.' streaming service Max on February 27,^[129] and on Ultra HD Blu-ray, Blu-ray, and DVD on March 12. It includes behind-the-scenes featurettes, as well as the special feature "Atlantean Blood is Thicker Than Water" which explores Aquaman and Orm's dynamic on both Blu-ray versions, and the original motion comic *Aquaman: Through Fire and Water* on premium digital versions.^[43] According to Nielsen Media Research, which measures the viewership of media on streaming services, *The Lost Kingdom* was the most-watched film on streaming upon its debut for the week of February 26 – March 3, 2024, with a total of 685 million minutes watched.^[130]

Reception

Box office

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom grossed \$124.5 million in the United States and Canada, and \$309.9 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$434.4 million.^{[8][9]} It is the highest-grossing DCEU film since the first *Aquaman* film, but grossed less than half of that film's box office revenue.^[131] Aidan Kelly of *Collider* estimated that the film needed to earn \$305–355 million worldwide to break even,^[132] while *Film*'s Hannah Shaw-Williams thought it was unlikely that the film would break even during its theatrical run, even after surpassing a worldwide gross of \$400 million.^[133] Jill Goldsmith at *Deadline Hollywood* noted that the revenue of Warner Bros.' theatrical films released in the fourth quarter were higher on most releases, including *The Lost Kingdom*, although this was lower than box office analysts had predicted despite lowered projections.^[134]

In the United States and Canada, *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* was released alongside *Migration*, *Anyone but You*, and *The Iron Claw*, and was projected to gross around \$40 million in its four-day opening weekend.^[127] The film earned \$13.7 million on its first day, including \$4.5 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to have a traditional opening weekend of \$27.7 million, the fourth-lowest of the DCEU, and the second-lowest among those films unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It then made \$10.6 million on Christmas Day, for a four-day total of \$38.3 million.^{[135][6]} In its second weekend the film made \$19.5 million, a drop of 30%, finishing second at the box office behind *Wonka*.^[136] The film earned \$10.6 million and \$5.3 million in the following two weekends, finishing in third and sixth, respectively.^{[137][138]}

Critical response

The
film



The performances of Jason Momoa (left) and Patrick Wilson (right) received praise from critics^{[139][140]}

received negative reviews from critics.^{[141][142]} On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 34% of 203 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 4.9/10. The website's consensus reads: "Jason Momoa remains a capable and committed leading man, but even DC diehards may feel that *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* sticks to familiar waters."^[143] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 42 out of 100, based on 43 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.^[144] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "B" on an A+ to F scale, tied with *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *The Flash* for the lowest of the DCEU, while PostTrak reported 69% of filmgoers gave it a positive score, with 50% saying they would definitely recommend the film.^[135]

Initial reviews, described as largely negative, praised the chemistry between Momoa and Wilson, despite the overall disappointment with the film's content and execution.^{[139][140]} Both Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* and *The Independent*'s Claire Loughrey provided a one-star rating for the film. Bradshaw compared the humor to Taika Waititi's Marvel films *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022) and felt Aquaman's role as a father was a derivative trope "used as a tired relatability short-cut by Hollywood". He also lamented Randall Park's role in the film, feeling it was "entirely wasted", and expressed ambivalent feelings about the cast performances. Meanwhile, Loughrey labelled the film as being an "entry in the rogues' gallery of brainless franchise films", opining that Wan might have incorporated elements from his planned project *The Trench* into the project. She was surprised the film's theme was about climate change and thought Mera's role was "faux-feminist" and narratively contrived, noting Amber Heard's legal controversies. Furthermore, she also called the set pieces "derivative" and thought the humor negatively impacted the film's emotional moments.^{[145][146]} Giving a two-star review, writer Nicholas Barber of the BBC began by expressing his views that *Aquaman*'s box office revenue was the primary reason for this film's existence. However, he praised the performances of Wilson and Abdul-Mateen II while noting that Momoa seems to have been miscast as "[h]e's too earthy to be the king of the sea." Barber also called the relationship between Arthur and Orm "clichéd," lamented at the complete waste of Kidman's talent, and opined that while most of Heard's scenes had been edited out, the film's "unrelated plot" was such that her absence did not matter much. Ultimately, he concluded that the film never "attempts anything original or honest" and criticized its "brutal" editing for "rush[ing] through every potentially major event in a blur of montages and voiceovers".^[147] David Fear of *Rolling Stone* felt it functioned as a standalone film and was separate from the DCEU, but disliked the tone and visual effects. Fear also called the storytelling "curiously thin" and was mixed on its commentary regarding climate change, but appreciated Momoa's performance and thought the film adequately concluded the DCEU.^[148] CNN's Brian Lowry negatively compared it to *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020) and felt the lack of a new antagonist was to its detriment,

calling David Kane a "one-note villain". He enjoyed Momoa's performance and thought it contributed to the film's "fun", but also was not interested in Curry and Orm's relationship as it "wades through too many clunky moments to reach the few good ones".^[149] Writing for the *Associated Press*, Mark Kennedy thought the film's plot to be derivative from other films – such as *The Matrix* (1999), *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *Star Wars* – and disliked references to other films. Nevertheless, Kennedy considered Momoa's performance to be "holding it all together," and summed up the film as attempting to raise the stakes by having a higher production budget.^[150]

Wan's direction was commended by Alissa Wilkinson in *The New York Times* and Phil Owen in *GameSpot*, with Wilkinson crediting him with creating a film "beyond the paint-by-numbers superhero movies we've been watching for decades now". Wilkinson also enjoyed the political commentary, as she felt certain elements were metaphors to authoritarianism and fascism. She primarily enjoyed Wilson's performance and Orm's character development compared to *Aquaman*, but felt certain plot elements and the humor became repetitive and boring. Owen commended the production values but felt it lacked "substance" and was "empty-headed", going on to give the film an 8 out of 10.^{[151][152]} *The A.V. Club*'s Matthew Jackson gave it a B grade, enthusiastically enjoying the film's depiction of Orm and Arthur's relationship, calling that "formula ... absolute gold, both on a set piece and a character level". However, Jackson opined the narrative contained too much and disliked the plotting, but still felt it could effectively tell a cohesive narrative and enjoyed his overall viewing experience.^[153] Michael Ordoña of the *Los Angeles Times* felt it highlighted climate change in an "earnest if clumsy fashion" and expressed minor complaints with the absence of physics during CGI-based action sequences underwater. Ordoña enjoyed the film's "buddy cop movie" tone and noted how it focused on portraying Arthur interacting with his family rather than Mera. He commended the characterization of Arthur and Orm, complimenting the former as the "most alive character in the DCEU", and enjoyed the short runtime.^[154] Meanwhile, Bob Strauss from the *San Francisco Chronicle* considered it to be a decent conclusion for the DCEU, and added that the story and runtime had been concise and efficient, agreeing with Ordoña's sentiments. He mostly enjoyed the film's design and visual effects, but felt it was similar to Zack Snyder's then-released film *Rebel Moon* (2023). He considered the acting effective in conveying the sensation of being underwater, and highlighted Arthur and Orm's relationship, but disliked the delivery of exposition.^[155]

Accolades

At the 49th People's Choice Awards, Momoa was nominated for the Action Movie Star of the Year.^[156] The film was nominated for Outstanding Animated Character in a Photoreal Feature at the 22nd Visual Effects Society Awards for the character T.O.P.O. the Octopus.^[157]

Future

In December 2022, *The Hollywood Reporter* reported that Warner Bros. was considering ending the *Aquaman* film series and recasting Momoa as the character Lobo following *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*.^[158] In January 2023, Momoa stated that he would "always be Aquaman", but felt that he could also portray other characters.^[159] Later that month, DC Studios co-CEOs Gunn and Safran said there was potential for Momoa to reprise his role in the DCU, but a decision on Aquaman had not been made. No actor would be playing multiple characters, so if they did cast Momoa as Lobo he would not portray Aquaman in the DCU. Gunn confirmed that *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, alongside *The Flash*, would

lead into the DCU's first film *Superman* (2025).^[160] Safran expressed interest in continuing to work with Momoa, either within the world of Aquaman or finding another character. He explained that they set a high bar for casting, and felt that Momoa's Aquaman was a perfect casting.^[12]

In September 2023, Gunn clarified that any DC media released before the first projects for the DCU in 2024 would not be canon to that franchise, leading commentators to question the possibility of a potential continuation moving forward.^{[161][162]} Wan said *The Lost Kingdom* would help set up a sequel and expressed interest in directing it after a long break.^[42] The following month, *Variety* reported that none of the main cast members from Zack Snyder's DCEU films would reprise their roles in the DCU, including Momoa as Aquaman. However, Momoa had reportedly been in talks to portray Lobo in either *Superman* or a solo film for the character.^[7] Ahead of *The Lost Kingdom*'s release in December 2023, Momoa said it could be his final performance as Aquaman, explaining that if the film was received well by audiences that a sequel could be possible, but he felt it was "not looking too good" for him reprising the role.^[126] The actor said he had a lot of ideas for the character, and indicated that a younger character, such as Aquaman's son Arthur Jr., could be featured in a potential third *Aquaman* film. He also said that he would not be replaced with a different actor as Aquaman.^[163] Safran said at that time that Momoa would "always have a home at DC" and that "we'll see what happens with him beyond" this film.^[126]

See also

- List of underwater science fiction works

Notes

- As depicted in *Aquaman* (2018)

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 - *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (<https://www.warnerbros.com/movies/aquaman-and-lost-kingdom>) at [WarnerBros.com](#)
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