

Smile (2022 film)

Smile is a 2022 American psychological supernatural horror film written and directed by Parker Finn in his feature directorial debut. Based on Finn's short film *Laura Hasn't Slept* (2020), it stars Sosie Bacon as a therapist who witnesses the bizarre suicide of a patient, then goes through increasingly disturbing and daunting experiences that lead her to believe she is experiencing something supernatural. It also stars Jessie T. Usher, Kyle Gallner, Kal Penn, and Rob Morgan, as well as Caitlin Stasey reprising her role from *Laura Hasn't Slept*.

A feature adaptation of Finn's short was announced in June 2020, and the cast was added in October 2021. Principal photography began that month in New Jersey and ended in November. Originally set for release on the streaming service Paramount+, distributor Paramount Pictures opted to release the film theatrically after positive test screenings.

Smile premiered at Fantastic Fest on September 22, 2022, and was released in the United States on September 30. The film received generally positive reviews from critics and grossed \$217.4 million worldwide on a budget of \$17 million. An untitled sequel is in production and scheduled to be released on October 18, 2024, with Gallner set to reprise his role.

Plot

At a psychiatric ward, therapist Rose Cotter meets graduate student Laura Weaver,^[a] who explains that she recently witnessed her professor kill himself. Laura claims she is being terrorized by an invisible entity which appears as various smiling people and has foretold her death. She begins screaming and panicking, prompting Rose to call for help; Laura suddenly becomes unnaturally calm and smiles, then fatally slits her own throat, terrifying Rose.

The next day, a patient named Carl smiles like Laura did and shouts to Rose that she is going to die. Rose calls for nurses to restrain Carl, only to realize Carl had been asleep the entire time. Concerned for Rose's mental well-being, her supervisor Dr. Morgan Desai orders Rose to take a week off work. Rose's hallucinations continue, leading those around her to believe she may be a danger to herself. Rose visits her former

Smile



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Parker Finn</u>
Written by	<u>Parker Finn</u>
Based on	<i><u>Laura Hasn't Slept</u></i> by <u>Parker Finn</u>
Produced by	<u>Marty Bowen</u> <u>Wyck Godfrey</u> <u>Isaac Klausner</u> <u>Robert Salerno</u>
Starring	<u>Sosie Bacon</u> <u>Jessie T. Usher</u> <u>Kyle Gallner</u> <u>Kal Penn</u> <u>Rob Morgan</u>
Cinematography	<u>Charlie Sarroff</u>
Edited by	<u>Elliot Greenberg</u>
Music by	<u>Cristobal Tapia de Veer</u>
Production companies	<u>Paramount Players</u> <u>Temple Hill</u>

therapist, Dr. Madeline Northcott, who suggests that Rose's problems stem from her childhood, in which she witnessed the overdose death of her abusive and mentally ill mother.

Later, Rose attends a birthday party for her nephew, the son of her older sister, Holly. When he unwraps her present, he finds Rose's dead cat, which has somehow replaced the actual present, horrifying everyone. Rose has a public breakdown and sees a guest smiling unnaturally at her, causing her to fall into a glass coffee table and injure herself. This convinces Rose that she has fallen victim to a curse, although her fiancé Trevor believes she has gone crazy.

Upon learning that Laura's professor was smiling at her before his death, Rose visits the professor's widow, Victoria, and learns that he had also witnessed a suicide shortly before his own. Rose asks her ex-boyfriend Joel, a police detective, to go through old police records. They find several cases of people who witnessed someone commit suicide while smiling at them before doing the same to themselves within a week.

Rose tries to patch things up with Trevor but becomes enraged after realizing he has called Madeline to provide psychological intervention without asking Rose first. Upset, she leaves to speak with Holly, who also dismisses Rose's belief in a curse. Holly compares Rose's behavior to their late mother, and Rose accuses Holly of abandoning her before their mother's death.

Rose and Joel discover the sole exception in the chain of suicides: convicted murderer Robert Talley. Rose and Joel visit him in jail, where he claims that the entity feeds on trauma, and that the only way to escape it is to brutally kill someone else in front of a witness to traumatize them, passing the curse to the witness. Rose angrily rejects this idea. The entity appears at her home in Madeline's form and taunts her. Rose drives to her hospital with a knife and murders Carl in front of Morgan, but it is revealed to be a hallucination. Rose wakes up in her car to find Morgan standing outside. He notices the knife, but she speeds away, prompting him to alert the police.

Rose drives to her abandoned family home, realizing that she cannot pass on the entity's curse if she dies alone. The entity appears as Rose's mother, and it is revealed that Rose chose not to call for help for her mother because of her abusive behavior. The entity attacks Rose, and a fire starts in the struggle, seemingly killing the entity. Rose flees the house and returns to Joel's apartment. Joel smiles at Rose, who realizes this is another hallucination.

In reality, Joel has tracked Rose's phone to her old house and finds her outside. Rose panics and runs back inside, where the entity reveals its true form – a skinless, semi-humanoid monstrosity with multiple sets of malformed jaws nesting within an enormous, smiling mouth. The sight of the entity's visage causes Rose to fall into a trance, and the entity possesses her by forcing itself inside her body through her mouth. Joel breaks down the front door and sees a smiling Rose set herself on fire, passing the curse onto him.

	<u>Entertainment</u>
Distributed by	<u>Paramount Pictures</u>
Release dates	September 22, 2022 (<u>Fantastic Fest</u>) September 30, 2022 (United States)
Running time	115 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$17 million ^[2]
Box office	\$217.4 million ^{[3][4]}

Cast

- Sosie Bacon as Rose Cotter
- Kyle Gallner as Joel

- [Jessie T. Usher](#) as Trevor
- [Robin Weigert](#) as Dr. Madeline Northcott
- [Caitlin Stasey](#) as Laura Weaver
- [Kal Penn](#) as Dr. Morgan Desai
- [Rob Morgan](#) as Robert Talley
- [Gillian Zinser](#) as Holly
- [Judy Reyes](#) as Victoria Muñoz
- [Jack Sochet](#) as Carl Renken
- [Nick Arapoglou](#) as Greg
- [Perry Strong](#) as Detective Buckley
- [Dora Kiss](#) as Mom
- [Sara Kapner](#) as Stephanie
- [Kevin Keppy](#) as Nightmare Mom
- [Marti Matulis](#) as The Monstrosity

Production

Development and casting

In June 2020, [Parker Finn](#) was signed on by [Paramount Pictures](#) to write and direct a feature-length adaptation of his own short film *Laura Hasn't Slept*, which saw a desperate young woman seeking the help of her therapist to rid herself of a recurring nightmare. In March of that year, the short film had won the Special Jury Recognition Prize for [South by Southwest's](#) Midnight Short category.^[5]

In September 2021, the film was announced under the title *Something's Wrong with Rose* with [Sosie Bacon](#) cast as the titular character.^[6] The following month, [Jessie T. Usher](#), [Kyle Gallner](#), [Rob Morgan](#), [Kal Penn](#), [Judy Reyes](#), [Gillian Zinser](#), and [Caitlin Stasey](#) joined the cast.^[7]

Filming

[Principal photography](#) began on October 11, 2021, in [New Jersey](#), including in the city of [Hoboken](#),^{[6][8]} and [wrapped](#) on November 24, 2021.^[9] Some filming locations included the [Murphy Varnish Lofts](#), [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#) in [Newark](#) and [Lewis Morris Park](#) in [Morristown](#).^[10]

[Editing](#) and [post-production](#) were completed in May 2022.^[9] Visual effects was done by the-Artery and was supervised by Yuval Levy and Vico Sharabani, when the film was simply retitled *Smile*.^[11] The film's score was composed by [Cristobal Tapia de Veer](#) and featured an obscure musical instrument called the [daxophone](#) as the lead instrument.^{[12][13]} For practical effects, Finn recruited Alec Gillis and [Tom Woodruff Jr.](#) of [Amalgamated Dynamics](#), who he described as a major influence in wanting to be a horror filmmaker for their work in films such as *Aliens*.^[14]

Release

Theatrical

Smile had its world premiere at Fantastic Fest on September 22, 2022,^[15] followed by screenings at Beyond Fest on September 27.^[16] It was released in the United States on September 30, 2022, by Paramount Pictures.^[17] Paramount Pictures President and CEO Brian Robbins said that *Smile* was originally slated for a streaming-only release on Paramount+, but the studio eventually decided to release the film theatrically because of strong results from test screenings.^{[18][19]}

Home media

The film was released for VOD platforms including Paramount+ on November 15, 2022,^[20] with a DVD, Blu-ray, and 4K UHD set released on December 13, 2022.^[21]

Marketing

The trailer and poster were released on June 22, 2022. Brad Miska of *Bloody Disgusting* described the footage as "pretty generic", but said it stood out due to its similarities to *Ringu* and *The Ring*.^[22] Shania Russell at *Film* compared the film to *The Ring*, *It Follows* and *Truth or Dare* and wrote, "It's all very familiar and probably not too hard to imagine how the movie will progress, but the scares will make or break the experience, and based on the trailer, *Smile* is more than promising."^[23] All-in-all, Paramount spent an estimated \$50 million promoting the film.^[24]

During several Major League Baseball games the weekend before the film's release, a viral marketing stunt occurred, as the studio's marketing team purchased seats behind home plate, with actors smiling maniacally into the camera for the pitcher-batter shot for extended periods of time. Some of the actors wore shirts with the name and logo of the film on the front.^{[25][26]}

Reception

Box office

Smile grossed \$105.9 million in the United States and Canada, and \$111.5 million in other territories, for a total worldwide gross of \$217.4 million.^{[3][4]} *Deadline Hollywood* calculated the film's net profit as \$101 million, accounting for production budgets, marketing, talent participations, and other costs; box office grosses and home media revenues placed it tenth on their list of 2022's "Most Valuable Blockbusters".^[24]

In the United States and Canada, *Smile* was released alongside *Bros*, and was projected to gross \$16–20 million from 3,645 theaters in its opening weekend.^[2] The film made \$8.2 million on its first day, including \$2 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to debut to \$22.6 million, topping the box office and slightly overperforming its projections, while being the biggest debut of September 2022.^{[27][28]} The film made \$18.5 million in its sophomore weekend, remaining atop the box office. The 18% second weekend drop was the second-smallest ever for a horror film behind *Get Out*'s 15% in February 2017, and marked the best non-holiday hold of the pandemic era.^[29] Although it was dethroned by newcomer *Halloween Ends* in its third weekend the film continued to hold well, making \$12.6 million.^[30] On November 9, 2022, it became only the third R-rated film released in the pandemic era to gross \$100 million domestically, as well as becoming the highest-grossing R-rated horror film worldwide during the pandemic.

Critical response

On the review aggregator website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film holds an approval rating of 79% based on 192 reviews, and an average rating of 6.6/10. The site's critical consensus reads: "Deeply creepy visuals and a standout Sosie Bacon further elevate *Smile*'s unsettling exploration of trauma, adding up to the rare feature that satisfyingly expands on a short."^[31] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a weighted average score of 68 out of 100, based on 32 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[32] Audiences surveyed by [CinemaScore](#) gave the film an average grade of "B−" on an A+ to F scale, while those polled at [PostTrak](#) gave it an overall 69% positive score, with 53% saying they would definitely recommend it.^[27]

Marisa Mirabal of [IndieWire](#) gave the film a grade of B−, noting its plot's similarities to films such as *It Follows*, *The Ring*, *Oculus* and *Final Destination*. She wrote: "*Smile* navigates unhealed trauma through a supernatural lens and mischievous juxtaposition, despite feeling like a shadow of other stories", and added that it "delivers a captivating and claustrophobic mental hellscape that will cause one to both grimace and grin."^[33] Tasha Robinson of [Polygon](#) wrote: "*Smile* is often a gimmicky, even corny horror movie, packed with so many jump-scares that the sheer pile-on borders on laughable... But no matter how excessively the legitimate scares pile up, they're startling and convincing. The editing and music are impressively tuned for maximum impact whenever the slow-burning tension resolves with an abrupt, ugly surprise. All of which makes *Smile* an efficient ride, if an unusually unrelenting one."^[34]

Katie Rife of [RogerEbert.com](#) gave the film 2.5 out of 4 stars, writing: "In padding out the concept from an 11-minute short into a nearly two-hour movie, *Smile* leans too heavily not only on formulaic mystery plotting, but also on horror themes and imagery lifted from popular hits like *The Ring* and *It Follows*."^[35] Kevin Maher of [The Times](#) wrote: "There are some nice jump scares and Bacon is charismatic but it's achingly derivative and dull", and gave the film 2 out of 5 stars.^[36] Jeffrey M. Anderson of [Common Sense Media](#) also gave the film 2 out of 5 stars, writing: "The image of a creepy, sinister smile is so primal and so chilling that it might have inspired something truly penetrating, but, sadly, this horror movie is content to fall back on noisy jump scares."^[37]

Accolades

At the [2023 MTV Movie & TV Awards](#), *Smile* was nominated for [Best Movie](#) and [Most Frightened Performance](#) (Bacon).^[38] At the [51st Saturn Awards](#), the film was nominated [Best Horror Film](#).^[39]

Related media

Prequel short film

Laura Hasn't Slept was written and directed by [Parker Finn](#) in 2019 and later debuted at South by Southwest in 2020. The positive reception at the film festival resulted in Paramount Pictures commissioning the filmmaker for a feature film adaptation,^[40] though it was later revealed that the movie is a continuation of the original story.^{[41][42][43]}

The premise follows Laura as she recounts a series of horrific dreams and hallucinations where she is being pursued by a smiling man to her therapist. As she does so, she begins to realize that she is not where she thinks she is, that she is again experiencing an extra-sensory episode, and that the counselor she is confiding in is actually the entity that has been tormenting her.^[40] While the ending of the short film seems to indicate

that the character dies, Laura later appears in *Smile* where she seeks the help of Dr. Rose Cotter; indicating that the resolution to *Laura Hasn't Slept* was a continued hallucination. The character ultimately sets in motion the events of the full-length film.^{[41][42][43]}

The short movie later received a wide release as a bonus feature on the home video media release of *Smile*; Paramount marketed the feature as a "*Smile* original short film".^[44] Finn additionally called the short "the origin" of *Smile*.^{[41][45]}

Sequel

Following the release of *Smile*, during interviews between November and December 2022, writer and director Parker Finn stated that he had intentionally left portions of the first movie ambiguous, with various plotlines unresolved, while expressing interest in exploring those details in a potential sequel film.^[19] The filmmaker stated that while additional installments may explore the backstory of the entity, he would like to keep its mysterious nature intact.^[43] He noted that a follow-up movie would be notably different from the first, stating that he believed "there is still a lot of interesting stuff to explore in the world of *Smile*. ... I'd want to make sure that there's a new, exciting, fresh way into it that the audience isn't anticipating. I also want to find some new ways to scare them and unnerve them."^{[19][43][46]}

In April 2023, Paramount Pictures officially announced at CinemaCon 2023 that a sequel had been green-lit and was in pre-production, with Parker Finn once again serving as writer and director.^[47] The untitled sequel is scheduled to be released on October 18, 2024. In December 2023, Naomi Scott was cast in the leading role.^[48] In January 2024, Lukas Gage was added to the cast of the sequel.^[49] Kyle Gallner will reprise his role as Joel with Rosemarie DeWitt also joining.^[50]

Notes

- a. Laura is the protagonist of the related short film *Laura Hasn't Slept* (2020).

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.smile.movie/>) 
 - *Smile* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15474916/>) at IMDb
 - *Smile* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/smile_2022) at Rotten Tomatoes
 - *Smile* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v732405>) at AllMovie
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