

Beau Is Afraid

Beau Is Afraid is a 2023 American surrealist tragicomedy horror film written, directed, and co-produced by Ari Aster.^{[5][6]} The film stars Joaquin Phoenix as the title character, and also includes a supporting ensemble cast consisting of Patti LuPone, Nathan Lane, Amy Ryan, Kylie Rogers, Parker Posey, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Hayley Squires, Michael Gandolfini, Zoe Lister-Jones, Armen Nahapetian, and Richard Kind. Its plot follows the mild-mannered but paranoia-ridden Beau as he embarks on a surreal odyssey to get home to his mother's funeral, realizing his greatest fears along the way.

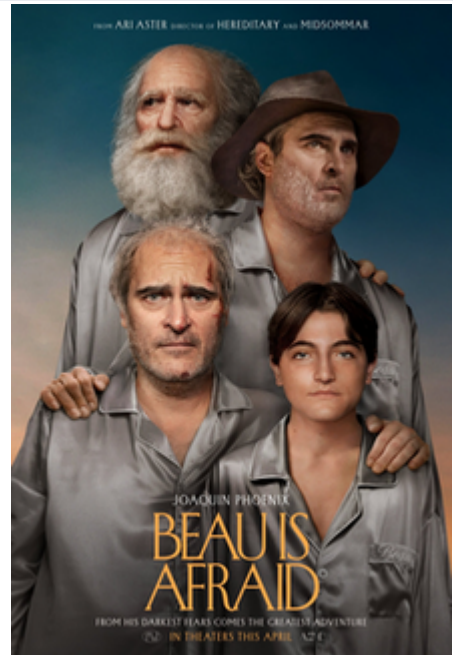
Distributed by A24, *Beau Is Afraid* premiered at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema on April 1, 2023, and began a limited theatrical release in the United States on April 14, 2023, before a wide release the following week. The film received generally positive reviews from critics but was a box-office bomb, grossing only \$11 million.^[7] Phoenix received a Golden Globe nomination for his performance.^[8]

Plot

Beau Wassermann is the son of a famous and wealthy businesswoman, Mona, who is responsible for building a large conglomerate empire. He grows up without a father, who his mother claims died the night Beau was conceived due to a hereditary heart murmur during orgasm; he also struggles with a recurring dream in which he watches from a bathtub as an identical twin demands to know what really happened, to which she locks him in the attic. While on a cruise trip with his mother, a teenage Beau meets and falls in love with a girl named Elaine. The two kiss and promise to remain virgins until they meet again.

Now independent and middle-aged, Beau suffers from extreme anxiety and lives alone in a crime-ridden city. He prepares for a flight to see his mother for the anniversary of his father's death, but misses his plane after his keys and luggage are stolen by a stranger at his door. Beau calls his mother to explain the situation, but she dismisses him. After having been locked out by deranged homeless people for the night, he attempts to call his mother again, only to have it answered by a UPS driver who finds an unidentified body that was decapitated by a falling chandelier, leading Beau to

Beau Is Afraid



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Ari Aster</u>
Written by	<u>Ari Aster</u>
Produced by	<u>Lars Knudsen</u> <u>Ari Aster</u>
Starring	<u>Joaquin Phoenix</u> <u>Nathan Lane</u> <u>Amy Ryan</u> <u>Stephen McKinley Henderson</u> <u>Hayley Squires</u> <u>Denis Ménochet</u> <u>Kylie Rogers</u> <u>Parker Posey</u> <u>Patti LuPone</u>
Cinematography	<u>Pawel Pogorzelski</u>

believe his mother is dead. After confrontations with an intruder at home, then by a police officer on the street, Beau is hit by a food truck and stabbed to near-death by a serial killer.

Beau wakes up wounded two days later in the house of a married couple, Grace and Roger, who live with their angsty daughter Toni, and care for an unstable veteran named Jeeves, who was their late son's battle buddy until he was killed in action. Beau calls Mona's attorney, Dr. Cohen, who informs him that despite the Jewish custom to lay the body to rest as soon as possible, her last wish was not to be buried until he was present. Roger promises to take Beau to his mother's estate as soon as possible but insists Beau rest until he is healed. On the day of Beau's release, Toni, who has grown to resent Beau for seemingly replacing her deceased brother, attempts to force him to drink a can of paint, before committing suicide by doing it herself. Grace walks in on Beau standing over Toni's body and violently blames him for her death. As Beau flees into the woods, Grace sends Jeeves after him.

Lost in the wilderness, Beau comes upon a group of traveling theater actors named "The Orphans of the Forest". He is invited to their rehearsal and becomes entranced by the play, imagining himself as the protagonist, who spends his entire life looking for his family after they are separated by a flood. A man approaches Beau and informs him that he knew his father, who he says is still alive. The troupe is ambushed by Jeeves, who slaughters several actors. Beau flees deeper into the woods; he is knocked unconscious when Jeeves triggers his ankle monitor, placed on him by Roger.

Beau hitchhikes the rest of the way to his mother's estate, only to find that he has just missed her funeral. Beau is awakened from a nap when a woman arrives late for the service, and realizes it is Elaine. They reconnect before having sex. Beau is terrified that he is going to die upon climaxing but is relieved when he survives. Elaine, however, dies mid-orgasm, her body frozen stiff. Mona then appears from the shadows and reveals that she has been alive and spying on him all along his journey. She guilt-trips Beau for supposedly not loving her enough and plays audio recordings of his therapy sessions. When Beau demands to know the truth about his father, Mona takes him to the attic, where Beau discovers he has a twin brother locked in the attic and that his father is actually a giant penis-shaped monster. At that moment, Jeeves breaks into the house and is killed by the monster. Beau begs his mother for forgiveness, but Mona further berates him, ultimately telling him that she hates him. In response, an enraged Beau briefly attempts to strangle her before she collapses.

In shock, Beau leaves the estate on a motorboat. After entering a cave, the boat's motor begins to stall, and he suddenly finds himself in a crowded arena. He is put on trial for perceived slights against his mother, with Mona and Dr. Cohen acting as prosecutors; a cheap lawyer attempts to defend Beau but is ultimately thrown to his death by Mona's employees. With his feet glued to the boat, Beau tries to fend for himself and

Edited by	Lucian Johnston
Music by	<u>Bobby Krlic</u>
Production companies	<u>A24</u> <u>Access</u> <u>Entertainment</u> <u>IPR.VC</u> MW Industries Square Peg
Distributed by	A24
Release dates	April 1, 2023 (<u>Alamo</u> <u>Drafthouse</u> <u>Cinema</u>) April 14, 2023 (United States)
Running time	179 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$35 million ^[2]
Box office	\$11.5 million ^{[3][4]}

appeal to his mother, but she does not respond. Realizing he is completely hopeless in his situation, he decides to accept his fate. The motor explodes, capsizing the boat and drowning Beau. The credits roll as the crowd silently leaves the arena along with Dr. Cohen and Mona, the latter of whom sobs uncontrollably.

Cast

- [Joaquin Phoenix](#) as Beau Wassermann^[9]
 - [Armen Nahapetian](#) as young Beau^[9]
- [Patti LuPone](#) as Mona Wassermann^[9]
 - [Zoe Lister-Jones](#) as young Mona ^[9]
- [Amy Ryan](#) as Grace^[9]
- [Nathan Lane](#) as Roger^[9]
- [Kylie Rogers](#) as Toni^[9]
- [Denis Ménochet](#) as Jeeves^[9]
- [Parker Posey](#) as Elaine Bray^[9]
 - [Julia Antonelli](#) as young Elaine^[9]
- [Stephen McKinley Henderson](#) as the therapist^[9]
- [Richard Kind](#) as Dr. Cohen^[9]
- [Hayley Squires](#) as Penelope^[9]
- [Julian Richings](#) as Strange Man^[9]
- [Bill Hader](#) as UPS Guy^[9]
- [Michael Esper](#) as Officer Johnson
- [Michael Gandolfini](#), [Théodore Pellerin](#) and [Mike Taylor](#) as Beau's sons^[9]

Alicia Rosario appears as Toni's friend Liz. [Patrick Kwok-Choon](#), [Maev Beaty](#), and [Arthur Holden](#) appear as members of the forest theater troupe. [David Mamet](#) has a vocal cameo as a rabbi.

Production

Development

The film had been in development by [Ari Aster](#) for some time, with a 2011 short film entitled *Beau*, that would later serve as the basis for a sequence in the feature film, and a 2014 draft of the script that circulated on the internet.^[10] Aster has described the film in many ways, including initially as a "nightmare comedy,"^[11] "a Jewish *Lord of the Rings*, but [Beau's] just going to his mom's house," and as "if you pumped a 10-year-old full of [Zoloft](#), and [had] him get your groceries."^[12]

Filming

In February 2021, [A24](#) announced the film, then titled *Disappointment Blvd.*,^[a] with [Joaquin Phoenix](#) on board to star in the leading role.^[14] The film's [ensemble cast](#) was announced in June and July.^{[15][16]}

Co-star [Stephen McKinley Henderson](#) described Aster and Phoenix as "so simpatico ... their way of working together was like they were really old friends. They could get upset and make up in the span of seconds, it seemed. But the work was always the better for it."^[17] During a Q&A session on April 1, 2023

with actress [Emma Stone](#), Aster recounted an incident in which, during the shooting of a "very intense" scene involving Phoenix's co-star [Patti LuPone](#), Phoenix suddenly collapsed and lost consciousness as a result of the physical intensity of his stunts, which included breaking through glass. Initially annoyed because "it was a really good take", Aster realized it was serious as "[Phoenix] was letting people touch him and people were tending to him and he was allowing it".^[18]

[Principal photography](#) began on June 28, 2021, and concluded that October.^{[19][20]} The film was shot in [Downtown Montreal](#), and [Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville](#), an off-island suburb of [Montreal](#) in [Quebec](#), with cinematographer [Pawel Pogorzelski](#) and production designer [Fiona Crombie](#).^{[21][20]} Animation for the film was done by [Cristobal León & Joaquín Cociña](#), who were personally chosen by Aster for their work on the 2018 stop-motion film [The Wolf House](#).^[22] With a budget of \$35 million, *Beau Is Afraid* was A24's most expensive film until it was surpassed by [Civil War](#).^[2]

Music

The film's score was produced by Katherine Miller and composed by British electronic musician Bobby Krlic, who performs under the name [The Haxan Cloak](#). With the score, Krlic stated that "every step of the way [in the film, in relation to the score], you're with Joaquin, you're with Beau", adding that the score is meant to be a representation of Beau's mental state throughout the events of the film.^[23]

The score was released on April 14, 2023, a week before the film's wide theatrical release, through A24's music division, and is separated into five parts, corresponding with the five acts of the film in which the songs appear.^[24]

Release

Theatrical

Beau Is Afraid officially premiered in Los Angeles on April 10, 2023, at the [Directors Guild of America](#), with Aster and the cast in attendance.^[25] The film initially had a sneak premiere with a Q&A moderated by [Emma Stone](#) at the [Alamo Drafthouse Cinema](#) in Brooklyn, New York as part of an [April Fools' Day](#) event with livestream screenings provided at Alamo theaters in select cities, as the audience attending was originally scheduled to watch the [director's cut](#) of Aster's *[Midsommar](#)* (2019).^[26] Further exclusive Q&A screenings were conducted, with moderators such as [Martin Scorsese](#), [Nathan Fielder](#) and [Rachel Sennott](#).^[27] The film was released theatrically in the United States by A24 on April 21, 2023,^[28] following a delay from its original 2022 schedule.^[29]

The film was shown a week early in select [IMAX](#) theaters in Los Angeles and New York on April 14, before being released in select North American IMAX theaters on April 21.^[30]

Home media

The film was released digitally on June 13. A Blu-ray and DVD release followed on July 11.^[31]

Reception

Box office

In its opening weekend the film grossed \$320,396 (an average of \$80,099) from four theaters, finishing 14th at the box office.^[32] Expanding to 965 theaters in its second weekend, the film made \$2.7 million, finishing ninth.^[33] In its third weekend the film made \$1.4 million from 2,125 theaters, finishing 13th.^[34] In October 2023, *TheWrap* reported that the film took a \$35 million loss.^[35]

Influences

For an *IndieWire* *Filmmaker Toolkit* podcast, Aster and his regular cinematographer Pogorzelski discussed three key films that influenced their approach for *Beau is Afraid*: Jacques Tati's playful, dense comedy *Playtime* (1967); Alfred Hitchcock's voyeuristic thriller *Rear Window* (1954); and Albert Brooks' allegorical comedy-fantasy *Defending Your Life* (1991).^[36]

Mark Kermode reviewing *Beau is Afraid* for *The Guardian* said the film had "narrative echoes of *Tristram Shandy* (both Sterne's novel and Michael Winterbottom's film) and an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink aesthetic reminiscent of the chaotic Cinerama comedy *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*" (1963). Kermode compared *Beau is Afraid* to "Todd Solondz-style urban sickness", the "body horror of David Cronenberg's *Shivers*" (1975), "Voltaire goes to hell via Darren Aronofsky's *Mother!*" (2017), the "exuberantly manic energy of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love*" (2002), the "nightmare logic of David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977), "Charlie Kaufman's painfully contrived *Synecdoche, New York*" (2008), and "slipping on a Buñuelian banana skin".^[37]

Sight and Sound also found Charlie Kaufman influences, and said various moments in *Beau is Afraid* recalled Franz Kafka, Mark Twain, and the Book of Job.^[38]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 67% of 267 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.8/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Beau Is Afraid* is overstuffed to the point of erasing the line between self-flagellation and self-indulgence, but Ari Aster's bravura and Joaquin Phoenix's sheer commitment give this neurotic odyssey undeniable power."^[39] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 63 out of 100, based on 51 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[40]

Reviewing for *RogerEbert.com*, Nick Allen gave the film three and a half out of four stars, calling it "gobsmacking, sometimes exhausting, always beguiling," and wrote that it was Aster's "funniest movie yet." He praised Phoenix's performance as "fascinating," and concluded that "the ambition is the point."^[41] Mark Kermode's review for *The Guardian* found the film was "sprawlingly picaresque" and "a rambling, labyrinthine, navel-gazing romp." He gave it three out of five stars.^[37] However, Peter Bradshaw's *Guardian* review found the film was an "epically pointless odyssey of hipster non-horror" and a "colossal recovered memory of mock Oedipal agony which is scary, boring and sad." He gave the film two out of five stars.^[42]

Manohla Dargis of the New York Times wrote that the film was "a supersized, fitfully amusing, self-important tale of fear and loathing," and chastised the run-time by saying, "It's a journey; midway, it becomes a slog."^[43] Anthony Lane, film critic for the The New Yorker also found the film's "nervous wreckage" and excesses were "wearisome", noting that the "movie is laid out in ontological order, as it were, from being to nonbeing. If there is a plot, it's more like a plot of earth than a narrative; back and forth Aster goes through the years." But Lane found the middle animated sequence had an "oddly antiquated beauty" that owed a nod to The Wizard of Oz (1939).^[44] The Atlantic film critic David Sims also praised the film's "impressionistic animated visuals".^[45]

Filmmaker John Waters selected *Beau is Afraid* as the best movie of 2023. Writing for Vulture he said, "A superlong, super-crazy, super-funny movie about one man's mental breakdown with a cast better than Around the World in 80 Days: Joaquin Phoenix, Patti LuPone, Parker Posey, Nathan Lane, and Amy Ryan. It's a laugh riot from hell you'll never forget, even if you want to."^[46] Martin Scorsese was similarly enthusiastic about the film, citing Aster as "one of the most extraordinary new voices in world cinema" and praising Aster for subverting the traditional three-act structure.^[27]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Nominee(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Golden Trailer Awards</u>	June 29, 2023	Most Original Trailer	"Beyond" (AV Squad)	Nominated	^[47]
		Best Drama Poster	"Payoff" (AV Print)	Nominated	
<u>Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Film Awards</u>	June 30, 2023	Best Actor	<u>Joaquin Phoenix</u>	Nominated	^[48]
		Best Supporting Actress	<u>Patti LuPone</u>	Nominated	
<u>Indiana Film Journalists Association</u>	December 17, 2023	Best Film	<i>Beau Is Afraid</i>	Longlisted	^[49] ^[50]
		Best Lead Performance	Joaquin Phoenix	Nominated	
		Best Adapted Screenplay	Ari Aster	Nominated	
		Best Cinematography	Pawel Pogorzelski	Nominated	
		Best Ensemble Acting	<i>Beau Is Afraid</i>	Nominated	
		Original Vision		Nominated	
<u>Golden Globe Awards</u>	January 7, 2024	Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy	Joaquin Phoenix	Nominated	^[51]
<u>Satellite Awards</u>	February 18, 2024	Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Comedy or Musical		Nominated	^[52]
<u>ADG Excellence in Production Design Awards</u>	February 10, 2024	Excellence in Production Design for a Contemporary Film	<u>Fiona Crombie</u>	Nominated	^[53]
<u>Critics' Choice Super Awards</u>	April 4, 2024	Best Actor in a Horror Movie	Joaquin Phoenix	Nominated	^[54]

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Notes

- a. Aster later said in a 2023 [Reddit AMA](#) that the title was a [cover-up](#), meant to be a distraction from the early draft of script of the film that circulated online.^[13]

External links

- [Official website \(https://a24films.com/films/beau-is-afraid\)](https://a24films.com/films/beau-is-afraid) 
- *Beau Is Afraid* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13521006/>) at [IMDb](#)

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