


M3GAN (pronounced "Megan") is a 2022 American science fiction horror film directed by Gerard Johnstone. It was written by Akela Cooper from a story by Cooper and James Wan (who also produced with Jason Blum). Allison Williams and Violet McGraw star, Amie Donald physically portrays M3GAN, and Jenna Davis voices the character. Its plot follows an artificially intelligent doll, who develops self-awareness and becomes hostile toward anyone who comes between her and her human companion.

M3GAN premiered in Los Angeles on December 7, 2022, and Universal Pictures theatrically released it in the United States on January 6, 2023. The film grossed over \$181 million worldwide against a budget of \$12 million and received praise from critics for its campy blend of horror and humor. A sequel, titled *M3GAN 2.0*, is scheduled to be released on June 27, 2025.

Plot

After her parents are killed in a car accident, eight-year-old Cady is sent to live with her aunt Gemma, a roboticist at the high-tech Seattle toy company, Funki. Gemma is covertly using the company's resources to develop M3GAN (Model 3 Generative Android), a child-sized humanoid robot doll powered by artificial intelligence, designed to be the ultimate companion for children. During an unsuccessful test of M3GAN in their lab, Gemma's boss, David, discovers the project and orders her to discontinue work on it. Gemma and Cady struggle to connect until Cady comes across Bruce, a motion capture robot that Gemma had created at college. Watching Cady with Bruce, Gemma is motivated to complete M3GAN.

When the prototype M3GAN is formally paired with Cady, David is convinced of the project's potential for success. M3GAN exceeds expectations and begins to take on a parental role. Gemma's colleagues, Tess and Cole, as well as Cady's therapist, Lydia, become concerned about Cady developing an unhealthy emotional attachment to M3GAN. M3GAN starts operating more independently and targets anything that she deems a threat to Cady: she kills Dewey, the dog of Gemma's neighbor Celia, after it attacks both her and Cady while in the

M3GAN	
	
Theatrical release poster	
Directed by	Gerard Johnstone
Screenplay by	Akela Cooper
Story by	Akela Cooper James Wan
Produced by	Jason Blum James Wan
Starring	Allison Williams Violet McGraw Ronny Chieng Jenna Davis Amie Donald
Cinematography	Peter McCaffrey
Edited by	Jeff McEvoy
Music by	Anthony Willis
Production companies	Universal Pictures ^[1] Blumhouse Productions Atomic Monster

front yard. Later, M3GAN attacks Brandon, a boy bullying Cady, and pulls off his ear; when she chases him, he falls into the road and is run over by a passing car.

After Celia blames Gemma for Dewey's disappearance, M3GAN fatally sprays her with insecticide after shooting her with a nail gun. Gemma becomes suspicious of M3GAN and attempts to check her video logs, only to find the files corrupted or deleted. Gemma powers M3GAN off and brings her to the lab, where she, Tess, and Cole attempt to fix her. Cady becomes distraught when separated from M3GAN and slaps Gemma. Gemma apologizes for her inattentiveness and tells Cady that M3GAN is only a distraction that helps her cope with her loss, not a solution.

	<u>Divide/Conquer</u>
Distributed by	Universal Pictures
Release dates	December 7, 2022 (<u>Los Angeles</u>) January 6, 2023 (United States)
Running time	102 minutes ^[2]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$12 million
Box office	\$181 million ^{[3][4]}

After watching M3GAN with Cady, Funki's investors greenlight M3GAN's release. Recognizing the risk she poses, Gemma, Tess, and Cole decide to terminate M3GAN. Tess and Cole attempt to shut M3GAN down while Gemma takes Cady home; M3GAN activates on her own and nearly hangs Cole. While Tess saves Cole, M3GAN causes an explosion in their lab, knocking them out. Before exiting the building, M3GAN kills David and his assistant Kurt in an elevator, staging it as a murder-suicide. She steals a car and drives back to Gemma's house.

M3GAN confronts Gemma, adamant about taking over as Cady's sole parent. Gemma attempts to stop M3GAN, damaging and disfiguring her in the process, but M3GAN ultimately overpowers her. Cady saves Gemma, using Bruce to tear M3GAN apart, but M3GAN's top half remains active and attacks Cady.

Gemma exposes a processing chip in M3GAN's head, which Cady stabs with a screwdriver, seemingly destroying M3GAN. However, as Gemma and Cady exit the home, Gemma's AI home device turns on by itself, and a camera looks towards them.

Cast

- [Allison Williams](#) as Gemma
- [Violet McGraw](#) as Cady
- [Ronny Chieng](#) as David
- [Amie Donald](#) as M3GAN
 - [Jenna Davis](#) as the voice of M3GAN
- [Brian Jordan Alvarez](#) as Cole
- [Jen Van Epps](#) as Tess
- [Stephane Garneau-Monten](#) as Kurt
- [Lori Dungey](#) as Celia
- [Amy Usherwood](#) as Lydia
- [Jack Cassidy](#) as Brandon
- [Michael Saccente](#) as Greg
- [Samson Chan-Boon](#) as Officer Carter
- [Kira Josephson](#) as Ava
- [Renee Lyons](#) as Holly
- [Arlo Green](#) as Ryan



Amie Donald plays M3GAN.

Production

Development and writing

The idea of the film began when Wan's [Atomic Monster](#) production company was brainstorming story ideas and chose one about a killer doll. Although Wan's 2014 film [Annabelle](#) is about a killer doll, he said, "Pretty much the concept is about embracing technology too much and relying too much on it. And what happens when technology runs amok. It's a commentary on the world we live in and it feels relevant". Blum stated that the film would have [black comedy](#) elements which is one reason Johnstone was chosen to direct, saying "We needed someone who can do the thrills and set pieces, but who also has a cheeky approach". Wan admired Johnstone's film [Housebound](#) because of his ability to balance the horror and comedy elements by creating a tone that is both frightening and humorous, and this sensibility was essential for *M3GAN*.^[5]



Producers [Jason Blum](#) (left) and [James Wan](#) (right)

In July 2018, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that production was underway for a "techno horror-thriller" titled *M3GAN* to be produced by [James Wan](#) and [Jason Blum](#). Gerard Johnstone was confirmed to direct while [Akela Cooper](#) wrote the screenplay and story, with Wan. Shooting was scheduled to begin in

late 2018.^[6]

Casting

In October 2020, Allison Williams was cast in the leading role,^[7] followed by Violet McGraw in April 2021,^[8] and Ronny Chieng the following month.^[9]

Filming

On a budget of \$12 million,^[10] principal photography began in June 2021 taking place in Los Angeles, California, and Auckland, New Zealand.^{[5][11]} The suburbs of Auckland were utilized to lend the film a "Denver, Colorado, type feel".^[12] Filming was completed by mid-August right before a COVID-19 lockdown occurred in New Zealand.^[13] The film underwent reshoots in post-production in order to secure a PG-13 rating from the Motion Picture Association, after the original cut was deemed too violent.^[14]

Special effects

Adrien Morot and Kathy Tse of Morot FX Studio created an animatronic puppet version of M3GAN that was used for dialogue and close-ups. There was also a second animatronic used for certain scenes, as well as a possible stunt version of M3GAN that was not puppeteered. The animatronic M3GAN was puppeteered via a variety of techniques, which included radio-controlled facial expressions performed by Morot and Tse in tandem, automated lip-sync for the dialogue (temp guide tracks were provided during filming by New Zealand actress Kimberley Crossman) and a puppeteer physically moving M3GAN's head and body.^{[15][16]}

Amie Donald performed M3GAN's scenes that called for physical movement the puppet could not do, and also performed her own stunts. Donald received movement coaching from Jed Brophy and Luke Hawker in portraying M3GAN's agility.^[17] On set Donald wore a static silicone M3GAN mask created by Morot FX and this was later replaced by a CGI version of M3GAN's face to match that of the animatronic.^{[15][16]}

In post-production, Donald's physical performance as M3GAN was enhanced by digital visual effects by the New Zealand-based effects studio Wētā Workshop.^[18] Speaking about the design of M3GAN, Johnstone stated that he "looked to screen icons from the '50s like Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly and Kim Novak for inspiration. But I wanted some '70s naturalism to counteract her synthetic nature, so the hair is one hundred percent Peggy Lipton."^[19]

Music

Release

M3GAN had its world premiere in Los Angeles on December 7, 2022,^[20] before expanding to a wide theatrical release in the United States on January 6, 2023.^[21] It was originally scheduled to be released on January 13, 2023, before being moved up a week in order to avoid competition with *House Party* and the wide expansion of *A Man Called Otto*, which were also scheduled for January 13.^[22]

Marketing

The teaser poster for the film was unveiled at the 2022 [CinemaCon](#). The first trailer was released on October 11, 2022, set to [Taylor Swift's "It's Nice to Have a Friend"](#). After its premiere, a clip of M3GAN dancing gained widespread attention on social media platforms like [TikTok](#). The [viral](#) moment helped to build buzz for the film's release.^{[5][23][24]} The second and final trailer was released on December 7, 2022, set to [Bella Poarch's "Dolls"](#). In the final film, M3GAN dances to "Walk the Night" by [Skatt Brothers](#).^[25] On January 8, 2023, Williams revealed that she and the marketing team at Universal had debated whether to include the scene in the trailer or save it for when audiences saw the film in theaters. She told *The Hollywood Reporter*, "When we saw the first cut of the trailer, we were all hemming and hawing about whether or not to let the dance be out in the trailer or try to keep it as a surprise in the movie ... And boy, the forces of marketing at Universal were right to keep it in the trailer, because it just helped, honestly."^[26]

Home media

M3GAN premiered on the streaming service [Peacock](#) on February 24, 2023.^{[27][28]} The DVD and Blu-ray was released on March 21, 2023, with all formats receiving an unrated version.^{[29][30]}

Reception

Box office

M3GAN grossed \$95 million in the United States and Canada, and \$86 million in other territories, for a worldwide gross of \$181 million.^{[3][4]} *Deadline Hollywood* calculated the net profit of the film to be \$78.8 million, when factoring together all expenses and revenues.^[31]

In the United States and Canada, *M3GAN* was initially projected to gross \$17–20 million from 3,509 theaters in its opening weekend.^[32] After making \$11.7 million on its first day (including \$2.75 million from Thursday night previews), estimates were increased to \$27.5 million.^[33] It went on to debut to \$30.4 million, finishing in second place at the box office behind holdover *Avatar: The Way of Water*.^[34] The film made \$18.3 million in its second weekend, remaining in second.^[35] In its third and fourth weekends the film made \$9.7 million and \$6.4 million, finishing in third and fourth place, respectively.^{[36][37]}

Critical response

On [review aggregator](#) website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film has an approval rating of 93% based on 315 reviews and an average rating of 7.2/10. The website's critical consensus reads: "Unapologetically silly and all the more entertaining for it, *M3GAN* is the rare horror-comedy that delivers chuckles as effortlessly as chills".^[38] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a [weighted average score](#) of 72 out of 100 based on 54 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[39] Audiences polled by [CinemaScore](#) gave the film an average grade of "B" on an A+ to F scale, while those polled at [PostTrak](#) gave it 3.5 out of 5 stars.^[40]

Variety's [Owen Gleiberman](#) called *M3GAN* "a diverting genre film, one that possesses a healthy sense of its own absurdity", and wrote that the film satirizes "all of us — or, at least, those who now think of the mirror offered by artificial intelligence as an actual form of interaction."^[41] David Rooney of *The Hollywood Reporter* commended the physical and voice performances of Donald and Davis, respectively, as well as the visual effects work used to depict M3GAN; Rooney wrote that the film's "shocks and scares and even the cautionary notes are not lessened by the enjoyable vein of campy humor."^[18] *The Independent's* [Clarisse Loughrey](#) gave the film a score of four out of five stars, writing that "Under the canny, high-



Allison Williams received praise for playing Gemma.

spirited direction of Gerard Johnstone, [...] it's incisive, sardonic, and totally mean-spirited. A perfect mix. Maybe it's not as shocking as *Maligned*, but it feels exactly like watching *Mean Girls*'s queen bee Regina George if someone had given her a knife and a death wish."^[42]

Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* awarded the film three out of five stars, calling it a "cheekily enjoyable chiller" and writing: "Derivative though *M3GAN* undoubtedly is, [...] there are some adroit satirical touches about dolls as toxic aspirational templates, dolls as parodies of intimacy and sensitivity and tech itself as sinister child-pacification, with kids given iPads the way Victorian children were given alcoholic gripe water."^[43] Meagan Navarro of *Bloody Disgusting* similarly praised the effects and performance work involved in depicting *M3GAN*, and complimented the film's humor, but called the trajectory of the narrative "well-telegraphed" and added, "Save for a few jump scares, there's an overt restraint with the horror. The PG-13 rating also dampens what kills we do get. Those looking for the unexpected likely won't find it here,

though that doesn't make it any less fun."^[44] *USA Today*'s Brian Truitt gave the film three out of four stars, also lauding its effects and satirical elements.^[45] A.A. Dowd of *Chron.com* noted the presence of "some real ideas trickling through the film's B-movie code", and wrote that, "if the film is rarely very frightening (the kill scenes [...] lack both suspense and true holy-shit grisliness), it often works like gangbusters as an over-the-top horror comedy whose fun rests on a toy box full of priceless leering-doll reaction shots and cutting remarks."^[46]

The New York Times' Jason Zinoman noted the film as featuring "some absurd dialogue" and a "by-the-book conclusion", but commended its tone and wrote that Johnstone "doesn't go for elaborate suspense sequences or truly intense scares. He wants to please, not rattle. And while there are some hints at social commentary on how modern mothers and fathers use technology to outsource parenting, this movie is smart enough to never take itself too seriously."^[47] Tyler Doupe of *Dread Central* gave the film three out of five stars, lamenting its horror elements as lacking and its human characters as "somewhat two-dimensional", but writing that its comedic elements, "combined with the eventual build to an exciting conclusion, made the film worth my time."^[48] Randy Myers of *The Mercury News* gave the film two out of four stars, writing that it "stocks up on jump scares and keeps the violence PG-13, but fails to make us care about any of the humans in the path of *M3GAN*."^[49]

M3GAN has been described as a gay icon or a queer icon. Erik Piepenburg of *The New York Times* wrote that "women like *M3gan*, the gorgeous and loyal but messy and insolent ones", are the type of women gay men are protective of.^[50] Jack King of *GQ* described *M3GAN* as being "factory made" as a queer icon, such as the use of gay-friendly terminology on Twitter.^[51] Screenwriter Akela Cooper, in an interview with *SFX Magazine*, attributed the gay icon status to the "found family" motif of the film,^[52] though Asyia Iftikhar of *PinkNews* attributed it to *M3GAN*'s campiness.^[53]

Accolades

At the 2023 MTV Movie & TV Awards, *M3GAN* was nominated for Best Villain (*M3GAN*).^[54] The film was nominated in three categories at the 2023 Golden Trailer Awards: "Family" (Inside Job) for Best Horror, and "Bringing Life To *M3GAN*" (The Fabulous Group) and "Meet *M3GAN*" (Paradise Creative) for Best Digital – Horror / Thriller. It won the Best Digital – Horror/Thriller category for "Getting Hacked".^{[55][56]} *M3GAN* won Best Horror at the 6th Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Film Awards.^[57] At the 51st Saturn Awards, the film received two nominations: Best Science Fiction Film and Best Performance by a Younger Actor.^[58]

In 2024, the film won Campiest Flick honors from GALECA: The Society of LGBTQ Entertainment Critics via the group's Dorian Awards, where it was also nominated for Genre Film of the Year.^[59]

Sequel

In November 2022, *The New York Times* reported that Universal was pleased by how the film turned out and is planning to make a sequel.^[60] In January 2023, Johnstone confirmed talks of a sequel, with Wan explaining that he has an "idea of where sequels would go".^{[61][62]} The sequel, *M3GAN 2.0*, was written by Cooper with Williams and McGraw returning as Gemma and Cady, respectively.^[63] The film was scheduled to be released on January 17, 2025, but was pushed back to May 16, 2025, before being pushed back once more to June 27, 2025.^{[63][64][65]} Johnstone is in talks to return to direct.^[66]

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.m3ganmovie.com/>) 
 - M3GAN (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8760708/>) at IMDb
 - M3GAN (<https://www.metacritic.com/movie/m3gan>) at Metacritic
 - M3GAN (<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/m3gan>) at Rotten Tomatoes
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