

# Old (film)

Old is a 2021 American body horror thriller film written, directed, and produced by M. Night Shyamalan. It is based on the Frenchlanguage Swiss graphic novel Sandcastle by Pierre Oscar Lévy and Frederik Peeters. The film features an ensemble cast consisting of Gael García Bernal, Vicky Krieps, Rufus Sewell, Alex Wolff, Thomasin McKenzie, Abbey Lee, Nikki Amuka-Bird, Ken Leung, Eliza Scanlen, Aaron Pierre, Embeth Davidtz, and Emun Elliott. The plot follows a group of people who find themselves aging rapidly on a secluded beach.

Shyamalan decided to adapt *Sandcastle* into a film after receiving it as a <u>Father's Day</u> gift in 2017. The untitled project was announced in September 2019, with the filmmaker revealing a partnership with <u>Universal Pictures</u>. The following year, filming took place in the <u>Dominican Republic</u> for three months, during the <u>COVID-19</u> pandemic, with cinematographer Michael Gioulakis.

*Old* premiered at <u>Jazz at Lincoln Center</u> in New York City on July 19, 2021, and was theatrically released in the United States on July 23. The film grossed \$90 million worldwide against an \$18 million budget while receiving mixed reviews from critics, who praised its cinematography and premise but criticized the screenplay, dialogue, and acting performances. The film's twist ending and themes received polarized responses.

# **Plot**

Guy and Prisca Cappa are going through a separation. To avoid saddening their young children, Maddox and Trent, the couple take them to a tropical resort as a final family vacation. At their hotel, Guy and Prisca are given complimentary drinks, and the children befriend Idlib, the resort manager's nephew. At night, Maddox and Trent overhear their parents arguing and play a message decoding game with Idlib. During the argument, it is revealed that Prisca has a benign slow-growing ovarian tumor.

The next morning, the manager invites the family to a secluded beach where three additional parties are present: rapper Brendan "Mid-Sized Sedan" and his female companion; surgeon Charles, his elderly mother Agnes, his wife Chrystal, and their young daughter Kara; as well as Jarin and Patricia Carmichael, a close-knit husband and wife. Trent discovers the corpse of Brendan's



Directed by	M. Night Shyamalan			
Screenplay by	M. Night Shyamalan			
Based on	Sandcastle by Pierre Oscar Lévy Frederik Peeters			
Produced by	M. Night Shyamalan Marc Bienstock Ashwin Rajan			
Starring	Gael García  Bernal  Vicky Krieps  Rufus Sewell			

Alex Wolff

Thomasin

McKenzie

companion. Charles grows suspicious of Brendan, who reveals that he has been experiencing nosebleeds because of his <a href="hemophilia">hemophilia</a>. After the children rapidly turn into teenagers and Agnes suddenly dies, the families conclude that the beach is aging them, with the occupants undergoing the equivalent of one year of aging every 30 minutes. At least one member of each family has an underlying medical condition. They discover that trying to leave will result in them blacking out and waking up back where they left.

In a fit of rage, Charles cuts Brendan with a pocket knife, and the group watches as his injury quickly heals. Prisca's supposedly slow-growing ovarian tumor rapidly grows in size at a lifethreatening rate. Charles performs a successful surgery to remove it. Brendan discovers that the body of his companion has fully decomposed in a matter of hours. Kara and Trent continue to age into their late teens, and after having sex with each other, Kara gets pregnant at a rapid pace. She gives birth, but the baby dies due to the time rapidly passing. The attempts to leave grow increasingly tense as Charles's worsening schizophrenia causes him to kill Brendan. As the day goes on, Jarin drowns, Kara falls to her death, and Patricia suffers a fatal epileptic seizure. Guy's eyesight blurs, and Prisca suffers hearing loss. Trent and Maddox discover the notebook of a previous traveler, along with indications of their being watched. At night, Charles attacks Guy and Prisca in a schizophrenic episode; Prisca runs as Charles continues to attack Guy. Chrystal's hypocalcemia results in her bones rupturing, killing her. Prisca returns and slashes Charles with a rusted knife, instigating a fatal blood infection that kills him. An elderly Guy and Prisca make amends before dying moments apart from each other.

With only the now-middle-aged Maddox and Trent remaining by the next morning, the pair construct a sandcastle. They revisit a secret message given to them by Idlib, which Trent deduces is connected to an underwater coral passage. Believing that the passage will allow them to leave the beach without losing

	Abbey Lee Nikki Amuka- Bird Ken Leung Eliza Scanlen Aaron Pierre Embeth Davidtz Emun Elliott		
Cinematography	Michael Gioulakis		
Edited by	Brett M. Reed		
Music by	Trevor Gureckis		
Production companies	Perfect World Pictures Blinding Edge Pictures		
Distributed by	Universal Pictures		
Release dates	July 19, 2021 (Jazz at Lincoln Center) July 23, 2021 (United States)		
Running time	109 minutes		
Country	United States		
Language	English		
Budget	\$18 million		
Box office	\$90.2 million		

consciousness, he and his sister start swimming through the coral. After they seemingly fail to emerge from the water, a resort employee who is monitoring them reports that the entire group has died. He gives the news to the manager, who warns of a previous incident where a guest almost escaped from the beach. The manager then announces that trial 73 has concluded.

It is revealed that the resort is a front for a research team from the pharmaceutical company Warren & Warren that was conducting clinical trials of new medical drugs, which are administered to guests with medical conditions by spiking their drinks. Because the beach naturally accelerates the lives of the guests, the researchers have been able to complete the lifelong drug trials within a day. The researchers lure a new group to the beach, but are interrupted by Trent and Maddox, who survived their underwater swim, using

the notebook as evidence that they give to vacationing police officer Greg Mitchel, who informs his boss of the researchers' crimes. The researchers are mentioned to have been arrested, with subpoenas sent to the rest of Warren & Warren, as Greg plans to reunite Trent and Maddox with their uncle.

### **Cast**

- Gael García
   Bernal as Guy
   Cappa, an actuary married to Prisca
- Vicky Krieps as Prisca Cappa, a museum



Gael García Bernal (left) and Vicky Krieps (right) star as married couple Guy and Prisca Cappa

curator married to Guy

- Rufus Sewell as Charles, a cardiac surgeon married to Chrystal
- Alex Wolff as Trent Cappa, Guy and Prisca's son (age 15)
  - Emun Elliott as adult Trent Cappa
  - Luca Faustino Rodriguez as Trent Cappa (age 11)
  - Nolan River as Trent Cappa (age 6)
- Thomasin McKenzie as Maddox Cappa, Guy and Prisca's daughter (age 16)
  - Embeth Davidtz as adult Maddox Cappa
  - Alexa Swinton as Maddox Cappa (age 11)
- Abbey Lee as Chrystal, Charles's trophy wife
- Nikki Amuka-Bird as Patricia Carmichael, a psychologist married to Jarin
- Ken Leung as Jarin Carmichael, a nurse and Patricia's husband
- Eliza Scanlen as Kara, Charles and Chrystal's daughter (age 15)
  - Mikaya Fisher as Kara (age 11)
  - Kylie Begley as Kara (age 6)
- Aaron Pierre as Mid-Sized Sedan/Brendan, a rapper

Additional cast members include <u>Kathleen Chalfant</u> as Agnes, Charles' mother; <u>Gustaf Hammarsten</u> as the resort manager who heads the secret research team for the pharmaceutical company Warren & Warren; <u>Francesca Eastwood</u> and <u>Matthew Shear</u> as resort employees; Kailen Jude as the manager's nephew Idlib; Daniel Ison as vacationing police officer Greg Mitchel; and <u>M. Night Shyamalan</u> as the resort employee who drives the guests to the beach and monitors them.

#### Themes

When <u>NME</u>'s Beth Webb asked about the different themes tackled in *Old*, Shyamalan responded, "It's definitely about our relationship to time and, in my opinion, our dysfunctional relationship to time that we all have. Until we're forced to examine it, whether it's a pandemic or the factors that are in this situation for

these characters, they're trapped on this beach, and they have to reflect on their relationship over time. You see some characters unable to navigate this, and then some characters find peace. Why did they find peace, and how did they find peace in the midst of all of this chaos? So there's this conversation about that, the one that I'm having of myself with time." [1]

At the <u>Tribeca Film Festival</u>, Shyamalan said that the film's focus on aging reminded him of his father, who has <u>dementia</u>, and his children as he watches them grow up. During the event, <u>Alex Wolff</u> compared the film to the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u>, "Coming out of COVID, it feels like time just stopped. And that's what the movie's literally about." At the film's premiere, Wolff was asked for his interpretation of the film and said it was "an allegorical existential sort of meditation on getting older." Other cast members chimed in; <u>Nikki Amuka-Bird</u> said the film was about not taking nature for granted; <u>Gael García Bernal</u> said it was about questioning how time travels differently for other people; and <u>Vicky Krieps</u> found that it was about "love and family and all these things that are much stronger than any fears — the fear of aging and the fear of death."

# **Production**



Writer, director, and producer M. Night Shyamalan

### **Development, pre-production and casting**

In September 2019, <u>Universal Pictures</u> announced its plans to distribute two then-untitled independently-financed thriller films written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan. In a statement, Universal Pictures President Peter Cramer said that these projects contained "highly original stories," while Shymalan added, "There are wonderful studios out there, but Universal has made it a mandate to release original films. They are the best at finding an audience for new stories with unexpected tones. I believe original films are crucial to the longevity of the theatrical experience." [5]

In May 2020, <u>Eliza Scanlen</u>, <u>Thomasin McKenzie</u>, <u>Aaron Pierre</u>, Alex Wolff, and Vicky Krieps entered negotiations to star. That June, they all joined the cast alongside <u>Abbey Lee</u>, Nikki Amuka-Bird, and <u>Ken Leung</u>. In July, it was reported that Shyamalan, Marc Bienstock, and Ashwin Rajan would produce the project through <u>Perfect World Pictures</u> and <u>Blinding Edge Pictures</u>, with Gael García Bernal also being cast. [9]

In August, <u>Rufus Sewell</u>, <u>Embeth Davidtz</u>, and <u>Emun Elliott</u> were all announced as part of the ensemble cast. That same month, <u>Bryan Cranston</u> said he had declined a role in the film due to a scheduling conflict caused by his involvement with filming <u>Your Honor</u> in New Orleans. [11][12]

## Filming and post-production

On September 26, 2020, principal photography began in the <u>Dominican Republic</u>, and to celebrate, Shyamalan revealed the film's title and published its first promotional release poster. That same day, <u>Collider</u> reported that the film was an adaptation of *Sandcastle*, the French graphic novel by Swiss authors Pierre Oscar Levy and <u>Frederik Peeters</u>, which Shyamalan had received as a collective <u>Father's Day</u> gift from his three daughters in 2017. Old marks the first film of Shyamalan's career to have no shooting take place around his hometown of <u>Philadelphia</u>, <u>Pennsylvania</u>. With an \$18 million budget, filming took place during the COVID-19 pandemic with cinematographer Michael Gioulakis, using 35mm

 $\underline{\text{film}}$ ,  $\underline{^{[18]}}$  and concluded on November 15, 2020.  $\underline{^{[19]}}$  After filming wrapped, Shyamalan said *Old* was the first film to be shot during the pandemic in the Dominican Republic and that throughout the shoot, no one tested positive for the virus as he paid for the production crew's ten-week stay at a hotel.  $\underline{^{[20]}}$ 

Old was inspired by films created during the Australian New Wave, including Walkabout (1971) and Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975), along with The Exterminating Angel (1962), Kuroneko (1968), Jaws (1975), and The Twilight Zone. [21] To create a claustrophobic feeling, Shyamalan employed several filming techniques from Akira Kurosawa's Rashomon (1950) and Ran (1985). [22] As a result, Old was mostly filmed in a single location, the Playa El Valle beach located between two mountains on the north coast of Santa Bárbara de Samaná. Additional filming took place at Pinewood Dominican Republic Studios in Juan Dolio and in several locations around Samaná. [23][24] To capture footage of the surrounding nature, Shyamalan's daughter, Ishana, served as the film's second unit director. [25] His other daughter, Saleka Shyamalan, wrote an original song for the film titled "Remain" that was inspired by the topic of marriage vows and U2's "With or Without You," used to "highlight the relationship between Guy and Prisca and the love that exists between them." [26][27]

Several cast members recalled Shyamalan using <u>storyboards</u> to frame every shot in the film. [28] Ishana Shyamalan described her father's choice as a "very prescribed and programmatic" approach, while Wolff said the director "had such precision in terms of what age he wanted you to be and where he wanted you to be at that age. Night would just guide you where you needed to be emotionally, and then it would happen naturally."[25] In an interview with <u>The Hollywood Reporter</u>, Wolff said he and McKenzie were the first actors to be cast after submitting audition tapes, and recalled passing out during the filming of the pregnancy scene due to high temperatures.[29] During post-production, editing was completed by Brett M. Reed.[30] The film's score was composed by Trevor Gureckis and released by Back Lot Music on July 23, 2021.[31][32]

## Release

*Old* was originally going to be released by Universal Pictures on February 26, 2021, 100 but in April 2020, 100, 100 the film was removed from the studio's release schedule after its film 100 was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 100 In June 2020, Universal Pictures announced that 100 would be theatrically released on July 23, 100, 100 and 100 premiere for the film was held at 100 Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City on July 19, 2021, which was attended by its cast and crew.

On February 7, 2021, during <u>Super Bowl LV</u>, Universal Pictures aired a 30-second <u>television spot</u> for *Old*. [37][38] Anthony D'Alessandro from <u>Deadline Hollywood</u> said the teaser reminded him of a two-part episode of <u>The Brady Bunch</u>, where an ancient <u>tiki</u> brings the group bad luck and causes Greg (Barry <u>Williams</u>) to suffer a surfing accident. [39] Writing for <u>Syfy Wire</u>, Josh Weiss said the teaser "definitely bears Shyamalan's signature slow-boil tension." [40] On May 27, 2021, a theatrical release poster and an official trailer were released, which <u>Variety</u>'s Antonio Ferme said brought "thrills and chills," and Weiss described as "a reverse <u>Benjamin Button</u> situation that the characters need to reverse before they shrivel up and die." [41][42] That July, an exclusive image of the film was released in a magazine issue of <u>Empire</u>. [43]

Summarizing the film's marketing results, RelishMix wrote that it was being compared to <u>A Quiet Place</u> <u>Part II</u> and <u>The Conjuring 3</u>, Shyamalan's <u>Split</u> and <u>Glass</u>, and <u>Edgar Wright's Last Night in Soho</u>, as well as <u>ABC</u>'s <u>Lost</u>. The site added that there were "Conversational tones swings from excitement, fear, curiosity, caution, warnings to the characters in the film — to questions about the pregnant girl and

numerous guesses about how the films ends and plot twists." By July 2021, the film's promotional content had been viewed a total of 113.2 million times, which included 41.2 million views from three YouTube videos and 30.3 million views from nineteen videos on Facebook. According to Universal Pictures, the Super Bowl teaser was viewed at least 100 million times, but overall, videos promoting the film "[fell] short of the norm along with daily click-rates." A Snapchat aging filter created for the film also gained 23 million views worldwide on its first day after it was used by celebrities such as Shaquille O'Neal, Kenny Smith, and Charles Barkley. 41

<u>Universal Pictures Home Entertainment</u> released *Old* on Digital HD via <u>digital distribution</u> on October 5, 2021, with a physical release on <u>Ultra HD Blu-ray</u>, <u>Blu-ray</u>, and <u>DVD</u> on October 19. Special features include deleted scenes; "Shyamalan Family Business," a look into how Ishana and Saleka Shyamalan contributed to the film; "All the Beach Is a Stage" and "Nightmares in Paradise," a detailing of how filming took place; and "A Family in the Moment," featuring cast members describing a specific night of filming. [45]

# Reception

#### **Box office**

*Old* grossed \$48.3 million in the United States and Canada, and \$41.9 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$90.2 million. [46][47]

A week before its release, *Variety* and *Deadline Hollywood* reported that film analytics had predicted the film would make \$12–15 million in its opening weekend, with some noting that its competition, which had the same target audience, could impact box office revenues. [48][49] Released alongside *Snake Eyes* and *Joe Bell* on July 23, 2021, in 3,355 theaters, *Old* made \$6.9 million on its first day, including \$1.5 million from Thursday night previews. With audiences that were 52% female and 62% at or over the age of 25, it went on to debut to \$16.85 million, [50] making it the sixth film of Shyamalan's to top the box office, though it marked the lowest opening weekend of his career. [44][51]

Describing the openings of *Old* and *Snake Eyes* as "weak," <u>Michael Cieply</u> wrote an analysis to explain the audience decline at the box office, streaming sites, and television by using <u>Occam's razor</u>, "Maybe, as a group, we are suffering from 'screen fatigue' — not in the narrow sense of migraines, eye strain, and <u>Computer Vision Syndrome</u>, but in a much bigger way, as a culture. We are tired of <u>Zoom</u> calls. We are tired of event television. We are really tired of looking at ourselves on media screens, large and small." In its second weekend, the film suffered a 60% decline and grossed \$6.86 million. After making \$4.1 million in its third, Old dropped out of the box office top five in its fourth weekend with \$2.4 million. In its fifth and sixth weekends, the film fell to the bottom of the box office top ten, making \$1.15 million and \$840,810, respectively.

Worldwide, *Old* made \$6.5 million in its opening weekend in 23 markets; the top countries were Russia (\$2.1 million), the United Kingdom (\$1.1 million), Mexico (\$800,000), Italy (\$600,000), and France (\$500,000). In its second, the film had a 35% drop and grossed \$7.5 million, including a \$1.2 million opening in Spain. After making \$4.4 million in its third weekend, it made \$2 million in its fifth and

held a Korean opening in a mere 453 theaters, a decision by the Korea Theater Association to release local titles instead. In its sixth weekend, *Old* was screened in 57 markets and made \$1.64 million. It made \$277,000 in its ninth weekend and \$169,000 in its tenth across 60 foreign markets. [64][65]

### Critical response

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 50% of 343 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.50/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Old* has no shortage of interesting ideas -- and writer-director M. Night Shyamalan's uneven execution will intrigue or annoy viewers, with little middle ground between." Metacritic, which uses a <u>weighted average</u>, assigned the film a score of 55 out of 100, based on 53 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews. Audiences polled by <u>CinemaScore</u> gave the film an average grade of "C+" on an A+ to F scale, while <u>PostTrak</u> reported 61% of audience members gave it a positive score, with 37% saying they would definitely recommend it.

Old received criticism for its screenplay, dialogue, and acting. Wendy Ide of <u>The Observer</u> said the film's exposition felt "ponderous and mannered" and asked: "If we can't believe the characters, how are we meant to accept the film's central premise?" <u>WXIX-TV</u>'s Terrence "TT" Todd gave a similar response and said that while the premise was interesting, the plot was confusing and could have been explained better as its own television series. From <u>Vox</u>, Alissa Wilkinson wrote that "Shyamalan has not grown any more skilled at writing dialogue over the years," but found that at its best, the film was comparable to <u>Luis Buñuel</u>'s <u>The Exterminating Angel</u>. Barry Hertz of <u>The Globe and Mail</u> said that the film had "stilted dialogue that runs in circles, dumb-dumb plot holes, [and] a bizarre determination to have his performers act as unnaturally as possible." However, some critics enjoyed the gallows humor in the movie. Germain Lussier of <u>Gizmodo</u> said the movie was made with sadistic glee and surprising emotion. Nick Allen of <u>The Playlist</u> called it a pitch-black comedy and self-aware horror. Scott Mendelson of <u>Forbes</u> said it would have benefited from an R rating and described it as a "relentless and mean little chiller".

The film's cinematography and premise received praise. While criticizing the film in general, Jocelyn Novec from the <u>Associated Press</u> said it had "an enticing premise and pretty scenery." In his *Deadline Hollywood* review, Pete Hammond wrote, "I don't expect this one to age very well, and some of it is just laughably bad. At the very least, as a summertime theatrical release, the stunning location should give audiences a nice respite from the heat." Critic <u>Richard Roeper</u> described the film's main location as "absolutely breathtaking," and <u>The New Yorker</u>'s <u>Richard Brody</u> wrote that "with spare methods and sharp images, the director turns a simple premise into potent fantasy." [78]

The film's themes and twist ending received a polarized response. *Sandcastle*, the novel the film is based on, ends without explaining why the beach ages its guests, and Wilkinson found that ending to be "more satisfying." From ABC News, Peter Travers said he was "shocked" to find "how clumsily [Shyamalan] handles potent themes about sudden death and the collapse of time that should resonate powerfully in the COVID-19 era. Even his argument for family values in the face of global youth worship feels rote." Writing for *The New York Times*, Glenn Kenny said, "Shyamalan's fluid filmmaking style serves him

especially well here [and] the way he switches out his actors as their characters age is seamless," but found that "while Shyamalan is often cited for his tricky endings, it's arguable that he doesn't quite stick the landing with this one." [80]

#### Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
Dorian Awards	March 17, 2022	Campiest Flick	Old	Nominated	[81][82]
Florida Film Critics Circle	December 22, 2021	Best Cinematography	Michael Gioulakis	Nominated	[83][84]
Hollywood Music in Media Awards	November 17, 2021	Best Original Score — Horror Film	Trevor Gureckis	Nominated	[85][86]
Imagen Awards	October 2, 2022	Best Actor – Feature Film	Gael García Bernal	Nominated	[87]
People's Choice Awards	December 7, 2021	Drama Movie of the Year	Old	Nominated	[88][89]
Saturn Awards	October 25, 2022	Best Thriller Film	Old	Nominated	[90][91]

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- Official website (https://www.old.movie/)
- Old (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10954652/) at IMDb

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