

*Gladiator II* is an upcoming historical epic film directed and co-produced by Ridley Scott. Serving as a sequel to *Gladiator* (2000), the film was written by David Scarpa, and stars Paul Mescal, Denzel Washington, Pedro Pascal, Joseph Quinn, Fred Hechinger, Connie Nielsen, and Derek Jacobi, the last two reprising their roles. It was produced by Scott Free Productions for Paramount Pictures and Universal Pictures.

A sequel to *Gladiator* was discussed as early as June 2001, with David Franzoni and John Logan set to return as screenwriters. Over the next few years, Scott offered occasional updates, including the possible involvement of the original film's lead actor, Russell Crowe, and plot ideas around the Roman afterlife and different historical time periods. Development was halted when DreamWorks sold the rights to the property to Paramount in 2006.

The film was finally announced in 2018, and Mescal was hired in the lead role in January 2023, with a script by Scarpa. The rest of the cast signed on over the next several months, and filming took place between June 2023 and January 2024, with a five-month hiatus due to the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike. *Gladiator II* is scheduled to be released in the United States on November 22, 2024.

## Cast

- Paul Mescal as Lucius Verus. Director Ridley Scott mentions that since he was last seen approximately 15 years ago, Lucius has been living "in the wilderness" with no connection with his mother, who now thinks he might be dead.<sup>[2]</sup> He was previously portrayed by Spencer Treat Clark in *Gladiator* (2000).
- Denzel Washington as a former slave-turned-wealthy arms and commodity dealer with a grudge against the emperors.
- Pedro Pascal as a former military commander whose defiance has resulted in him being condemned to being a gladiator.
- Connie Nielsen as Lucilla, the mother of Lucius.
- Derek Jacobi as Senator Gracchus, a member of the Roman Senate.

Gladiator II	
Directed by	<span>Ridley Scott</span>
Written by	<span>David Scarpa</span>
Produced by	<span>Ridley Scott</span>
	<span>Michael Pruss</span>
	<span>Douglas Wick</span>
	<span>Lucy Fisher</span>
	<span>Walter F. Parkes</span>
	<span>Laurie MacDonald</span>
Starring	<span>David Franzoni</span>
	<span>Paul Mescal</span>
	<span>Denzel Washington</span>
	<span>Pedro Pascal</span>
	<span>Connie Nielsen</span>
	<span>Joseph Quinn</span>
Cinematography	<span>Fred Hechinger</span>
	<span>Derek Jacobi</span>
	<span>John Mathieson</span>
	<span>Claire Simpson</span>
	<span>Sam Restivo</span>
Music by	<span>Harry Gregson-Williams</span>
Production companies	<span>Scott Free Productions</span>
	<span>Red Wagon Entertainment</span>
	<span>P + M Image Nation</span>
Distributed by	<span>Paramount Pictures</span>
	<span>(United States)</span>
	<span>Universal Pictures</span>
Release date	<span>(International)</span>
	<span>November 22, 2024</span>
Countries	<span>United States</span>
	<span>United Kingdom</span>

- Joseph Quinn as co-emperor Caracalla. Despite comparisons with Joaquin Phoenix's Commodus from the first film, Quinn did not feel he channeled Phoenix's performance, crediting Scott for wishing him to "play the chords louder and turn it up and go for the more brave or bold form" of communication. He also credited Nielsen for helping him and the rest of the cast to not be nervous about the first film's legacy.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Fred Hechinger as co-emperor Geta
- Lior Raz
- Peter Mensah
- Matt Lucas
- May Calamawy
- Tim McInnerny

<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$250–310 million <sup>[1]</sup>

## Production

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### Development

In June 2001, developments for a *Gladiator* (2000) follow-up began in the form of potential for either a prequel or a sequel, with David Franzoni in early negotiations to once again serve as screenwriter.<sup>[4]</sup> The following year, a sequel was announced to be moving forward with John Logan serving as screenwriter. The plot, set fifteen years later, included the Praetorian Guards ruling Rome, and an older-aged Lucius searching for the truth about his biological father. Franzoni signed on as producer, alongside Douglas Wick and Walter Parkes.<sup>[5]</sup> In December 2002, the film's plot was announced to include prequel events regarding the parentage of Lucius, as well as sequel events depicting the resurrection of Maximus. Producers and Russell Crowe collaboratively and extensively researched ancient Roman beliefs regarding the afterlife.<sup>[6]</sup> By September 2003, Ridley Scott announced that the script was completed, while confirming that the story would primarily center around the secret son of Maximus being Lucius.<sup>[7]</sup>

In May 2006, Scott stated that while development on the project continued, the exact story for the film had yet to be mapped out. The filmmaker stated that all creative minds that were involved with *Gladiator* were working on how to continue from where the story left off. Scott stated that Crowe had favoured a fantasy element in bringing Maximus back to life, while Scott believed a grounded, historical approach was the better option. While he believed the film would not be made, he confirmed the plan to reveal that Lucius is the son of Maximus and Lucilla. He also discussed the necessity of a more complex script with the corruption of Rome in the potential sequel.<sup>[8]</sup> During this time, Nick Cave was commissioned to write a new draft of the script. It was later revealed to be written under the working title of "Christ Killer". Cave described the plot as a "deities vs. deity vs. humanity" story. The premise involved Maximus in purgatory, who is resurrected as an immortal eternal warrior for the Roman gods. In the draft, Maximus is sent to Earth and tasked with stopping the momentum of Christianity by killing Jesus Christ and his disciples, as their movement was gradually siphoning off the



Ridley Scott returns to direct *Gladiator II* after two decades since the original.

power and vitality of the ancient Pagan gods. During his task mission, Maximus is tricked into murdering his own son. Cursed to live forever, Cave's script included Maximus fighting amongst the Crusades, WWII, and the Vietnam War; with the ending revealing that in the modern-day time period, the character now works at The Pentagon. The script was ultimately rejected and scrapped.<sup>[9][10][11][12]</sup>

After experiencing financial difficulties in the 2000s, DreamWorks Pictures—including the rights to *Gladiator* and the rest of the pre-2006 live-action film library—was sold to Paramount Pictures in 2006 and development on the sequel was halted.<sup>[13]</sup> In March 2017, Scott revealed that the difficulties of reintroducing Maximus, when the character is deceased, had been resolved. The filmmaker expressed enthusiasm for the future of the project, while discussions with Russell Crowe to reprise his role were ongoing.<sup>[14]</sup> In November 2018, it was announced that Paramount was officially green-lighting the development of a sequel. Scott was in early negotiations to once again serve as director, with a script written by Peter Craig. Scott will additionally serve as producer alongside Doug Wick, Lucy Fisher, Walter Parkes, and Laurie MacDonald. The project will be a joint-venture production between Paramount, Scott Free Productions, and Parkes/MacDonald Productions with Universal Pictures as a co-financing partner.<sup>[15]</sup> By June 2019, producers stated: "...we wouldn't touch unless we felt in a way to do it was legitimate." In their interview, they also revealed that the current script takes place 25–30 years after the first film.<sup>[16]</sup> The plot will center around Lucius.<sup>[17]</sup>

In April 2021, Chris Hemsworth approached Crowe with a proposal to become involved with the project, with the intention to co-produce the film. While working together on *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022), the two actors shared additional ideas for the film.<sup>[18]</sup> By September 2021, Scott stated that the script was once again being worked on with his intention being to direct the sequel upon the completion of production on his current project *Napoleon* (2023).<sup>[19]</sup> In November, it was revealed that David Scarpa, who worked with Scott on *Napoleon*, was rewriting the script.<sup>[20]</sup> Scarpa was hired by Scott because of their friendship, but struggled with him to find a good script for the film's story since 2019, leading Scott to wait ten months until Scarpa came up with the idea of using Lucius as the protagonist.<sup>[21]</sup>

Originally greenlit with a production budget of \$165 million, the cost of the film ballooned to a reported \$310 million by the time filming wrapped (though Paramount insisted the net cost did not exceed \$250 million).<sup>[1]</sup> The production received nearly €47 million in film incentive rebates from Malta, setting a record the largest rebate issued for a film production in the European Union.<sup>[22]</sup>

## Pre-production

In January 2023, Paul Mescal was cast in the film, while it was also reported that Arthur Max and Janty Yates, the production designer and costume designer of the original film, respectively, would also be returning to work on the sequel.<sup>[23]</sup> Scott was unaware of Mescal's fame until he watched him in the first four episodes of the BBC Three/Hulu miniseries *Normal People*, leading Scott to see the whole miniseries just as the story for *Gladiator 2* came up because of Scarpa working out the script, leading him to cast Mescal due to having him in mind for something, feeling that he could be as good as Crowe.<sup>[21]</sup> Austin Butler, Richard Madden, and Miles Teller had also been considered for the lead role.<sup>[24]</sup> Mescal was chosen after Daria Cercek and Michael Ireland had seen his performance in the West End revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, claiming that the "ladies in the audience [had been] very vocal" when he had taken his shirt off.<sup>[25]</sup> In March, Barry Keoghan entered negotiations to join the cast in the role of Emperor Geta while Denzel Washington joined the cast.<sup>[26][27]</sup> Additionally, John Mathieson was set to return as cinematographer for the film.<sup>[28]</sup>

In April 2023, it was announced that Connie Nielsen and Djimon Hounsou would reprise their roles as Lucilla and Juba respectively, while Joseph Quinn was added to the cast as Emperor Caracalla.<sup>[29][30]</sup> In May 2023, Pedro Pascal, May Calamawy, Lior Raz, Derek Jacobi, Peter Mensah and Matt Lucas joined the cast of the film, with Fred Hechinger entering negotiations to play Geta after Keoghan had to drop out over scheduling conflicts. Jacobi reprises his role as Senator Gracchus from the first film.<sup>[31][32]</sup> Hechinger would be confirmed the following month.<sup>[33]</sup> In December, Hounsou announced that, despite initially being involved, he would not be returning for the sequel due to scheduling conflicts.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Filming

Production was expected to begin in May 2023, with Ouarzazate, Morocco set as a filming location.<sup>[35]</sup> Set construction began in the city in April.<sup>[36]</sup> Filming began in June 2023 with additional filming locations planned for Malta, which stood-in for ancient Rome, and the United Kingdom over the following four months.<sup>[37][3]</sup> An accident involving fire during filming on June 7 injured six crew members.<sup>[33]</sup> Filming was suspended in July due to the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike.<sup>[38]</sup> Filming resumed on December 4 in Malta,<sup>[39]</sup> and wrapped on January 17, 2024.<sup>[40]</sup>

## Music

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In January 2024, it was revealed that Harry Gregson-Williams had composed the score for the film, taking over from Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard who scored the first film.<sup>[41]</sup>

## Release

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*Gladiator II* is scheduled to be released in the United States by Paramount Pictures on November 22, 2024, and internationally by Universal Pictures.<sup>[42]</sup>

## Marketing

Footage of the film was screened at the CinemaCon 2024 in Las Vegas, which depicted scenes of Quinn's Caracalla dressed in a white toga and laurel-leaf crown dramatically plunging his thumb downward to note the fate of defeated gladiators, with Nielsen in the background.<sup>[3]</sup>

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