CANNES, France — While Donald Trump's hush money trial [*entered its sixth week*](https://apnews.com/live/trump-trial-updates-day-19-hush-money) in New York, an origin story for the Republican presidential candidate premiered at the [*Cannes Film Festival*](https://apnews.com/hub/cannes-film-festival) on Monday, unveiling a scathing portrait of the former president in the 1980s.

“The Apprentice,” directed by the Iranian Danish filmmaker Ali Abbasi, stars Sebastian Stan as Trump. The central relationship of the movie is between Trump and [*Roy Cohn*](https://apnews.com/article/4b249accc87b36d1fa732d463b1dc960) , the defense attorney who was chief counsel to [*Joseph McCarthy’s 1950s Senate investigations.*](https://apnews.com/united-states-government-f7e7ce3eb3e74cb999776ecd41338ce0)

Cohn is depicted as a longtime mentor to Trump, coaching him in the ruthlessness of New York City ***politics*** and business. Early on, Cohn aided the Trump Organization when it was being sued by the federal government for racial discrimination in housing.

“The Apprentice,” which is labeled as inspired by true events, portrays Trump's dealings with Cohn as a Faustian bargain that guided his rise as a businessman and, later, as a politician. Stan's Trump is initially a more naive real-estate striver, soon transformed by Cohn's education.

The film notably contains a scene depicting Trump raping his wife, Ivana Trump (played by [*Maria Bakalova)*](https://apnews.com/article/maria-bakalova-7ca40d5af58d8582b2b30607c332e26d). In Ivana Trump’s 1990 divorce deposition, [*she stated that Trump raped her*](https://apnews.com/events-united-states-presidential-election-9a2c849efddc43bd967188fdcc6fd68a). Trump denied the allegation and Ivana Trump later said she didn’t mean it literally, but rather that she had felt violated.

That scene and others make “The Apprentice” a potentially explosive big-screen drama in the midst of the [*U.S. presidential election*](https://apnews.com/hub/election-2024). The film is for sale in Cannes, so it doesn't yet have a release date.

Variety on Monday *[reported alleged behind-the-scenes drama](https://variety.com/2024/film/news/donald-trump-movie-the-apprentice-dan-snyder-feud-1236010060/" \l "recipient_hashed=45951097908370e2bfe84dc19977e5fefd4f87a19351a53c4ba404acdebe0709&recipient_salt=4343b621d3e9047aacf7967fb651fe7dfc659efdf1624330ecdd0ab224262124)* surrounding “The Apprentice.” Citing anonymous sources, the trade publication reported that [*billionaire Dan Snyder,*](https://apnews.com/hub/dan-snyder) the former owner of the Washington Commanders and an investor in “The Apprentice,” has pressured the filmmakers to edit the film over its portrayal of Trump. Snyder previously donated to Trump's presidential campaign.

Neither representatives for the film nor Snyder could immediately be reached for comment.

In the press notes for the film, Abbasi, whose [*previous film “Holy Spider”*](https://apnews.com/article/iran-entertainment-europe-middle-east-9a6169029e06bcfd591bacdfff4a3c6a) depicts a female journalist investigating a serial killer in Iran, said he didn't set out to make “a History Channel episode.”

“This is not a biopic of Donald Trump," said Abbasi. "We’re not interested in every detail of his life going from A to Z. We’re interested in telling a very specific story through his relationship with Roy and Roy’s relationship with him.”

Regardless of its political impact, “The Apprentice” is likely to be much discussed as a potential awards contender. The film, shot in a gritty '80s aesthetic, returns Strong to a New York landscape of money and power a year following the conclusion of [*HBO’s “Succession.”*](https://apnews.com/article/hbo-succession-series-finale-88a05398cf5fb95e589069ef57f82373) Strong, who's currently performing on Broadway in [*“An Enemy of the People,”*](https://apnews.com/article/jeremy-strong-broadway-succession-enemy-a6e6986bda6b07f1faf65fd4eb41cae3) didn't attend the Cannes premiere Monday.

“The Apprentice” is playing in competition in Cannes, making it eligible for the festival's top award, the Palme d'Or. At Cannes, filmmakers and casts hold [*press conferences the day after*](https://apnews.com/article/cannes-film-festival-how-it-works-00e8eb4130bbb863145e5dc950213988) a movie's premiere. “The Apprentice” press conference will be Tuesday.