

Oppenheimer (film)

Oppenheimer (/ˈɒpənhaɪmər/ *OP-ən-hy-mər*) is a 2023 epic biographical thriller film^[5] written and directed by Christopher Nolan. Based on the 2005 biography *American Prometheus* by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, the film chronicles the career of American theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer. The story predominantly focuses on Oppenheimer's studies, his direction of the Manhattan Project during World War II, and his eventual fall from grace due to his 1954 security hearing. The film stars Cillian Murphy as the title character, Emily Blunt as his wife "Kitty", Matt Damon as head of the Manhattan Project Leslie Groves, Robert Downey Jr. as U.S. Atomic Energy Commission member Lewis Strauss, and Florence Pugh as his communist lover Jean Tatlock. The ensemble supporting cast includes Josh Hartnett, Casey Affleck, Rami Malek, and Kenneth Branagh.

The film was announced in September 2021 after Universal Pictures won a bidding war for Nolan's screenplay, following Nolan's conflict with longtime distributor Warner Bros. Murphy was the first cast member to sign on the following month, with the rest of the cast joining between November 2021 and April 2022. Pre-production was under way by January 2022, and filming took place from February to May. *Oppenheimer* was filmed in a combination of IMAX 65 mm and 65 mm large-format film, including, for the first time, sections in IMAX black-and-white film photography. Like his previous works, Nolan used extensive practical effects and minimal computer-generated imagery. *Oppenheimer* is Nolan's first film to receive an R-rating in the United States since *Insomnia* in 2002.

Oppenheimer premiered at Le Grand Rex in Paris on July 11, 2023, and was theatrically released in the United States and United Kingdom on July 21 by Universal. Its simultaneous release with Warner Bros.' *Barbie* led to the Barbenheimer cultural phenomenon, which encouraged audiences to see both films as a double feature. The film grossed over \$853 million worldwide on a \$100 million production budget, becoming the third-highest-grossing film of 2023, the highest-grossing World War II-related film,^[6] and the second-highest-grossing R-rated film of all time.^[7] It received critical acclaim, with particular praise for the cast performances (particularly those of Murphy and Downey), screenplay, musical score, visuals, and Nolan's direction.

Plot

Oppenheimer



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Christopher Nolan
Screenplay by	Christopher Nolan
Based on	<i>American Prometheus</i> by Kai Bird Martin J. Sherwin
Produced by	Emma Thomas Charles Roven Christopher Nolan
Starring	Cillian Murphy Emily Blunt Matt Damon Robert Downey Jr. Florence Pugh

In 1926, 22-year-old American doctoral student J. Robert Oppenheimer grapples with anxiety and homesickness while studying in Europe under experimental physicist Patrick Blackett at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge. Oppenheimer, upset with the demanding Blackett, leaves him a poison-laced apple, but retrieves it the following morning. Visiting scientist Niels Bohr recommends that Oppenheimer should instead study theoretical physics at Göttingen, where Oppenheimer completes his PhD and meets Isidor Isaac Rabi. The two later meet theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg at a conference in Switzerland, but Heisenberg sees quantum physics research as stagnant.

So Oppenheimer returns to the United States, wanting to expand research there. He begins teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, and the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). He meets his future wife, Katherine "Kitty" Puening, a biologist and ex-communist, and has an intermittent affair with Jean Tatlock, a troubled member of the Communist Party USA.

In December 1938, nuclear fission is discovered, and Oppenheimer immediately realizes that it could potentially be used to create a bomb. In 1942, amid World War II, US Army General Leslie Groves recruits Oppenheimer to lead the Manhattan Project to develop an atomic bomb after he gives assurances that he has no communist sympathies.

Oppenheimer, who is Jewish, is particularly driven by the Nazis potentially completing their nuclear weapons program, headed by Heisenberg. He assembles a scientific team including Edward Teller and Rabi in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and also collaborates with scientists Enrico Fermi and David L. Hill. As the work continues, Oppenheimer grieves over the apparent suicide of Tatlock.

Upon Adolf Hitler's death in 1945, some Project scientists question the bomb's relevance, while Oppenheimer believes it will quickly end the ongoing war in the Pacific and save Allied lives. Teller's calculations reveal the possibility that an atomic detonation could trigger a chain reaction that ignites the atmosphere and destroy the world. Oppenheimer brings this revelation to Albert Einstein, who declines to be involved, and Oppenheimer concludes that the chances of the accident occurring are "near zero".

The Trinity test is successful, and President Harry S. Truman orders the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, forcing Japan's surrender. Oppenheimer is thrust into the public eye as the "father of the atomic bomb", but the immense destruction and mass fatalities haunt him. He urges Truman to restrict further nuclear weapons development, which Truman curtly dismisses.

As an advisor to the US Atomic Energy Commission, Oppenheimer advocates against further nuclear research, especially the hydrogen bomb proposed by Teller. His stance becomes a point of contention amid the tense Cold War. AEC Chairman Lewis Strauss comes to resent Oppenheimer for publicly humiliating him when dismissing his concerns about exporting radioisotopes, and for recommending

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Cinematography	<div><u>Hoyte van Hoytema</u></div>
Edited by	<div><u>Jennifer Lame</u></div>
Music by	<div><u>Ludwig Göransson</u></div>
Production companies	<div><u>Syncopy Inc.</u> <u>Atlas Entertainment</u></div>
Distributed by	<div><u>Universal Pictures</u></div>
Release dates	<div>July 11, 2023 (<u>Le Grand Rex</u>) July 21, 2023 (<u>United States and United Kingdom</u>)</div>
Running time	<div>180 minutes^[1]</div>
Countries	<div><u>United States</u> <u>United Kingdom</u></div>
Language	<div>English</div>
Budget	<div>\$100 million^[2]</div>
Box office	<div>\$853 million^{[3][4]}</div>

negotiations with the Soviets after they successfully detonate their own bomb. Strauss also believes that Oppenheimer denigrated him to Einstein in 1947 during their visit to the Institute for Advanced Study.

In 1954, desiring to eliminate Oppenheimer's political influence, Strauss secretly orchestrates a private hearing before a Personnel Security Board to decide whether to renew Oppenheimer's Q clearance. However, it quickly becomes clear that the hearing has a predetermined outcome—special counsel Roger Robb harshly cross-examines Oppenheimer, negatively twists the testimony of Groves, Teller, and other associates, and fixates on Oppenheimer's past communist associations. The board votes 2–1 to strip Oppenheimer of his clearance, damaging his public image and limiting his influence on nuclear policy.

In 1959, during Strauss' Senate confirmation hearing for Secretary of Commerce, Hill testifies for the scientific community about Strauss' personal motives in engineering Oppenheimer's downfall. The Senate votes against his nomination. Strauss rants in private that Oppenheimer would do it again if he had the chance because it made him important. In 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson presents Oppenheimer with the Enrico Fermi Award as a gesture of political rehabilitation.

A flashback shows Einstein and Oppenheimer's conversation in 1947, revealing that Oppenheimer never mentioned Strauss, but instead expressed his somber belief that he had indeed started a different kind of chain reaction that would destroy the world.

Cast

- Cillian Murphy as J. Robert Oppenheimer, a theoretical physicist and director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory.^[8]
- Emily Blunt as Katherine "Kitty" Oppenheimer, Robert Oppenheimer's wife and a former Communist Party USA member.^[9]
- Matt Damon as Gen. Leslie Groves, a USACE officer and director of the Manhattan Project.^[10]
- Robert Downey Jr. as Lewis Strauss, a high-ranking member of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission.^[10]
- Florence Pugh as Jean Tatlock, a psychiatrist, Communist Party USA member, and Robert Oppenheimer's romantic interest.^[11]
- Josh Hartnett as Ernest Lawrence, a Nobel-winning nuclear physicist who worked with Oppenheimer at the University of California, Berkeley.^{[12][13]}
- Casey Affleck as Boris Pash, a U.S. Army military intelligence officer and commander of the Alsos Mission.^[14]
- Rami Malek as David L. Hill, a nuclear physicist at the Met Lab, who helped to create the Chicago Pile.^[11]
- Kenneth Branagh as Niels Bohr, a Nobel-winning physicist, philosopher and Oppenheimer's personal idol.^[15]



Cillian Murphy plays J. Robert Oppenheimer.

- Benny Safdie as Edward Teller, a theoretical physicist known for being the "father of the hydrogen bomb".^[11]
- Jason Clarke as Roger Robb, a U.S circuit judge who was a special counsel at Oppenheimer's security hearing.^[16]
- Dylan Arnold as Frank Oppenheimer, Robert's younger brother and a particle physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project.^[17]
- Tom Conti as Albert Einstein, Nobel-winning theoretical physicist known for developing the theory of relativity.^[18]
- James D'Arcy as Patrick Blackett, Oppenheimer's college professor and Nobel-winning physicist at Cambridge University.^[19]
- David Dastmalchian as William L. Borden, a lawyer and executive director of the JCAE.^[20]
- Dane DeHaan as Maj Gen. Kenneth Nichols, a U.S Army officer and the deputy district engineer of the Manhattan Project.^[21]
- Alden Ehrenreich as a Senate aide to Lewis Strauss, a fictional character who is an aide during Strauss' nomination for United States Secretary of Commerce.^{[22][23]}
- Tony Goldwyn as Gordon Gray, a government official and chairman of the committee deciding the revoking of Oppenheimer security clearance.^[24]
- Jefferson Hall as Haakon Chevalier, a Berkeley professor who became friends with Oppenheimer at university.^{[25][26]}
- David Krumholtz as Isidor Isaac Rabi, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who worked as a consultant on the Manhattan Project.^[22]
- Matthew Modine as Vannevar Bush, head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development.^[27]
- Gustaf Skarsgård as Hans Bethe, a German-American Nobel-winning theoretical physicist and the head of the Theoretical Division at Los Alamos.^[28]
- Michael Angarano as Robert Serber, a physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project.^[12]
- Jack Quaid as Richard Feynman, a Nobel-winning theoretical physicist who worked in the Theoretical Division at Los Alamos.^[29]
- Josh Peck as Kenneth Bainbridge, a physicist who was the director of the Manhattan Project's Trinity nuclear test.^[30]
- Olivia Thirlby as Lilli Hornig, a Czech-American scientist who worked on the Manhattan Project.^[31]
- Christopher Denham as Klaus Fuchs, a German-born physicist and communist spy who worked on the Manhattan Project.^[32]
- David Rysdahl as Donald Hornig, a chemist who worked on the firing unit at Los Alamos.^[33]
- Louise Lombard as Ruth Tolman, a psychologist close to Oppenheimer during the development of the atomic bomb.^[34]
- Harrison Gilbertson as Philip Morrison, a physics professor who worked on the Manhattan Project.^[35]
- Trond Fausa Aurvåg as George Kistiakowsky, a Harvard professor who took part in the Manhattan Project.^[36]
- Olli Haaskivi as Edward Condon, a nuclear physicist who helped with the development of radar and briefly took part in the Manhattan Project.^[17]
- Devon Bostick as Seth Neddermeyer, a physicist who discovered the muon and advocated for the implosion-type nuclear weapon used in the Trinity Test.^[37]

- Macon Blair as Lloyd K. Garrison, a lawyer who helped to represent Oppenheimer at his security clearance hearing.^[38]
- Kurt Koehler as Thomas A. Morgan, an industrialist and former chairman of the board of the Sperry Corporation who was one of the panel members at Oppenheimer's security clearance hearing.^{[39][40]}
- Josh Zuckerman as Giovanni Rossi Lomanitz, a physicist who became Oppenheimer's protégé at Berkeley.^[41]
- Alex Wolff as Luis Walter Alvarez, a Nobel-winning physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project.^[42]
- Guy Burnet as George Eltenton, a chemical engineer in the US with ties to the Soviet Union.^[43]
- Emma Dumont as Jackie Oppenheimer, Frank's wife and Robert's sister-in-law.^[35]
- Jack Cutmore-Scott as Security Officer Lyall Johnson, a security officer at Berkeley who worked at the Manhattan Project.^[38]
- Scott Grimes as Counsel to Lewis Strauss^[32]
- Gary Oldman as Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the United States.^[44]
- Hap Lawrence as Lyndon B. Johnson, the 36th President of the United States.^[38]
- Harry Groener as Sen. Gale W. McGee^[38]
- Pat Skipper as Secretary of State James F. Byrnes^[38]
- Gregory Jbara as Sen. Warren Magnuson, Chairman, Senate Commerce Committee ^[38]
- Tim DeKay as Sen. John Pastore^[38]
- James Remar as Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War under President Truman.^[38]
- Danny Deferrari as Enrico Fermi, a Nobel-winning physicist and creator of the Chicago Pile.^[43]
- Máté Haumann as Leo Szilard, a Hungarian physicist who postulated that a nuclear chain reaction could be created.^[45]
- Matthias Schweighöfer as Werner Heisenberg, a German Nobel Prize-winning physicist who worked in the country's nuclear weapons program during World War II.^{[46][47]}
- James Urbaniak as Kurt Gödel, a mathematician known for his theorems that revolutionized mathematics and had far-reaching implications for philosophy and computer science.^[38]
- Rory Keane as Hartland Snyder, a physicist, who collaborated with Oppenheimer to calculate the gravitational collapse of a dust particle sphere.^[48]
- John Gowans as Ward V. Evans, who served as one of the panel members at Oppenheimer's security clearance hearing.^[48]
- Jessica Erin Martin as Charlotte Serber, head technical librarian at Los Alamos.^[49]
- Ronald Auguste as J. Ernest Wilkins Jr., a physicist who worked with Oppenheimer on the Manhattan Project.^[49]
- Will Roberts as George C. Marshall, a United States general who served as a key figure in the country's atomic weapons program.^[49]

Production

Development

Following the 2005 publication of the biography *American Prometheus* by Bird and Sherwin, director Sam Mendes had been interested in adapting the book into a film. After that project failed to materialize, and the book was optioned by various filmmakers over the next 15 years, the authors grew pessimistic about seeing their work adapted to the screen. At one point Oliver Stone was offered the opportunity to direct, but turned it down because he "couldn't find my way to its essence."^[50] In 2015, J. David Wargo optioned the book, then commissioned and rejected several scripts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wargo flew to Hollywood to meet with actor James Woods, who set up a meeting with Charles Roven, a producer for various Christopher Nolan films, and in turn, Roven gave a copy of the book to Nolan. Both Wargo and Woods are executive producers of the film.^[51]

Nolan had long desired to make a film about Oppenheimer, even prior to reading *American Prometheus*.^[52] In 2019, towards the end of production on Nolan's science-fiction film *Tenet* (2020), star Robert Pattinson gave the director a book of Oppenheimer's speeches. According to Nolan, the speeches showed the physicist "wrestling with the implications ... of what's happened and what [he's] done." Nolan wanted to depict "what it would have been like to be Oppenheimer in those moments" in contrast to *Tenet*, which employs time travel to curb a potential weapon of mass destruction.^{[53][2]}

In December 2020, Warner Bros. Pictures announced plans to give its 2021 films simultaneous releases in theaters and on HBO Max, citing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the film industry. Nolan, who had partnered with the studio on each one of his films starting with *Insomnia* (2002), was outraged with the decision as he had been a proponent of film theaters.^[54] In January 2021, media reports mentioned the possibility that Nolan's next film could be the first not to be financed or distributed by Warner Bros.^[55] By mid-2021, the filmmaker had left Warner Bros. and was meeting with other studios to develop his new project.^[2] Nolan had previously supported the studio's decision to give *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020) a simultaneous release, stating that he perceived that situation to have been handled properly, but said he had been excluded from any discussions regarding the postponed release of *Tenet*.^{[56][57]}

In September 2021, it was announced that Nolan would write and direct a biographical film set during World War II about Oppenheimer, with Cillian Murphy in negotiations to star.^{[58][59]} Due to his strained relationship with Warner Bros., Nolan approached multiple studios for the project, including Sony Pictures, Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures, and Apple Studios.^{[60][61]} According to insiders, Paramount was ruled out early in the process in relation to the replacement of CEO and chairman Jim Gianopulos with Brian Robbins, an advocate for increased streaming-service releases.^[61] Nolan had connections to Donna Langley, the chairman and chief content officer of the NBCUniversal studio group, who agreed with his stance in favor of traditional film exhibition in theaters. As such, Universal agreed to finance and distribute *Oppenheimer*, with production set to begin in the first quarter of 2022.^[62] The studio also agreed to Nolan's terms, which included a production budget of \$100 million, an equal marketing budget, an exclusive theatrical window ranging from 90 to 120 days, 20 percent of the film's first-dollar gross, and a three-week period both before and after the film's release in which Universal could not release another new film.^{[61][2]}

Writing

Oppenheimer is the first screenplay written by Nolan in the first person, as he wanted the narrative to be conveyed from Oppenheimer's perspective. He described the "texture" of the film being "how the personal interacts with the historic and the geopolitical" with the intention of making it a cautionary tale.^{[52][63][64]} He began developing the script after he completed *Tenet* and wrote it in only a few months; he had already been thinking about making a film about Oppenheimer for over 20 years.^[52]

A major plot element is Oppenheimer's response to the long-term consequences of his actions. Nolan wished to explore the phenomenon of delayed reactions, as he felt people are not "necessarily confronted with the strongest or worst elements of [their actions] in the moment".^[65] He also chose to alternate between scenes in color and black-and-white to convey the story from both subjective and objective perspectives, respectively,^[66] with most of Oppenheimer's view shown via the former, while the latter depicts a "more objective view of his story from a different character's point of view".^{[67][65]} Wanting to make the film as subjective as possible, the production team decided to include visions of Oppenheimer's conceptions of the quantum world and waves of energy.^[68] Nolan noted that Oppenheimer never publicly apologized for his role in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but still desired to portray Oppenheimer as feeling genuine guilt for his actions, believing this to be accurate.^[69]



Writer, director, and producer Christopher Nolan

Nolan began by trying to find the "thread that connected the quantum realm, the vibration of energy, and Oppenheimer's own personal journey" and sought to portray the difficulties in his life, particularly regarding his sex life.^[53] As such, Nolan wanted to candidly portray his affair with Jean Tatlock. He also wanted to explore Tatlock's influence on Oppenheimer's life, since she was a Communist, which had "enormous ramifications for [Oppenheimer's] later life and his ultimate fate".^[71] Nolan also sought to explore the relationship between Oppenheimer and Admiral Lewis Strauss, former chair of the Atomic Energy Commission, having been inspired by the relationship between Mozart and Antonio Salieri as depicted in Amadeus (1984).^[65]

Another critical moment of the film was the meeting in which President Harry S. Truman called Oppenheimer a "crybaby". Nolan wanted to convey the scene from Oppenheimer's perspective and felt it was a "massive moment of disillusion, a huge turning point [for Oppenheimer] in his approach to trying to deal with the consequences of what he'd been involved with", while also underscoring that it is a "huge shift in perception about the reality of Oppenheimer's perception".^[52] He wanted to execute a quick tonal shift after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, desiring to go from the "highest triumphalism, the highest high, to the lowest low in the shortest amount of screen time possible".^[64] For the ending, Nolan chose to make it intentionally vague to be open to interpretation and refrained from being didactic or conveying specific messages in his work. However, he did have the intention to have a "strong set of troubling reverberations at the end".^[69]

Nolan first became aware of Oppenheimer as a youth, after hearing the lyric "How can I save my little boy from Oppenheimer's deadly toy?" in the Sting song "Russians" (1985).^[65] He was also inspired by his fears of nuclear holocaust throughout childhood, as he lived during the era of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the anti-nuclear protests in RAF Greenham Common. He felt that "while our relationship with that [nuclear] fear has ebbed and flowed with time, the threat itself never actually went away", and felt the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine had caused a resurgence of nuclear anxiety.^[53] Nolan had also penned a script for a biographic film on Howard Hughes approximately during the time of production of Martin Scorsese's The Aviator (2004), which had given him insight

I think of any character I've dealt with, Oppenheimer is by far the most ambiguous and paradoxical. Which, given that I've made three Batman films, is saying a lot.

— Christopher Nolan,
Total Film^[70]

on how to write a script regarding a person's life.^[52] Emily Blunt described the *Oppenheimer* script as "emotional" and resembling that of a thriller, while also remarking that Nolan had "Trojan-Horsed a biopic into a thriller".^[70]

Casting

Oppenheimer marks the sixth collaboration between Nolan and Murphy, and the first starring Murphy as the lead. To prepare for the role, the actor did what he summarized as "an awful lot of reading" on Oppenheimer's life and had also been inspired by David Bowie's appearance in the 1970s.^{[72][8][65]} Nolan called Murphy one day to ask him to play the part, and Murphy enthusiastically accepted and was excited to play a lead role in a Nolan film. Afterward, Nolan flew to Dublin to meet with Murphy, who read the script in Nolan's hotel room.^[73] Murphy lost an undisclosed amount of weight for the role in order to better match the real-life Oppenheimer's gaunt appearance.^[74] Nolan also set up a telephone call between Murphy and Nobel laureate Kip Thorne, who had previously worked with Nolan on *Interstellar* (2014).^[52] As a graduate student, Thorne had attended some of Oppenheimer's seminars, and explained to Murphy his experience with Oppenheimer's gift for facilitating group discussions of difficult scientific concepts.^[52]

The casting process was so secretive that some cast members did not know which role they would be playing until they signed on.^[42] Robert Downey Jr., Matt Damon, and Emily Blunt took pay cuts to work on the film, earning \$4 million each in lieu of their usual \$10–20 million upfront salary.^[75] Downey went to Nolan's house to read the script, which was printed in black on red paper.^[76] Downey described *Oppenheimer* as "the best film" in which he has appeared to date.^[77] Blunt met Nolan in Los Angeles and, when she was offered the role of Katherine "Kitty" Oppenheimer, she enthusiastically accepted; she also contacted Murphy to get an expectation of what working with Nolan would be like.^[76] Damon – who had previously worked with Nolan on *Interstellar* – was taking a break from acting as a result of negotiations with his wife in couples therapy, but signed on to *Oppenheimer* as he had reserved one exception: if Nolan offered him a role in a film.^[78] Nolan cast writer-director Benny Safdie as physicist Edward Teller after asking director Paul Thomas Anderson about his experience directing Safdie in *Licorice Pizza* (2021).^[79] Safdie had worked alongside a nuclear physicist at Columbia University while in high school.^[65]

The film also marks the first time in many years that Nolan did not cast Michael Caine, who had appeared in every Nolan film since *Batman Begins* (2005). When asked about Caine's absence from the film, Nolan stated, "He's with us in spirit, but not an actual actor. No, no. He wasn't able to join us for this one. But he's always with us in spirit, and I've had the most wonderful collaboration with him over the years."^{[80][81]}

Filming

Pre-production had begun by January 2022 in New Mexico, where a two-day casting call took place in Santa Fe and Los Alamos for people to audition to play local residents, military personnel, and scientists.^{[82][83]} Another casting call was held in February.^[84]

Principal photography began on February 28, 2022, at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico,^[85] and lasted for 57 days with Hoyte van Hoytema serving as cinematographer.^{[74][22]} The original shooting schedule had set aside approximately 85 days for principal photography.^[86] During pre-production, it had become clear there was no way to shoot a feature film for \$100 million over that many days on

location all over the United States.^[86] To free up money in the film's budget for location shooting in California and New Jersey and for construction of high-quality period sets in New Mexico, Nolan compressed the shooting schedule to 55 days.^[86] Murphy, who appears in nearly every scene, described the pace as "insane".^[86]

Gary Oldman said he would be on set for a day in May for "one scene, a page and a half."^[44] Nolan filmed his eldest child, his daughter Flora, in a scene in which she played a young woman disintegrated in a nuclear explosion. It appears in the film as

one of Oppenheimer's visions, in which Nolan intended to show "that if you create the ultimate destructive power, it will also destroy those who are near and dear to you."^[53]



Filming took place at the University of California, Berkeley in May 2022.

The film used a combination of IMAX 65 mm and 65 mm large-format film.^[8] It is also the first film to shoot sections on IMAX black-and-white photographic film, which Kodak created and FotoKem developed specifically for the film.^{[87][88]} Van Hoytema used 50mm and 80mm Hasselblad lenses when filming on the IMAX MKIV or IMAX MSM 9802 cameras, while scenes shot on the Panavision Panaflex System 65 Studio cameras were shot using Panavision Sphero 65 and Panavision System 65 lenses. Said Van Hoytema, "When shooting our close-ups, we didn't want the camera to be six feet away from our subject. We wanted to be much tighter, so that you really feel the perspective and the intimacy. Also, I knew we would be filming in low-light situations and would need to shoot at T1.4 rather than a T4."^[89] Additionally, the production had Panavision construct a custom probe lens to allow the filmmakers to use IMAX cameras for macro photography to record the films miniature effects.^[90] In the second week of April, filming took place on location at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.^[91] Filming also occurred in California,^[31] primarily around the campus of the University of California, Berkeley.^[92]

During a 2021 research trip, Nolan discovered that Los Alamos had drastically changed from its 1940s appearance and could not be used for exterior shots of the town; for example, the town's equivalent of a Main Street has a Starbucks.^[85] Instead, the production team constructed a version of 1940s-era Los Alamos on top of a similar plateau at Ghost Ranch.^[85] It took three months to build the set, which was used for only six shooting days.^[85] The production also shot some scenes on location in the real town of Los Alamos starting on March 8, 2022.^[85] Many scenes in the film take place in academic lecture halls; to save time and money, the production team decided against attempting to recreate those halls as sets at Ghost Ranch, and instead shot them inside a historic Women's Army Corps dormitory in Los Alamos.^[85] Scenes were also filmed in Oppenheimer's original cabin in Los Alamos, which had been restored. Kai Bird visited the set and was impressed by Murphy's performance as Oppenheimer during filming.^[93]

Filming involved the use of real explosives to recreate the Trinity nuclear test, forgoing the use of computer-generated graphics.^[94] When this news first broke online, many fans (aware of Nolan's famous preference for in-camera practical effects) thought it meant he had set off a real atomic

bomb.^[2] Nolan later remarked that it was both "flattering" and "scary" that his fans would think that of him.^[2] The production team was able to obtain government permission to film at White Sands Missile Range, but only at highly inconvenient hours, and therefore chose to film the scene elsewhere in the New Mexico desert.^[2] The production filmed the Trinity test scenes in Belen, New Mexico, with Murphy climbing a 100-foot steel tower, a replica of the original site used in the Manhattan Project, in rough weather.^[2] A special set was built in which gasoline, propane, aluminum powder, and magnesium were used to create the explosive effect.^[53] Although they used miniatures for the practical effect, the film's special effects supervisor Scott R. Fisher referred to them as "big-atures", since the special effects team had tried to build the models as physically large as possible. To make the models look closer to their intended real-life size, the team used forced perspective.^{[95][96]} Visualizations of the interactions between atoms, molecules and energy waves, as well as the depiction of stars, black holes and supernovas, were also achieved through practical methods. Nolan claimed the film contains no computer-generated effects.^[97] Filming wrapped in May 2022.^[98]

Post-production

During post-production, editing was completed by Jennifer Lame, who had previously edited *Tenet*.^[8] While inspecting the footage during editing, Nolan and Lame performed "character passes" to ensure all the characters were properly displayed on screen, due to the film having a faster pace than most traditional blockbusters.^[65] Visual effects were handled by DNEG, which produced more than 100 VFX shots from more than 400 practically shot elements,^[99] marking their eighth collaboration with Nolan. Andrew Jackson was the visual effects supervisor.^[100] Digital compositing was used for the Trinity scene to add multi-layers to the explosion which was shot in a multifaceted viewpoint.^[101]

Music

Ludwig Göransson composed the score for the film, after doing so for Nolan's previous film, *Tenet*.^[8] Göransson's score was featured in a trailer for the film on May 8, 2023.^[102] It was also featured in the Universal Pictures exclusive five-minute Opening Look on July 13.^{[103][104]} Nolan had advised him to use the violin for Oppenheimer's central theme in the film, with Göransson remarking that he had felt that it could go from "the most romantic, beautiful tone in a split second to neurotic and heart wrenching, horror sounds."^[65]

Release

Marketing

Oppenheimer's teaser trailer was released on July 28, 2022, featuring a live countdown to 5:29 a.m. (MST) on July 16, 2023, the 78th anniversary of the first detonation of an atomic weapon; it premiered in screenings of *Nope* before being posted online on Universal's social media profiles.^[105] *Empire* commented that it is exemplary of Nolan's style: "heady, brooding stuff with a real sense of weight".^[106] In December 2022, two trailers for the film premiered in front of *Avatar: The Way of Water*, with one being exclusive to IMAX theaters and the other being shown in all other formats. The

latter was eventually released online.^{[107][108]} In May 2023, an official main trailer debuted during preview screenings of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*. It was subsequently released to the public on May 8, 2023, alongside a theatrical release poster.^[109]

Theatrical release

Oppenheimer had its world premiere at Le Grand Rex in Paris on July 11, 2023,^[110] followed by the British premiere at Odeon Luxe Leicester Square in London on July 13,^[111] and the American premiere at AMC Loews Lincoln Square in New York City on July 17.^[112] Both the London and the New York premieres were affected by the ongoing SAG-AFTRA strike, as some actors left the London premiere early,^[111] and Universal Pictures canceled the red carpet event for the New York premiere.^[112] SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher later claimed the studios "duped" the guild into accepting a twelve-day-extension for negotiations to continue promoting summer films like *Oppenheimer*.^[113] *Oppenheimer* was released theatrically on July 21, 2023, by Universal Pictures.^{[8][114]} In addition to standard digital cinemas, it will be also released in various film formats including IMAX 70 mm (30 prints), standard 70 mm (113 prints) and 35 mm (around 80 prints).^[115]



Oppenheimer advertisement in Katowice, Poland

The film was released on the same day as *Barbie*, a fantasy comedy film directed by Greta Gerwig based on Mattel's Barbie fashion dolls and media franchise, and distributed by Warner Bros. Many speculated that Warner Bros.' decision to release *Barbie* on the same day as *Oppenheimer* was done in order to deplete ticket sales of *Oppenheimer*, as retaliation for Nolan releasing the film with Universal.^[116] Due to the tonal and genre dissonance between the two films, many social media users created memes about how the two films appealed to different audiences,^[117] and how they should be viewed as a double feature.^[118] The trend was dubbed "Barbenheimer".^[119] In an interview with *La Vanguardia*, Cillian Murphy endorsed the phenomenon, saying "My advice would be for people to go see both, on the same day. If they are good films, then that's cinema's gain."^{[120][121]}

As of March 2022, Universal Pictures halted the release of its titles in Russia, joining other major American film distributors in the boycott against the country following its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.^[122] *Oppenheimer* consequently did not have a Russian release.

In Japan, the only country to have been attacked by nuclear bombs, the film is yet to have a release date. In late June 2023, a Universal Pictures spokesperson told *Variety* that "plans have not been finalized in all markets." *Variety* also pointed out that it's not uncommon for American films to be released in Japan months after the theatrical debut in the United States.^[123] *The Economist* suggested that due to the film's controversial theme in Japan, it may never get released there.^[124]

Classifications and censorship

In the United States, the film received an R-rating from the Motion Picture Association for "some sexuality, nudity, and language", meaning anyone under 17 needs to be accompanied by an adult guardian. It is Nolan's first film to receive that rating since *Insomnia* (2002).^[125] In Australia, the film received an MA 15+ rating from the Australian Classification Board board for "strong sex and a suicide

scene".^[126] In the United Kingdom, the film received a 15 certificate from the British Board of Film Classification for "strong language and sex", meaning anyone under the age of 15 cannot be admitted to view the film.^[127]

In some countries, including those in the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia, Universal distributed a version of the film with Florence Pugh's nude body covered by a computer-generated black dress.^{[128][129][130]}

India

In India, *Oppenheimer* was released with all instances of nudity, sex and cigarette smoking scenes censored (but not cut) by the filmmakers, earning the U/A certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) while retaining the running time.^[131] The audio from the scene, where Tatlock directs Oppenheimer to read a verse from the Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita, "I am become Death, destroyer of worlds", while the two have intercourse, remained intact.^[132] As NDTV reported, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting Anurag Thakur questioned how the CBFC certified the film with the verse heard during such circumstance in the first place, and asked the scene to be deleted.^[133]

The Hindu right in India took offence at and demanded the removal of the scene.^[134] Among them was journalist Uday Mahurkar, who wrote an open letter to Nolan calling the scene a "direct assault on religious beliefs of a billion tolerant Hindus", and demanded its removal from all releases of *Oppenheimer* across the world.^[132] On the other hand, actor Nitish Bharadwaj, who played Krishna in the television series *Mahabharat*, told *The Times of India* that "The use of this verse in the film should also be understood from Oppenheimer's emotional state of mind. A scientist thinks of his creation [24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year], irrespective of what he is doing. His mind space is consumed fully of his creation [and] the physical act is just a natural mechanical act."^[135]

Despite the opposition from Hindu fundamentalists, *Oppenheimer* was well received in most of the country.^[134]

Reception

Box office

As of September 4, 2023, *Oppenheimer* has grossed \$310.3 million in the United States and Canada, and \$542.7 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$853 million.^{[3][4]}

By August 2023, *Oppenheimer* had become the highest-grossing film ever to not reach the top spot at the domestic box office, though in its sixth weekend it topped the worldwide box office with a total of \$38.12 million, surpassing *Barbie* for the first time.^[136] It is also the highest grossing World War II-related film.^{[137][138][139]} Additionally, *Oppenheimer* became one of the top five highest-grossing IMAX releases, earning \$170 million (approximately 20% of its total gross), over \$17 million of which was earned from the 30 screens showing IMAX 70mm prints.^[140]

United States and Canada

In the United States and Canada, *Oppenheimer* was released alongside *Barbie*, and was originally projected to gross \$45–50 million from 3,610 theaters in its opening weekend.^[141] The week of their releases, AMC Theatres announced that over 40,000 AMC Stubs members had already pre-booked tickets to both films on the same day.^[142] After grossing \$33 million on its first day (including \$10.5 million from Thursday night previews), weekend estimates were raised to \$77 million. It went on to debut to \$82.5 million,^[143] finishing second behind *Barbie* and marking one of the best opening weekends ever for an R-rated drama; 64% of the audience was male, with 33% being 18–34 years old. The Barbenheimer phenomenon was credited with boosting interest in the film, with a total of 79% of tickets sold over the weekend being for the two films (27% for *Oppenheimer*), a combined total of 18.5 million people.^[144] The film's opening weekend was Nolan's best for an original film, being the highest of his filmography outside of the latter two films from *The Dark Knight* trilogy.^[145] The film made \$46.2 million in its second weekend (a drop of 44%), remaining in second behind *Barbie*.^{[146][147]} The film made \$28.7 million in its third weekend, finishing third behind *Barbie* and newcomer *Meg 2: The Trench*.^[148] On August 16, *Oppenheimer* surpassed *Sing* to become the highest-grossing film to never reach the number one spot at the box office.^{[149][150]} In its fourth weekend the film made \$18.8 million (a drop of 35%) rising back up to second place^[151]. In its fifth and sixth weekends the film grossed \$10.7 million and \$9 million (a drop of 43% and 16% respectively), finishing in third and fourth place at the box office and passing \$300 million domestically in its sixth weekend.^[151]

Other territories

Outside the US and Canada, the film grossed \$98 million in its opening weekend.^[152] The following weekend, *Oppenheimer* earned \$77.1 million, dropping by just 21% to become Nolan's highest-grossing film in 30 countries, including India, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Turkey.^[153] In its third weekend, *Oppenheimer* grossed \$52.8 million (a drop of 31%)^[154] and \$32 million in its fourth weekend.^[155] The film continued to hold well in the following weeks, making \$32 million and \$29.1 million in its fifth and sixth weekends.^{[156][157]} As of September 3, 2023, the highest grossing territories were the United Kingdom (\$70.7 million), Germany (\$45.4 million), France (\$39.3 million), China (\$30.5 million) and Australia (\$25.3 million).^[158]

Critical response

Critics praised *Oppenheimer* primarily for its screenplay, the performances of the cast (particularly Murphy and Downey), and the visuals;^{[159][160]} it was frequently cited as one of the best films of 2023 up to that point, although some criticism was aimed towards the writing of the female characters.^[159] On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 93% of 461 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.6/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Oppenheimer* marks another engrossing achievement from Christopher Nolan that benefits from Murphy's tour-de-force performance and stunning visuals."^[161] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 88 out of 100, based on 69 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[162] Audiences surveyed by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A" on an A+ to F scale, while those polled at PostTrak gave it a 93% overall positive score, with 74% saying they would definitely recommend the film.^[144]

Richard Roeper of the *Chicago Sun-Times* awarded *Oppenheimer* a perfect four out of four stars, describing it as "magnificent" and "one of the best films of the 21st century".^[163] *The A.V. Club's* Matthew Jackson deemed it a "masterpiece", adding that "it's Christopher Nolan's best film so far, a

step up to a new level for one of our finest filmmakers, and a movie that burns itself into your brain".^[164]

Empire's Dan Jolin labeled it a "masterfully constructed character study", taking particular note of Murphy's performance and van Hoytema's IMAX cinematography.^[165] Peter Suderman writing for *Reason* magazine said that the film leaves the viewer with a sense of "fear and foreboding about the horror of full-on nuclear conflict in the wake of the nuclear bomb. Humanity is both great *and* terrible. *Oppenheimer* isn't just a movie—it's a warning."^[166] Matt Zoller Seitz, writing for *RogerEbert.com* gave *Oppenheimer* a full four stars rating. He lauded Nolan's storytelling, exploration of Oppenheimer's character, and the film's technical achievements, concluding: "As a physical experience, *Oppenheimer* is something else entirely—it's hard to say exactly what, and that's what's so fascinating about it".^[167]

Peter Travers of *ABC News* described the film as a "monumental achievement" and "one of the best films you'll see anywhere".^[168] Caryn James of *BBC Culture* similarly termed it "boldly imaginative and [Nolan's] most mature work yet", adding that it combined the "explosive, commercially-enticing action of *The Dark Knight* trilogy" with the "cerebral underpinnings" of *Memento*, *Inception* and *Tenet*.^[169] *IGN* critic Siddhant Adlakha gave *Oppenheimer* 10/10, describing it as "a three-hour biopic that plays like a jolting thriller" and Nolan's most "abstract" work yet.^[170]

Saibal Chatterjee from *NDTV* rated the film 4.5 stars out of 5 and stated: "*Oppenheimer*, a cinematic achievement of blinding brilliance, achieves a sublime combination of visual grandeur, technical flair, emotional intimacy and an examination of the limits of human endeavor and ambition".^[171] In August 2023, it ranked number 3 on *Collider*'s list of "The 10 Best Drama Movies of the 2020s So Far," writing that Nolan "explores the world's obsession with destructive nuclear weapons from the perspective of their creator; using the Greek myth of Dante as an inspiration, *Oppenheimer* makes it clear that once this type of power is unleashed, it is bound to be used again."^[172]

Despite praising the film's themes and performances, *CNN*'s Brian Lowry believed that "Nolan juggles a lot, in a way that somewhat works to the movie's detriment".^[173] While acknowledging the contribution of "American scientists and American enterprise", Brett Mason noted that the film omits the crucial contributions of non-Americans that ensured the work was able to commence as early as December 1941: "Nolan completely ignores the crucial role that British science and Australian physicist Mark Oliphant played in jump-starting the quest."^[174]

Justin Chang, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, staunchly defended Nolan's artistic integrity in accurately depicting Oppenheimer's inability to see the true victims of his work.^[175] Instead of detouring to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to satisfy "representational completists ... Nolan treats them instead as a profound absence, an indictment by silence".^[175]

Accolades

Oppenheimer received nominations for Best Thriller, Best Drama TV Spot (for a Feature Film), Best Sound Editing in a TV Spot (for a Feature Film), and Best Thriller TV Spot (for a Feature Film); and won Best Drama, Best Summer 2023 Blockbuster Trailer, and Best Sound Editing at the 2023 Golden Trailer Awards.^{[176][177]} It finished as runner-up for Most Anticipated Film at the 6th Hollywood Critics Association Midseason Film Awards.^[178]

Influence

The renewed attention to the site and associated nuclear testing pushed the United States Senate to pass legislation which, if passed by Congress, could provide compensation and health care funding to those who were affected, known as the "Downwinders".^[179]

Historical accuracy

The film was praised for its accuracy, with some scenes being taken word-for-word out of the book or real-life events.^[180]

Many of the changes are small embellishments or changes from real-life. For example, Oppenheimer was not as excited about his discovery of black holes as it is shown in the film since he did not know how significant it would be; the study was, indeed, released the same day Germany invaded Poland, as shown in the film. During the Trinity test, Donald Hornig had his hand on the kill switch for a faster reaction time, not near it as depicted in the film. Truman did say "Don't bring that crybaby into my office again," but not immediately after their meeting.^{[180][181]}

The scene where Oppenheimer poisons his professor's apple is based on accounts that Oppenheimer gave of the incident, but it is unclear whether it occurred in real life.^[182] In the film, Oppenheimer is depicted as putting potassium cyanide in the apple before having a change of heart the next day, and then narrowly preventing the apple from being eaten. There is no evidence that Niels Bohr nearly ate the apple, or had any involvement in the incident.^{[180][183]}

Oppenheimer and Einstein were friends, but the specific conversations which the film revolves around never happened.^[180] Oppenheimer took his concerns about an unstoppable chain reaction to Karl Taylor Compton, not Einstein.^[180]

See also

- List of films about nuclear issues
- List of World War II films since 1990
- Oppenheimer*, a 1980 TV series about Oppenheimer, portrayed by Sam Waterston
- Fat Man and Little Boy*, a 1989 film about the Manhattan Project
- Doctor Atomic*, a 2005 opera about Oppenheimer, composed by John Adams

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.oppenheimermovie.com/>) 
- Oppenheimer* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15398776/>) at *IMDb*
- Oppenheimer* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v734156>) at *AllMovie*
- Oppenheimer* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/oppenheimer_2023) at *Rotten Tomatoes*

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