

James Gunn



James Francis Gunn Jr. (born August 5, 1966) is an American filmmaker and studio executive. He began his career as a screenwriter in the mid-1990s, starting at Troma Entertainment with Tromeo and Juliet (1997). He then began working as a director, starting with the horror-comedy film Slither (2006), and moving to the superhero genre with Super (2010), Guardians of the Galaxy (2014), Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 (2017), The Suicide Squad (2021), and Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3 (2023). In 2022, Warner Bros. Discovery hired Gunn and Peter Safran to become co-chairmen and co-CEOs of DC Studios. [1] Under DC Studios, Gunn will co-produce and executive produce every film and television series under the upcoming DC Universe (DCU) media franchise alongside Safran, which will act as a soft-reboot of the DC Extended Universe (DCEU). He will also continue to write and direct various projects set in the DCU, including the upcoming film Superman: Legacy (2025).

He also wrote and directed the web series James Gunn's PG Porn (2008–2009), the HBO Max original series Peacemaker (2022-present) and Creature Commandos (2024), and the Disney+ original special The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special (2022). Other projects he is known for is writing for the 2004 remake of George A. Romero's Dawn of the Dead (1978), writing the liveaction adaptation of Scooby Doo (2002), and its sequel Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed (2004), writing and producing the horror-action film The Belko Experiment (2016), producing the superhero-horror film Brightburn (2019), and contributing to comedy-anthology film Movie 43 (2013) (directing the segment "Beezel") and the 2012 hack-and-slash video game Lollipop Chainsaw.

Early life

James Francis Gunn Jr.[2] was born on August 5, 1966[3][n 1] in St. Louis, Missouri, [4] to parents James F. Gunn, an attorney, and Leota "Lee" (Hynek) [6][7][8] He was raised Catholic [9] in the St Louis suburb municipality of Manchester, Missouri. [10][11] He has five siblings — actor Sean, actor and political writer Matt, screenwriter Brian, Patrick, and Beth. [12][13][14] Gunn is of Irish and Jewish descent [15] his father coming from an Irish immigrant family. [16]Gunn has stated that his family's surname was originally the Irish name MacGilgunn and that it means "sons to the servants of the god of the dead"; it actually means "son of the brown youth." [17][18][19][20]

Growing up, Gunn was influenced by low-budget films such as Night of the Living Dead and Friday the 13th. He read magazines like Fangoria and attended genre movie screenings, including the original Dawn of the Dead at the Tivoli Theatre in St. Louis. At the age of 12, he began making 8 mm zombie films with his brothers in the woods near their home. [21]

James Gunn



Gunn at the 2	016 San Diego Comic-Con
Born	James Francis Gunn Jr. August 5, 1966 ^[n 1] St. Louis, <u>Missouri</u> , U.S.
Education	Saint Louis University (BA) Columbia University (MFA)
Occupations	Film director • film producer • screenwriter • studio executive
Years active	1989-present
Employer	Warner Bros. Discovery
Title	Co-chairman and Co-CEO of DC Studios
Spouses	Jenna Fischer (m. 2000; div. 2008) Jennifer Holland (m. 2022)
Relatives	Sean Gunn (brother) Matt Gunn (brother) Brian Gunn (brother) Mark Gunn (cousin)

Gunn and his brothers all attended the <u>Jesuit St. Louis University High School</u>, where he graduated in 1984. [5][6] He went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts from Saint Louis University. [22] While at Saint Louis University, Gunn created political cartoons for the school's student weekly, *The University News*. [23] Gunn said that, at an unspecified time in his college education, "I went to two

years undergraduate film school at <u>Loyola Marymount</u> in <u>Los Angeles</u>. But I was pretty screwed up at the time, and had to leave. Years later I went to graduate school at the <u>Columbia University School of Fine Arts</u> but I studied prose writing, not film writing." He earned a Master of Fine Arts from Columbia University in 1995. [25]

Career

Music

While living in St. Louis, Gunn founded a band, The Icons, in 1989, serving as lead vocalist. The group released the album *Mom, We Like It Here on Earth* in 1994, and its songs "Sunday" and "Walking Naked" were featured in the film *Tromeo and Juliet*. The Icons disbanded in the mid-1990s. Gunn has continued to work in music, composing songs for *Scooby-Doo*, *Scooby-Doo* 2: *Monsters Unleashed*, and *Movie 43*.

Film and television

Gunn began his career in filmmaking with <u>Troma Entertainment</u> in 1995, for which he cowrote the independent film <u>Tromeo and Juliet</u>. Working alongside his mentor <u>Lloyd Kaufman</u>, the co-founder of Troma, Gunn learned how to write screenplays, produce films, scout locations, direct actors, distribute films, and create his own poster art. [21] After contributing to several other Troma films, Gunn in 2000 wrote, produced and performed in the superhero comedy <u>The Specials</u>, directed by <u>Craig Mazin</u> and featuring <u>Rob Lowe</u>, <u>Thomas Haden</u> Church, Paget Brewster, Judy Greer and Jamie Kennedy.

Gunn's first major Hollywood screenplay was *Scooby-Doo* in 2002. In 2004, he wrote the screenplays for the remake of <u>Dawn of the Dead</u> and the sequel *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*. With these films, Gunn became the first screenwriter to have two films top the box office in consecutive weeks. That same year, he executive produced and starred in the mockumentary *LolliLove*, directed by and starring his then-wife Jenna Fischer. His film



Gunn in 2013

directorial debut was the 2006 horror-comedy $\underline{Slither}$, which was included on Rotten Tomatoes' list of the 50 Best Ever Reviewed Horror Movies. [28]

Gunn's next projects included the comedy short film "Humanzee!" which was originally intended exclusively for the Xbox Live's *Horror Meets Comedy* series of short comedy films by horror directors, it was replaced with "Sparky and Mikaela" which debuted on Xbox Live on December 31, 2008. In an April 2009 interview on *The Jace Hall Show*, Gunn described "Sparky and Mikaela" as being "about a human [and] racoon crime fighting team and they fight crime in both the forest world, among the furry animals, and in the human world". Gunn also has a short-form web series for Spike.com titled *James Gunn's PG Porn*.

In 2008, Gunn was a judge on the $\underline{VH1}$ reality television show $\underline{Scream~Queens}$, where 10 unknown actresses compete for a role in the film $\underline{Saw~VI}$.

In 2009, Gunn announced he was going to write and direct *Pets*, a comedy about a man who is abducted by aliens who want to turn him into a household pet, with <u>Ben Stiller</u>, <u>Stuart Cornfeld</u> and Jeremy Kramer producing. [31] However, by March 2009, Gunn announced, "*Pets* unfortunately, is done. I'm gone. I left the project for various reasons. I hope it sees the light of day somehow, but it won't be with me attached as director." [32]

In 2010, Gunn released <u>Super</u>, a <u>dark comedy</u> and <u>superhero</u> satire starring <u>Rainn Wilson</u> and <u>Elliot Page</u>. He also directed a segment of the 2013 comedy anthology film <u>Movie 43</u> (2013); the segment starred <u>Elizabeth Banks</u> and <u>Josh Duhamel</u>. The film was critically panned.

Gunn co-wrote and directed the <u>Marvel Studios</u> adaptation of <u>Guardians of the Galaxy</u>, which was released on August 1, 2014. His brother, Sean, has a role in the film. Gunn has appeared as an actor, mostly in smaller roles or uncredited appearances in his own projects. After <u>Dan Gilroy</u> and <u>Jack Black</u> separately lamented the proliferation of superhero films, Gunn responded in a Facebook post, saying in part:

Popular fare in any medium has always been snubbed by the self-appointed elite. ... What bothers me slightly is that many people assume because you make big films that you put less love, care, and thought into them than people do who make independent films or who make what are considered more serious Hollywood films. ... If you think

people who make superhero movies are dumb, come out and say we're dumb. But if you, as an independent filmmaker or a 'serious' filmmaker, think you put more love into your characters than the Russo Brothers do Captain America, or Joss Whedon does the Hulk, or I do a talking raccoon, you are simply mistaken. [35]

Gunn wrote and produced the <u>horror film</u> <u>The Belko Experiment</u>, which was released in 2017. In 2016, he directed three <u>Stan Lee</u> cameo scenes in one day, for the film <u>Doctor</u> <u>Strange</u> and two unrevealed projects. [37][38][39]

Gunn wrote and directed <u>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</u> (2017). [40][41][42] Gunn was slated to direct <u>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3</u> in July 2018, but before the project started, <u>Disney severed ties with Gunn as the director amid controversy over off-color jokes</u> he had <u>tweeted</u>. [43] Gunn was rehired in March 2019 after a mass public appeal, many saying he was the reason of the previous movies' successes. [44]



Gunn in 2014

In October 2018, Gunn was hired to write a completely new script for the <u>DC Extended</u> Universe film *The Suicide Squad*, with the intention of also serving as director, after its original

director <u>Gavin O'Connor</u> left due to scheduling issues. [45][46] In January 2019, he was officially confirmed to direct *The Suicide Squad*. [47] He also wrote, directed, and produced the spin-off <u>television series</u> for the film centered on the character <u>Peacemaker played by John Cena</u> for <u>Max</u>. [48] Gunn will also co-write and co-produce a live-action/animated film titled <u>Coyote vs. Acme</u>, based on the <u>Looney Tunes</u> character <u>Wile E. Coyote</u>, for <u>Warner Bros</u>. Pictures Animation. [49] He is also executive-producing a *Peacemaker* spin-off centered on <u>Amanda Waller</u>, with Christal Henry writing and <u>Viola Davis</u> reprising her role from previous DCEU projects. [50] In addition, Gunn is writing and directing another project for DC. [51] Gunn is also involved in multiple other DC projects, including television series. [51]

Other media

Gunn wrote a novel in 2000, <u>The Toy Collector</u>, a story of a hospital orderly who steals drugs from the hospital which he sells to help keep his toy collection habit alive. In 1998, he and Troma's President Lloyd Kaufman co-wrote <u>All I Need to Know about</u> *Filmmaking I Learned from The Toxic Avenger*, about his experiences with Kaufman while working at Troma.

He wrote the story for Grasshopper Manufacture's video game *Lollipop Chainsaw*, working with game designer Suda 51. [52]

Firing from Disney and reinstatement

In July 2018, in reaction to Gunn's public criticisms of <u>Donald Trump</u>, commentator <u>Mike Cernovich</u> drew attention to controversial jokes that Gunn posted on social media between 2008 and 2012 involving <u>pedophilia</u> and the <u>Holocaust</u>. [53][54] Amid criticism of the tweets, Disney severed ties with Gunn as the director of the upcoming *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3* film at the time; Gunn responded: "I have regretted [those jokes] for many years since. [...] Regardless of how much time has passed, I understand and accept the business decisions taken today. Even these many years later, I take full responsibility for the way I conducted myself then. All I can do now [is offer] my sincere and heartfelt regret [...] To everyone inside my industry and beyond, I again offer my deepest apologies."

Walt Disney Studios's decision received criticism from many entertainers and journalists, including actors <u>Dave Bautista</u>, <u>Selma Blair</u>, Patton Oswalt, David Dastmalchian, Michael Ian Black, Mikaela Hoover, Mike Colter, Alex Winter, David Hasselhoff, directors <u>Joe Carnahan</u> and <u>Fede Álvarez</u>, <u>comics artist Jim Starlin</u>, musician <u>Rhett Miller</u>, comedian <u>Jim Jefferies</u>, <u>Rick and Morty</u> creators <u>Justin Roiland</u> and <u>Dan Harmon</u>, journalist <u>David A</u>. <u>French</u> and Troma Entertainment founder and president <u>Lloyd Kaufman</u>. <u>[57][58][59]</u> <u>Bobcat Goldthwait</u>, who worked as a voice actor on the 1997 Disney film <u>Hercules</u>, responded to the incident by asking Disney to remove his voice from an upcoming park attraction based on the film.

A number of media outlets criticized Disney's decision, including <u>Collider</u>, <u>Cartoon Brew</u>, <u>The Daily Dot</u>, <u>The Independent</u>, <u>National Review</u>, <u>MovieWeb</u>, and <u>Vulture</u>. [61][58][62] An online petition urging Disney to re-hire Gunn received over 400,000 signatures. On July 30, 2018, <u>Guardians of the Galaxy</u> cast members <u>Chris Pratt</u>, <u>Zoe Saldana</u>, <u>Dave Bautista</u>, <u>Bradley Cooper</u>, <u>Vin Diesel</u>, <u>Sean Gunn</u>, <u>Karen Gillan</u>, <u>Pom Klementieff</u> and <u>Michael Rooker</u> released a joint statement through social media expressing their support for Gunn. [64]

Because of the situation, <u>Sony Pictures</u> decided to not promote the horror film <u>Brightburn</u>, which Gunn produced, at the 2018 <u>San Diego Comic-Con</u>. However, when the first trailer for the film was released on December 8, 2018, Gunn's name was prominently featured. The film opened in May 2019.

In March 2019, Gunn was reinstated by Disney as director of the film after meeting with Alan Horn, chairman of Walt Disney Studios. Gunn started production on *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol.* 3 in October 2021, after *The Suicide Squad* had been completed. [44]

DC Studios

Gunn and Peter Safran had advised David Zaslav, the CEO of the newly created Warner Bros. Discovery, during his search for a new head of \overline{DC} Films. The duo impressed Zaslav who decided to appoint them as the co-chairpersons and CEOs of DC Films, rebranded as "DC Studios", with control over films, animation and television projects based on characters from \overline{DC} Comics. Gunn oversees the creative aspects and will be exclusive to Warner Bros. Discovery during his tenure, except for his prior commitments to Disney. The two assumed their positions on November 1, 2022. $\overline{[67][68][69][70]}$

In December 2022, Gunn announced that he was writing a film about a young Superman during his early years in Metropolis, [71] later revealed to be titled *Superman: Legacy* and scheduled for release in July 2025; in March 2023 it was confirmed Gunn would also direct the project. [72] In January 2023, Gunn and Safran revealed their plans for future DCU films, with the first chapter being titled "Gods and Monsters". Gunn was also revealed to be writing a seven-episode animated series titled *Creature Commandos*, based on the comic book team of the same name, [73] and working on the HBO Max series *Waller*, a spin-off of *Peacemaker* focusing on the character of Amanda Waller. [74]

Personal life

Gunn married actress <u>Jenna Fischer</u> on October 7, 2000. After seven years of marriage, Gunn and Fischer announced their separation in a joint statement on September 5, 2007, divorcing in 2008. The two remained friends. In 2010, Fischer persuaded Gunn to cast Rainn Wilson, her co-star on *The Office*, in Gunn's film *Super*.

Gunn has been in a relationship with actress <u>Jennifer Holland</u> since 2015. [77] In February 2022, Holland and Gunn became engaged, and were married at the end of September 2022. [79]

Gunn was raised in a <u>Catholic</u> family and has mentioned how prayer continues to play an important role in his life, $\frac{[80]}{}$ but has also said that he is "in some ways, anti-religion".

Filmography

Film

Year	Title	Director	Writer	Producer	Notes
1997	Tromeo and Juliet	Associate	Yes	No	
2000	The Specials	No	Yes	Associate	
2002	Scooby-Doo	No	Yes	No	
	Dawn of the Dead	No	Yes	No	
2004	Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed	No	Yes	Co- producer	
2006	Slither	Yes	Yes	No	Feature film directorial debut
2010	Super	Yes	Yes	No	
2014	Guardians of the Galaxy	Yes	Yes	No	
2016	The Belko Experiment	No	Yes	Yes	
2017	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	Yes	Yes	No	
2019	Brightburn	No	No	Yes	[82]
2021	The Suicide Squad	Yes	Yes	No	
2023	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3	Yes	Yes	No	
ТВА	Coyote vs. Acme	No	Story	Yes	Originally produced by <u>Warner Bros. Pictures</u> ; pending release from alternative distributor ^[83]

Executive producer

Year	Title	Notes
2004	LolliLove	Also uncredited writer
2018	Avengers: Infinity War	Also additional dialogue ^{[84][85]}
2019	Avengers: Endgame	

Other roles

Year	Title	Role
1996	Tromeo and Juliet	Executive in charge of production
1999	Terror Firmer	Based on the book "All I Need to Know about Filmmaking I Learned from the <i>Toxic Avenger</i> " by Gunn and Lloyd Kaufman
2001	Thirteen Ghosts	Uncredited additional writing ^[86]
2013	Thor: The Dark World	Second unit Director: mid-credit sequence
2016	Doctor Strange	Uncredited director: Stan Lee's cameo scene
2017	Spider-Man: Homecoming	Officieulled difector. Staff Lee's carried scene

Short films

Year	Title	Director	Writer	Producer	Notes
1997	Hamster PSA	Yes	Yes	No	
2004	Tube	No	Yes	No	
2000	Sparky & Mikaela	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mah ahart
2008	Humanzee!	Yes	Yes	Yes	Web short
2013	Beezel	Yes	Yes	No	Segment of Movie 43

Acting roles

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1996	Tromeo and Juliet	Found a peanut father	
2000	The Specials	Minute Man	
2000	Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger IV	Doctor Flem Hocking	
	Doggie Tails, Vol. 1: Lucky's First Sleep-Over	Riley	Direct-to-video
2003	The Ghouls	Detective Cotton	
	Melvin Goes to Dinner	Scott	
2004	LolliLove	James	
2006	Slither	Hank	Uncredited
2008	Humanzee!	James	Web short
2010	Super	Demonswill	
2014	Guardians of the Galaxy	Maskless Sakaaran, Baby Groot	Also CGI actor in end-credits scene ^[87]
2017	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	Baby Groot	
2023	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3	Lambshank	Voice cameo ^[88]

Television

Year	Title	Director	Writer	Executive Producer	Creator	Notes
1997–2000	The Tromaville Café	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	
2008–2009	James Gunn's PG Porn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Web series
2022– present	<u>Peacemaker</u>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Directed 5 episodes
	I Am Groot	No	No	Yes	No	Shorts series Season 1 only Special thanks Season 2
2022	The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Television special
2024 ^{[89][90]}	Creature Commandos	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Acting roles

Year	Title	Role
1997	Sgt. Kabukiman Public Service Announcement	Insane Masturbator
1997–2000	The Tromaville Café	Mike the Crazy Boom Guy
2008–2009	James Gunn's PG Porn	Various roles
2013	<u>Holliston</u>	John Anguish
2015	Con Man	Raaker 2.0
	Harley Quinn ^[91]	Himself (voice)
2022	I Am Groot	Wrist Watch (voice)
	The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special	Groot

Video games

Year	Title	Role
2012	Lollipop Chainsaw	Writer
2013	LocoCycle ^[92]	Actor: Big Arms Chairman

Theme parks

Year	Title	Role
2017	Guardians of the Galaxy - Mission: BREAKOUT!	Writer, director; show scenes
2022	Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind	Writer, director; show scenes

Collaborators

Work Actor	Slither	James Gunn's PG Porn	Super	Guardians of the Galaxy	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	The Suicide Squad	Peacemaker	The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3	Superman: Legacy
Chukwudi lwuji							✓		✓	
Daniela Melchior						✓			✓	
Flula Borg						✓		1		
Gregg Henry	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	
Jennifer Holland						✓	✓		✓	
Kevin Bacon			✓					✓		
Linda Cardellini			✓						✓	
Lloyd Kaufman	✓		1	1		1			1	
Michael Rooker	✓		1	1	✓	✓		✓	1	
Michael Rosenbaum		1			✓				1	
Mikaela Hoover		1	1	1		1			1	
Nathan	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	1			1	✓

Fillion										
Pete Davidson						✓		✓	✓	
Pom Klementieff					1	✓		1	✓	
Rhett Miller								1	1	
Rob Zombie	1		✓	✓	1					
Sean Gunn		1	1	✓	1	1		✓	1	
Stephen Blackehart		1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Steve Agee			1		1	1	✓			
Sylvester Stallone					✓	✓			✓	

Additionally, $\underline{\text{John Cena}}$, $\underline{\text{Elizabeth Banks}}$, and $\underline{\text{David Dastmalchian}}$ have all appeared in a project produced by Gunn, in addition to a project directed by him.

Awards and nominations

Year ^[a]	Award	Category	Recipient(s) and nominee(s)	Result	Ref.
2005	Bram Stoker Award	Best Screenplay	Dawn of the Dead	Nominated	
2006	Chainsaw Award	Highest Body Count	Clither	Won	
2007	Saturn Awards	The Filmmakers Showcase Award	Slither	Won	
2014	Golden Raspberry Award	Worst Screenplay (shared with co-writers)	- Movie 43	Won	[93]
		Worst Director (shared with co-directors)		Won	
2015	Critics' Choice Awards	Best Action Film	Guardians of the Galaxy	Won	[94]
	Grammy Awards	Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media	Guardians of the Galaxy: Awesome Mix Vol. 1	Nominated	[95]
	Hollywood Film Awards	Blockbuster of the Year	Guardians of the Galaxy	Won	[96]
	Hugo Awards	Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form		Won	[97]
	Nebula Awards	Ray Bradbury Nebula Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation		Won	[98]
	Saturn Awards	Best Comic-to-Film Motion Picture		Won	[99]
		Best Director		Won	
		Best Writing		Nominated	
	Writers Guild of America Awards	Best Adapted Screenplay (shared with Nicole Perlman)		Nominated	[100]
2018	Grammy Awards	Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2: Awesome Mix Vol. 2	Nominated	[101]
	Saturn Awards	Best Comic-to-Film Motion Picture	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	Nominated	[102] [103]
2022	Hollywood Critics Association TV Awards	Best Writing in a Streaming Series, Comedy	Peacemaker	Nominated	[104]
	Georgia Film Critics Association Awards	Oglethorpe Award for Excellence in Georgia Cinema		Nominated	[105]
	Hollywood Critics Association	Best Action Film	The Suicide Squad	Nominated	[106]
	Critics' Choice Super Awards	Best Superhero Movie	,	Nominated	[107]
	Saturn Awards	Best Superhero Film		Nominated	[108]
2023	Children's and Family Emmy Awards	Outstanding Fiction Special	The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special	Pending	[109]
		Outstanding Directing for a Single Camera Program		Pending	
		Outstanding Short Form Program	I Am Groot	Pending	

Bibliography

Year	Title	Notes
1998	All I Need to Know about Filmmaking I Learned from The Toxic Avenger	with Lloyd Kaufman
2000	The Toy Collector	
2003	Make Your Own Damn Movie: Secrets of a Renegade Director	Introduction only

Notes

- 1. While many sources give a birth year of 1970, [4] Gunn graduated from St. Louis University High School in 1984, [5] and other sources give his birth year as 1966. [3]
- a. Indicates the year of ceremony. Each year is linked to the article about the awards held that year, wherever possible.

See also

James Gunn's unrealized projects

References

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External links

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