Barbie (film)

Barbie is a 2023 American fantasy comedy film directed by Greta Gerwig from a screenplay she wrote with Noah Baumbach. Based on the eponymous fashion dolls by Mattel, it is the first live-action Barbie film after numerous computeranimated films and specials. The film stars Margot Robbie as the title character and Ryan Gosling as Ken, and follows the pair on a journey of self-discovery following an existential crisis. The supporting cast includes America Ferrera, Kate McKinnon, Issa Rae, Rhea Perlman, and Will Ferrell.

A live-action Barbie film was announced in September 2009 by Universal Pictures with Laurence Mark producing. Development began in April 2014, when Sony Pictures acquired the film rights. Following multiple writer and director changes and the casting of Amy Schumer and later Anne Hathaway as Barbie, the rights were transferred to Warner Bros. Pictures in October 2018. Robbie was cast in 2019, after Gal Gadot turned down the role due to scheduling conflicts, and Gerwig was announced as director and co-writer with Baumbach in 2020. The rest of the cast was announced in early 2022, with principal photography occurring primarily at Warner Bros. Studios, Leavesden, in England and at the Venice Beach Skatepark in Los Angeles from March to July of that year.

Barbie premiered at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on July 9, 2023, and was released in the United States on July 21, by Warner Bros. Pictures. Its simultaneous release with Universal's Oppenheimer led to the Barbenheimer cultural phenomenon, which encouraged audiences to see both films as a double feature. The film received critical acclaim and has grossed \$1.42 billion, becoming the highest-grossing film of 2023 as well as the highest-grossing film by a solo female director, the highest-grossing film ever released by Warner Bros., and the 14th highest-grossing film of all time.

Plot

Stereotypical Barbie ("Barbie") and fellow dolls reside in Barbieland, a matriarchal society populated by different versions of Barbies, Kens, and a group of discontinued models, who are treated like outcasts due to their unconventional traits. While the Kens spend their days playing at the beach, considering it their profession, the Barbies hold prestigious jobs such as doctor, lawyer, and politician. Beach Ken ("Ken") is only happy when he is with Barbie and seeks a closer relationship, but Barbie rebuffs him in favor of other activities and female friendships.

One evening at a dance party, Barbie is suddenly stricken with <u>worries about</u> <u>mortality</u>. Overnight, she develops bad breath, <u>cellulite</u>, and flat feet, disrupting her usual routines the next day. Weird Barbie, an outcast due to her disfigurement, tells her she must find the child playing with her in the real world to cure her afflictions. Ken stows away in her convertible to join her, to which Barbie reluctantly agrees.

Arriving at <u>Venice Beach</u>, Barbie punches a man for groping her, leading to her and Ken's brief arrest. Alarmed by their presence, <u>Mattel</u>'s CEO orders their recapture. Barbie tracks down her owner, a <u>tween</u> girl named Sasha, who criticizes her for encouraging unrealistic beauty standards. Distraught, Barbie discovers that Gloria, a Mattel employee and Sasha's mother, inadvertently catalyzed her <u>existential</u>

<u>crisis</u> after Gloria began playing with Sasha's old Barbie toys in a similar state. Mattel attempts to put Barbie in a toy box for remanufacturing, but she escapes with Gloria and Sasha's help and the three travel to Barbieland with Mattel executives in pursuit.

Meanwhile, Ken learns about the <u>patriarchal</u> system and feels respected for the first time. Returning to Barbieland, he persuades the other Kens to take over, and the Barbies are indoctrinated into submissive roles, such as agreeable girlfriends, housewives, and maids. Barbie arrives and unsuccessfully tries to convince Ken and the other Barbies to return to the way things were. She becomes depressed, but Gloria gives an inspirational speech about society's conflicting expectations of women, restoring Barbie's self-confidence.

With the assistance of Sasha, Weird Barbie, Allan, and the discontinued dolls, Gloria convinces the Barbies to free themselves from subordination. The Barbies manipulate the Kens into fighting amongst themselves, distracting them from enshrining male superiority into Barbieland's constitution, and the Barbies regain power. Having now experienced systemic oppression for themselves, the Barbies resolve to rectify the faults of their previous society, emphasizing better treatment of the Kens and all outcasts.

Barbie and Ken apologize to each other, acknowledging their mistakes. Ken bemoans that he has no purpose without Barbie, so Barbie encourages him to find an autonomous identity. Barbie, who remains unsure of her own identity, meets with the spirit of Ruth Handler, Mattel co-founder and creator of the Barbie doll, who explains that Barbie's story has no set ending and her ever-evolving history surpasses her roots.

After the Barbies, Kens, and Mattel executives bid Barbie goodbye, she decides to become human and return to the real world. Sometime later, Gloria, her husband, and Sasha take Barbie, now going by the name "Barbara Handler", to her first gynecologist's appointment.

Cast[edit]

- Margot Robbie as Barbie, often referred to as "Stereotypical Barbie"[11][12]
- Main variations of Barbie played by:
 - o Issa Rae as President Barbie [13][14]
 - o Kate McKinnon as Weird Barbie [15][14]
 - Alexandra Shipp as Writer Barbie^{[16][14]}
 - Emma Mackey as Physicist Barbie^{[17][14]}
 - o Hari Nef as Dr. Barbie[14]
 - Sharon Rooney as Lawyer Barbie^[13]
 - o Ana Cruz Kayne as Judge Barbie [13][14]
 - Ritu Arya as Journalist Barbie
 - o Dua Lipa as Mermaid Barbie [18][14]
 - Nicola Coughlan as Diplomat Barbie^{[13][14]}
- Ryan Gosling as Ken, often referred to as "Beach Ken"
- Main variations of Ken played by:
 - o Simu Liu as Tourist Ken/"Rival Ken"[20][21][14]
 - o Kingsley Ben-Adir as Basketball Ken 113
 - o Ncuti Gatwa as Artist Ken [20][13]

- Scott Evans as Stereotypical Ken^[13]
- o John Cena as Kenmaid, a merman Ken [22][23]
- America Ferrera as Gloria, a Mattel employee who helps Barbie in the real world[24]
- Ariana Greenblatt as Sasha, Gloria's daughter
- Michael Cera as Allan^[27]
- Rhea Perlman as Ruth Handler, the co-founder of Mattel[®]
- Helen Mirren as the narrator^[28]
- Will Ferrell as the CEO of Mattel

 Mattel
- Connor Swindells as Aaron Dinkins, a low-level Mattel employee
- Jamie Demetriou as the CFO of Mattel
- Emerald Fennell as Midge[31]
- Asim Chaudhry as a Mattel warehouse employee
- Ray Fearon as Dan at the FBI
- Erica Ford as <u>Skipper[32]</u>
- Hannah Khalique-Brown as "Growing Up" Skipper[33]
- Mette Narrative as Barbie Video Girl
- Marisa Abela as Teen Talk Barbie^[34]
- Lucy Boynton as Proust Barbie
- Rob Brydon as Sugar Daddy Ken^[13]
- Tom Stourton as Earring Magic Ken

 [35]
- Ann Roth as the woman on the bench
- Annie Mumolo as Anxiety Mom[37]
- Lauren Holt as Time Mom[38][37]
- Ryan Piers Williams as Gloria's husband

Production

Development

The idea of a live-action *Barbie* film had been in development at <u>Cannon Films</u> in the mid-1980s; little is known about it, other than a promotional blurb (with the plotline centering around Barbie showing her owner how all her dreams could come true), and it is unclear how far into development it got before Mattel ceased working with Cannon, following Cannon's live-action adaptation of <u>Masters of the Universe</u> (1987) flopping at the box-office.^[40]

Development on a film based on the *Barbie* toy line began in September 2009, when it was announced that <u>Mattel</u> had signed a partnership to develop the project with <u>Universal Pictures</u> and with <u>Laurence Mark</u> as producer, but nothing came to fruition. In April 2014, Mattel teamed with <u>Sony Pictures</u> to produce the film, which would have <u>Jenny Bicks</u> writing the screenplay and <u>Laurie MacDonald</u> and <u>Walter F. Parkes</u> producing through the <u>Parkes+MacDonald Image Nation</u> banner they created. Filming at the time was anticipated to begin by the end of the year. In March 2015, <u>Diablo Cody</u> was brought onto the project to rewrite the screenplay, and <u>Amy Pascal</u> joined the producing team. Sony would again have rewrites done to the screenplay later that year, hiring Lindsey Beer, <u>Bert V. Royal</u>, and Hillary Winston to write separate drafts.

In December 2016, <u>Amy Schumer</u> entered negotiations to star in the title role with Winston's screenplay; Schumer helped rewrite the script with her sister, Kim Caramele. In March 2017, Schumer exited negotiations, blaming scheduling conflicts with the planned June 2017 filming start; in 2023 she revealed she left the project due to creative differences with the film's producers at the time. July, <u>Anne Hathaway</u> was under consideration for the title role, with Sony hiring Olivia Milch to rewrite the screenplay and approaching <u>Alethea Jones</u> to direct as a means to interest Hathaway into signing on. July Jones was attached to direct by March 2018.

In August 2018, Robbie Brenner had been hired as producer by Mattel CEO Ynon Kreiz with the rights reverting to Mattel, with Kreiz having the intention to repossess the rights following the expiration of Sony's option. Later, Brenner was hired to run Mattel Films. [50][51] The expiration of Sony's option on the project in October 2018 and its transfer to Warner Bros. Pictures would see the departures of Hathaway, Jones, Macdonald, Parkes and Pascal. Margot Robbie would enter early talks for the role, with Patty Jenkins briefly considered for the director position. [52] Kreiz was determined to cast Robbie in the titular role after meeting with her following his hiring as CEO as both he and Brenner felt that Robbie's appearance resembled that of a conventional Barbie doll and were impressed by her ideas. Initial meetings occurred at the Polo Lounge located in The Beverly Hills Hotel. [53][51] Brenner eventually partnered with Robbie's production company, LuckyChap Entertainment, with Robbie's husband Tom Ackerley and Josey McNamara also being enlisted as producers. [50][51] Robbie's casting was confirmed in July 2019. [14]

In her capacity as a producer, Robbie pitched *Barbie* to Warner Bros. herself. During the green-light meeting, she compared the film to <u>Steven Spielberg</u>'s <u>Jurassic Park</u> (1993) and also jokingly suggested that it would gross over \$1 billion. Later on, she approached <u>Greta Gerwig</u>—whose previous films, particularly <u>Little Women</u> (2019), Robbie enjoyed—to be the screenwriter. Gerwig was in post-production for another film, and accepted the assignment on the condition that her partner, <u>Noah Baumbach</u>, also write the script. Gerwig would sign on to also direct the film in July 2021. Robbie said the film aimed at subverting expectations and giving audiences "the thing you didn't know you wanted". In August 2023, it was announced that Robbie would earn "roughly \$50 million in salary and box office bonuses" as the star and producer of the film.

Writing

Gerwig and Baumbach were given full creative freedom in writing the film. They collaborated on the screenplay during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns of 2020–2021 and described the writing process as "open" and "free". Gerwig's film treatment consisted of an Abstract Poem on Barbie influenced by the Apostles' Creed. For the narrative arc, she was partially inspired by the non-fiction book Reviving Ophelia (1994) by Mary Pipher, which accounts the effects of societal pressures on American teenage girls. She also found inspiration in classic Technicolor musicals such as The Red Shoes (1948) and The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (1964), and said: "They have such a high level of what we came to call authentic artificiality. You have a painted sky in a soundstage. Which is an illusion, but it's also really there. The painted backdrop is really there. The tangibility of the artifice is something that we kept going back to." The script also contains candid criticism of Mattel, which created skepticism among Mattel officials when they

received the first version. However, Kreiz decided to trust Gerwig. Brenner noted that "being safe in this world doesn't work" as she interpreted Barbie to be a "bold" and "trailblazer" figure. As a result, Will Ferrell's portrayal as the Mattel CEO was meant to be an allegory for corporate America. Kreiz praised Ferrell and said that while Mattel officials took their brands seriously, they did not take themselves seriously. Gerwig and Robbie had both felt the film was "most certainly a feminist film" but Mattel officials had rejected the description. Both Gerwig and Robbie informed the studio that they would also explore the controversies and problematic parts of Barbie, but also convinced the studio that they would respect the product.

Gerwig was also influenced by her childhood experiences with Barbie; her mother would discourage her from purchasing such dolls, but eventually allowed her to. 631 Opting to acknowledge the controversial nature of the Barbie doll, Gerwig chose to create a film in which she would be both "doing the thing and subverting the thing", in the sense that she would be celebrating the feminism behind Barbie while also noting the controversial beauty standards associated with it. She was also fascinated by the idea that humans create dolls, which in turn imitate humans, feeling that "we're in constant conversation with inanimate objects" while also conveying an affirmative message to the audience to "just be yourself and know that that's enough". The film deliberately juxtaposed contradictory messaging, such as critiquing consumerism yet glamorizing plastic products, and in the ending of the film, in which Barbie desires to be more than just a plastic doll. Gerwig made the film as an "earnest attempt to make amends" with the intention of affirming the worth of women and conveying the impossibility of perfection, which some perceived to be standards associated with Barbie. [64][65] Reflecting upon the maximalism of Barbie, Gerwig said the "ontology of Barbie" was similar to what she perceived as Shakespeare's maximalism, which she enjoyed in his works. She grounded the film in what she described as a "heightened theatricality that allows you to deal with big ideas in the midst of anarchic play". 661

Gerwig described the film as being anarchic, unhinged, and humanist. [63][67] She felt the film originated from the "deep isolation of the <u>pandemic</u>", opining that the line in which Barbie says "Do you guys ever think about dying?" exemplifies the film's anarchic nature. She also found the idea of Barbie being "constrained in multitudes" as "all of these women are Barbie and Barbie is all of these women" to be "trippy" and felt as a result, Barbie did not need to have her own personal life, as she was attuned to her environment. She also described the story as mirroring a girl's journey from childhood to adolescence, though she did not deem it to be a <u>coming of</u> age film and felt that the film ultimately "ends up, really, about being human".[63]

Primarily, she began her writing by interpreting Barbie as living in a <u>utopia</u> and eventually experiencing reality, where she would have to "confront all the things that were shielded from them in this place [Barbieland]". She also drew parallels to the story of <u>Adam and Eve</u> and taking inspiration from <u>John Milton</u>'s <u>Paradise Lost</u>, particularly being inspired by the concept that there is "no poetry without pain". To underscore the tragic elements of Barbie and Ken facing the real world, she focused on elements of dissonance. As such, she chose to keep a scene featuring Robbie's Barbie telling an older woman that she is beautiful after being requested to remove it, as she felt that the scene epitomized "the heart of the movie". She also desired to provide a "counterargument" to Barbie by featuring a scene in which Barbie learns that some women do not like her, and felt it gave the film "real intellectual and emotional power". As such, a scene is featured in which Barbie is being stared at

inappropriately on the Venice Beach, which Gerwig chose to feature as she felt it was a universal experience, being especially relevant for actors. She was inspired by an audition she did in which she wore overalls and felt that she did not perform well in. [62] The ending of the film features Barbie saying the line "I'm here to see my gynecologist", with Gerwig describing it as a "mic drop kind of joke". She had chosen to include the line as she had wanted to instill confidence in younger girls, as she had been embarrassed about her body when she was younger. [69]

Barbie also explores the negative consequences of hierarchical power structures, with Gerwig saying that she extrapolated that "Barbies rule and Kens are an underclass" and felt it was similar to the <u>Planet of the Apes</u>. Ken has low selfesteem and seeks approval from Barbie, which Gerwig identified as a good source for a story. Gosling compared Gerwig's vision to <u>Milton Glaser</u>'s <u>I Love New York</u> logo as he felt Gerwig created the film's characters as a way of understanding the contemporary world. Ken has the only <u>power ballad</u> in the film, and Gerwig had identified it as the moment in which she felt the film transcended what a Barbie movie traditionally should have been.

Casting[edit]

During the casting process, Gerwig and Robbie searched for actresses with "Barbie energy" (which they described as "a certain ineffable combination of beauty and exuberance").^[61]

In October 2021, Ryan Gosling entered final negotiations to play Ken in the film. [19] America Ferrera, Simu Liu and Kate McKinnon were cast in February 2022. [71][72][73] Liu auditioned for the film after his agent raved about the script being one of the best they had ever read. [74] In March 2022, Ariana Greenblatt, Alexandra Shipp, and Emma Mackey were revealed to be in the cast. [75][76][77] Will Ferrell joined the cast in April, along with Issa Rae, Michael Cera, Hari Nef, Kingsley Ben-Adir, Rhea Perlman, Ncuti Gatwa, Emerald Fennell, Sharon Rooney, Scott Evans, Ana Cruz Kayne, Connor Swindells, Ritu Arya and Jamie Demetriou. [75][77][79][80] In April 2023, a trailer revealed that John Cena had joined the cast. It was later reported that Cena had spontaneously been offered a part in the film after paying for Robbie's meal in London during production. [81] Helen Mirren narrated the film's trailer and the film itself. [82] Robbie and Gosling were each paid \$12.5 million for their participation as actors. [83]

Robbie wanted <u>Gal Gadot</u> to play a Barbie in the film, but Gadot was unavailable due to scheduling conflicts. Gerwig wanted her frequent collaborators <u>Timothée</u> <u>Chalamet</u> and <u>Saoirse Ronan</u> to make cameo appearances, but neither was available, Gerwig revealed that during a visit to the set, Chalamet said he should have been in the film. Additionally, <u>Bowen Yang</u>, <u>Dan Levy</u> and <u>Ben Platt</u> were considered for Ken; <u>Jonathan Groff</u> was the first choice for Allan but turned it down.

Set design[edit]

<u>Sarah Greenwood</u> and <u>Katie Spencer</u> serve as set designer and decorator, respectively, on the film. For the <u>Barbie Dreamhouse</u>, the pair drew inspiration from the <u>mid-century modernist</u> architecture found in <u>Palm Springs</u>, including the <u>Kaufmann Desert House</u> by <u>Richard Neutra</u>, as well as the photography of <u>Slim Aarons</u>. Gerwig wanted to capture "what was so ridiculously fun about the Dreamhouses", alluding to its previous models, and referenced <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> (1985), the paintings of <u>Wayne Thiebaud</u>, and the apartment of <u>Gene</u>

Kelly's character in the Technicolor musical *An American in Paris* (1951). "Everything needed to be tactile, because toys are, above all, things you touch", Gerwig was quoted saying of the use of practical effects instead of CGI to capture the sky and the San Jacinto Mountains. The set design is also noted for its extensive use of a specific shade of pink paint, Pantone 219. The company already had an international shortage due to COVID-19 related supply chain issues as well as freezing temperatures damaging stock; set design for the film used up the company's entire remaining stock of pink. [88][89][90] She also sought to use practical builds [charification] and had to first film sequences in miniature models and then composite the footage onto the actual image. She had already discussed the production design with cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto, Greenwood, and costume designer Jacqueline Duran a year beforehand to prepare for the film. [91] Gerwig also called the director Peter Weir for inspiration on Barbie Land, with the idea of creating it as an "interior soundstage world". [68]

Costumes

Costume designer <u>Jacqueline Durran</u>, who previously collaborated with Gerwig on <u>Little Women</u> (2019), employed a practical approach to create Barbie's wardrobe: "The defining characteristic of what she wears is where she's going and what she's doing, [i]t's about being completely dressed for your job or task." To match the film's Barbieland setting, Durran and her team created costumes made of roughly fifteen color combinations "that riffed off the idea of a <u>French Riviera</u> beach in the early 1960s" and drew inspiration from actress <u>Brigitte Bardot</u>. For Ken's outfits, Durran zeroed in a look composed of colorful sportswear from the <u>1980s</u>, while actor Ryan Gosling suggested a Ken-branded underwear for the character. Durran closely adapted outfits from past iterations of Barbie dolls, such as the 1993 "Western Stampin'" dolls and the 1994 "Hot Skatin'" dolls. She noted the Barbie dolls as "a very useful way to look at different ideas of <u>femininity</u>: what that means, who owns it, and who it's aimed at" and reflected this idea in how she dressed the characters. While the majority of the clothing featured in the film were sourced by Durran and her team, they also pulled pieces from the fashion archives of <u>Chanel</u>. [92]

Filming[edit]

Principal photography began on March 22, 2022, at Warner Bros. Studios, Leavesden in England and wrapped on July 21, 2022. Among the notable filming locations was the Venice Beach Skatepark in Los Angeles, California. Rodrigo Prieto served as cinematographer. Prior to filming, Gerwig had organized a sleepover with the female cast members for them to establish positive relationships while also feeling that it "would be the most fun way to kick everything off". She also opted to use filming techniques from the 1950s, as Barbie has been a popular toy since 1959, with the intention of recreating a period-accurate look. Additionally, she watched Powell and Pressburger's A Matter of Life and Death (1946) to understand how older visual effects were used to provide a sense of theatricality. To highlight the tragic nature of Barbie and Ken facing the difficulties of the real world, she directed Robbie and Gosling to play their characters as if they were in a drama. Reshoots took place in Los Angeles in April 2023.

Hair and makeup[edit]

Ivana Primorac was the lead hair and makeup artist for the film. 1971