

= Empire of the Sun (film) =

Empire of the Sun is a 1987 American epic coming @-@ of @-@ age war film based on J. G. Ballard 's semi @-@ autobiographical novel of the same name . Steven Spielberg directed the film , which stars Christian Bale , John Malkovich , Miranda Richardson , and Nigel Havers . The film tells the story of Jamie " Jim " Graham , a young boy who goes from living in a wealthy British family in Shanghai , to becoming a prisoner of war in a Japanese internment camp , during World War II .

Harold Becker and David Lean were originally to direct before Spielberg came on board , initially as a producer for Lean . Spielberg was attracted to directing the film because of a personal connection to Lean 's films and World War II topics . He considers it to be his most profound work on " the loss of innocence " . The film received critical acclaim but was not initially a box office success , earning only \$ 22 @, @ 238 @, @ 696 at the US box office , but it eventually more than recouped its budget through revenues in other markets .

= = Plot = =

Amidst Japan 's invasion of China during World War II , Jamie Graham ? a British upper middle class schoolboy ? is enjoying a privileged and spoiled life in the Shanghai International Settlement . After the Attack on Pearl Harbor , the Japanese begin to occupy the settlement , and in the ensuing chaos to escape the city Jamie is separated from his parents . Jamie 's mother shouts at him over the panicked mob to wait at their house and promises that they will come back for him . He spends some time living in his deserted home , but after eating all the food he ventures out into the city .

Hungry , Jamie tries to surrender to some Japanese soldiers , who shrug and laugh him off . After being chased by a street urchin , he is taken in by Basie ? an American expatriate and hustler ? and his partner Frank , who nicknames him " Jim " . They intend to leave the boy in the streets when they are unable to sell his teeth for cash , but Jamie promises to lead them back to his neighborhood where there are valuables to loot . There , Jamie finds his house lit and sees a figure in the window whom he thinks is his mother . He runs to the door only to discover the house is occupied by Japanese troops , who take the trio prisoner . They are then taken to Lunghua Civilian Assembly Center in Shanghai for processing . A truck later arrives to take selected internees to the Suzhou Creek Internment Camp ; Basie is among those selected to go but Jamie is not . Because he knows of the camp 's location , a desperate Jamie convinces the soldiers to take him . On arrival at the camp Jim wanders to the airfield to witness workers servicing a squadron of Zero fighters . As Jim reaches out to touch one he is confronted by a trio of fighter pilots . Jim salutes the pilots , and they salute Jim in return .

It is now 1945 , nearing the end of the Pacific War . Despite the terror and poor living conditions of the camp , Jim survives by establishing a successful trading network ? which even involves the camp 's commander , Sergeant Nagata . Dr. Rawlins , the camp 's British doctor , becomes a father figure and teacher to Jim . One night after a bombing raid , Nagata orders the destruction of the prisoners ' infirmary as reprisal . He only stops when Jim (now fluent in Japanese) begs forgiveness . Through the barbed wire fencing , Jim befriends a Japanese teenager , who is a trainee pilot . Jim also visits Basie in the American POW barracks , where Jim idolizes the Americans and their culture . Basie eventually sends Jim to set snare traps outside the camp 's wire ; though Jim succeeds , Basie is only using him to test the area for land mines ? plotting to escape . As a reward , Basie allows Jim to move into the American barracks with him .

One morning at dawn , Jim witnesses a kamikaze ritual . Overcome with emotion , he salutes and sings the Welsh song " Suo Gân " . The base is suddenly attacked by a group of American P @-@ 51 Mustang fighter aircraft . Jim is overjoyed and climbs the ruins of a nearby pagoda to better watch the airstrike . Dr. Rawlins chases Jim up the pagoda to save him , where the boy breaks down in tears ? he cannot remember what his parents look like . As a result of the attack the Japanese decide to evacuate the camp . Basie escapes during the confusion , though he had promised to take Jim with him . The camp 's prisoners march through the wilderness where many die of fatigue , starvation , and disease .

Arriving at a football stadium near Nantao ? filled with luxuries confiscated by the Japanese ? Jim recognizes his parents ' Packard . Waking up next to the corpse of a woman , Jim witnesses flashes from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki hundreds of miles away . Jim slips away from the group and wanders back to Suzhou Creek . Along the way he hears news of Japan 's surrender and the end of the war . He encounters the Japanese teenager he befriended earlier , who has since become a pilot but is now disillusioned . The youth remembers Jim and offers him a mango , and will cut it for him with his katana . Basie reappears with a group of armed Americans who have arrived to loot the Red Cross containers being airdropped over the area . One of the Americans , thinking Jim is in danger , shoots and kills the Japanese youth . Basie offers to help Jim find his parents , but Jim ? infuriated over his friend 's death ? chooses to stay behind .

Jim is eventually found by American soldiers and placed in an orphanage . Here , the film ends with a deeply traumatized Jim reuniting with his mother and father over the sound of the Welsh lullaby .

The final scene shows " Jim ? s suitcase floating in the river in Shanghai (which he had thrown in the water during the march to Nantao stadium) . We know that inside are Jim ? s cherished cutouts of American magazines , the closest thing he has to memories , and aptly echoes the opening shot of a coffin floating in the same river . "

= = Cast = =

Christian Bale as Jamie " Jim " Graham , who goes from living in a wealthy British family in Shanghai , to becoming a prisoner of war during World War II . J.G. Ballard felt Bale had a physical resemblance to himself at the same age . The actor was 12 years old when he was cast . Amy Irving , Bale 's co @-@ star in the television movie Anastasia : The Mystery of Anna , recommended Bale to her then @-@ husband , Steven Spielberg , for the role . More than 4 @,@ 000 child actors auditioned . Jim 's singing voice was provided by English performer James Rainbird .

John Malkovich as Basie : An American ship steward stranded in Shanghai during the Japanese occupation . He forms a friendship with Jamie , giving him the nickname " Jim " .

Miranda Richardson as Mrs. Victor : A British woman who was Jim 's " neighbor " at Suzhou . She dies in a stadium to which they moved right after the bombing of the prison camp . Jim sees a bright light in the sky to the East . He believes it is her soul floating to Heaven but finds out later it was the flash from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki , hundreds of miles away .

Nigel Havers as Dr. Rawlins : Jim 's father figure at Suzhou . Rawlins finds difficulty teaching Jim humility .

Joe Pantoliano as Frank Demarest : A companion of Basie , he was the one who almost hit Jamie with a truck . He joins Basie and Jamie at the prison camp .

Leslie Phillips as Maxton

Masat? Ibu as Sergeant Nagata

Emily Richard as Mary Graham

Ben Stiller as Dainty

Robert Stephens as Mr. Lockwood

Guts Ishimatsu as Sergeant Uchita

James Walker as Mr. Radik

Yvonne Gilan as Mrs. Lockwood

Ralph Michael as Mr. Partridge

James Greene as British Prisoner

Peter Copley as British Prisoner

Burt Kwouk as Mr. Chen

Paul McGann as Lieutenant Price

J.G. Ballard as Masquerade Party Guest

= = Production = =

== Development ==

Warner Bros. purchased the film rights , intending Harold Becker to direct and Robert Shapiro to produce . Tom Stoppard wrote the first draft of the screenplay , on which Ballard briefly collaborated . Becker dropped out , and David Lean came to direct with Spielberg as producer . Lean explained , " I worked on it for about a year and in the end I gave it up because I thought it was too similar to a diary . It was well @-@ written and interesting , but I gave it to Steve . " Spielberg felt " from the moment I read J. G. Ballard 's novel I secretly wanted to direct myself . " Spielberg found the project to be very personal . As a child , his favorite film was Lean 's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* , which similarly takes place in a Japanese prisoner of war camp . Spielberg 's fascination with World War II and the aircraft of that era was stimulated by his father 's stories of his experience as a radio operator on North American B @-@ 25 Mitchell bombers in the China @-@ Burma Theater . Spielberg hired Menno Meyjes to do an uncredited rewrite before Stoppard was brought back to write the shooting script .

== Filming ==

Empire of the Sun was filmed at Elstree Studios in the United Kingdom , and on location in Shanghai and Spain . The filmmakers searched across Asia in an attempt to find locations that resembled 1941 Shanghai . They entered negotiations with Shanghai Film Studios and China Film Co @-@ Production Corporation in 1985 . After a year of negotiations , permission was granted for a three @-@ week shoot in early March 1987 . It was the first American film shot in Shanghai since the 1940s . The Chinese authorities allowed the crew to alter signs to traditional Chinese characters , as well as closing down city blocks for filming . Over 5 @,@ 000 local extras were used , some old enough to remember the Japanese occupation of Shanghai 40 years earlier . Members of the People 's Liberation Army played Japanese soldiers . Other locations included Trebujena in Andalusia , Knutsford in Cheshire and Sunningdale in Berkshire . Lean often visited the set during the England shoot .

Spielberg attempted to portray the era accurately , using period vehicles and aircraft . Four Harvard SNJ aircraft were lightly modified in France to resemble Mitsubishi A6M Zero aircraft . Two additional non @-@ flying replicas were used . Three restored P @-@ 51D Mustangs , two from ' The Fighter Collection ' of England , and one from the ' Old Flying Machine Company ' , were flown in the film . These P @-@ 51s were flown by Ray Hanna (who was featured in the film flying at low @-@ level past the child star with the canopy back , waving) , his son Mark and " Hoof " Proudfoot and took over 10 days of filming to complete due to the complexity of the planned aerial sequences , which included the P @-@ 51s actually dropping plaster @-@ filled replica 500 lb bombs at low level , with simulated bomb blasts . A number of large scale remote control flying models were also used , including an 18 @-@ foot wingspan B @-@ 29 , but Spielberg felt the results were disappointing , so he extended the film contract with the full @-@ size examples and pilots on set in Trebujena , Spain . J.G. Ballard makes a cameo appearance at the costume party scene .

== Special effects ==

Industrial Light & Magic designed the visual effects sequences with some computer @-@ generated imagery also used for the atomic bombing of Nagasaki . Norman Reynolds was hired as the production designer while Vic Armstrong served as the stunt coordinator .

== Reception ==

Empire of the Sun was given a limited release on December 11 , 1987 , before being wide released on Christmas Day , 1987 . The film earned \$ 22 @.@ 24 million in North America , and \$ 44 @.@ 46 million in other countries , accumulating a worldwide total of \$ 66 @.@ 7 million , earning more than its budget but still considered a box office disappointment by Spielberg .

== Critical response ==

Review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes gives the film a score of 83 % based on reviews from 40 critics . By comparison Metacritic calculated an average score of 60 out of 100 based on 17 reviews . J. G. Ballard gave positive feedback , and was especially impressed with Christian Bale 's performance . Critical reaction was not universally affirmative , but Richard Corliss of Time stated that Spielberg " has energized each frame with allusive legerdemain and an intelligent density of images and emotions . " Janet Maslin from The New York Times called the film " a visual splendor , a heroic adventurousness and an immense scope that make it unforgettable . " Julie Salamon of The Wall Street Journal wrote that the film as " an edgy , intelligent script by playwright Tom Stoppard , Spielberg has made an extraordinary film out of Mr. Ballard 's extraordinary war experience . " J. Hoberman from The Village Voice decried that the serious subject was undermined by Spielberg 's " shamelessly kiddiecentric " approach . Roger Ebert gave a mixed reaction , " Despite the emotional potential in the story , it didn 't much move me . Maybe , like the kid , I decided that no world where you can play with airplanes can be all that bad . " On his TV show with Gene Siskel , Ebert said that the film " is basically a good idea for a film that never gets off the ground " . Siskel added , " I don 't know what the film is about . It 's so totally confused and taking things from different parts . On one hand , if it wants to say something about a child 's @-@ eye view of war , you got a movie made by John Boorman called Hope and Glory that was just released that is much better , and much more daring in showing the whimsy that children 's view of war is . On the other hand , this film wants to hedge its bet and make it like an adventure film , so you 've got like Indiana Jones with the John Malkovich character helping the little kid through all the fun of war . I don 't know what Spielberg wanted to do . "

== Awards ==

In his second starring role , Bale received a special citation for Best Performance by a Juvenile Actor from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures , an award specially created for his performance in Empire of the Sun . At the 60th Academy Awards , Empire of the Sun was nominated for Art Direction , Cinematography , Editing , Original Music Score , Costume Design (Bob Ringwood) , and Sound (Robert Knudson , Don Digirolamo , John Boyd and Tony Dawe) . It did not convert any of the nominations into awards . Allen Daviau , who was nominated as cinematographer , publicly complained , " I can 't second @-@ guess the Academy , but I feel very sorry that I get nominations and Steven doesn 't . It 's his vision that makes it all come together , and if Steven wasn 't making these films , none of us would be here . " The film won awards for cinematography , sound design , and music score at the 42nd British Academy Film Awards . The nominations included production design , costume design , and adapted screenplay . Spielberg was honored by his work from the Directors Guild of America , while the American Society of Cinematographers honored Allen Daviau . Empire of the Sun was nominated for Best Motion Picture (Drama) and Original Score at the 45th Golden Globe Awards . John Williams earned a Grammy Award nomination .

== Themes ==

Flying symbolizes Jim 's possibility and danger of escape from the prison camp . His growing alienation from his prewar self and society is reflected in his hero @-@ worship of the Japanese aviators based at the airfield adjoining the camp . " I think it 's true that the Japanese were pretty brutal with the Chinese , so I don 't have any particularly sentimental view of them , " Ballard recalled . " But small boys tend to find their heroes where they can . One thing there was no doubt about , and that was that the Japanese were extremely brave . One had very complicated views about patriotism [and] loyalty to one 's own nation . Jim is constantly identifying himself , first with the Japanese ; then , when the Americans start flying over in their Mustangs and B @-@ 29s , he 's

very drawn to the American . "

The apocalyptic wartime setting and the climactic moment when Jim sees the distant white flash of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki gave Spielberg powerful visual metaphors " to draw a parallel story between the death of this boy 's innocence and the death of the innocence of the entire world . " Spielberg reflected he " was attracted to the idea that this was a death of innocence , not an attenuation of childhood , which by my own admission and everybody 's impression of me is what my life has been . This was the opposite of Peter Pan . This was a boy who had grown up too quickly . " Other topics that Spielberg previously dealt with , and are presented in Empire of the Sun , include a child being separated from his parents (The Sugarland Express , E.T. the Extra @-@ Terrestrial , Close Encounters of the Third Kind and Poltergeist) and World War II (1941 , and Raiders of the Lost Ark) . Spielberg explained " My parents got a divorce when I was 14 , 15 . The whole thing about separation is something that runs very deep in anyone exposed to divorce . "

= = In popular culture = =

The dramatic attack on the Japanese prisoner of war camp carried out by P @-@ 51 Mustangs is accompanied by Jim 's whoops of " ... the Cadillac of the skies ! " , a phrase believed to be first used in Ballard 's text as " Cadillac of air combat " and in the screenplay that has now entered urban mythology as being attributed to the war years . Steven Bull quotes the catchwords in the Encyclopedia of Military Technology and Innovation (2004) as originating in 1941 . John Williams ' soundtrack includes the " Cadillac of the Skies " as an individual score cue . The phrase has now been appropriated by other aircraft including the General Dynamics F @-@ 111 Aardvark in Australian service . Ben Stiller conceived the idea for Tropic Thunder while performing in Empire of the Sun .