

## **HEREDITARY (2018)** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6wWKNij\\_1M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6wWKNij_1M)

- Released: June 8
- 2 hrs 7 minutes
- \$10 million budget (Estimated)
- Directed by Ari Aster
- Written by Ari Aster
- Production company: A24 (with PalmStar Media and Windy Hill Pictures)
- Rated: R (for horror violence, disturbing images, language, drug use and brief graphic nudity)

### **QUICK THOUGHTS**

- Anthony Becerra
- Phil Svitek
- Demetri Panos

### **DEVELOPMENT**

- premiered at Sundance 2018
- by the producers of *The Witch* (A24)
- didn't start out as a horror film, but Aster figured horror would be easier to finance: "It started from a cynical place, but then from there became something else." -Aster to Vanity Fair

### **WRITING** (Ari Aster)

- Aster spent a period of his life writing 2 movies a year, and now he wants to go back and rework those for new films
- Aster said he "probably wouldn't" direct a film someone else wrote (Hollywood Reporter)
- "There was certainly a conscious decision to separate the film into two halves that are also completely inextricable from each other, where the two parts actually are the same movie...I wanted to make a film that served as a serious meditation on grief and trauma. It begins as a family tragedy, and then continues down that path, but gradually curdles into a full-bore nightmare—in the same way that life can really feel like a nightmare, like everything is falling apart." -Ari Aster to Vanity Fair

### **STORY/TOPICS**

- Major themes: grief and mental illness
  - "Where the fears that are being exploited and investigated are impossible to remedy. And they *aren't* irrational. So, you know, a fear of death, or a fear of abandonment, or a fear of being responsible for something horrible that happens to somebody in your life that you care about, and having to live with the guilt of that. I knew if I wanted to make a horror film, I wanted to make one that really got to people. And I don't know how to do that but to think about what scares me." -Aster to Vanity Fair

- Interesting point from Forbes: It's hard for psychological, arty horror movies with an unhappy ending like *Hereditary* to do well because for audiences they tend to either not be scary enough or be too scary, so they have a 2/3 disadvantage. (like *Goldilocks*: too hot, too cold, or just right)
- Hollywood Reporter: this film exemplifies "horror is experiencing an art house renaissance of sorts"
- It's reflective of real social fears, anxieties and dysfunctional family issues— can sometimes be hard for people to face so they end up not liking the film.
- *Hereditary* should be considered a family drama first and a horror film second, according to Aster.
- Hollywood Reporter: "*Hereditary* is being read as a metaphor for American helplessness, the crushing realization that we, living in the self-styled greatest nation in the world, have no control over our fate's course as we thrash against the currents sweeping us toward whatever end: economic collapse, nuclear holocaust."
- Too metaphorical? Superheroes are metaphors but much more grounded?

#### CAST:

- Toni Collette (Annie Graham)
  - previous projects: *The Sixth Sense*, *About A Boy*, *Emma*, *Japanese Story*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Grassland*; TV: *United States of Tara* and *Tsunami: The Aftermath*
  - was in *Hearts Beat Loud* at Sundance at the same time as *Hereditary* (2018)
  - Broadway: *The Wild Party*, nominated for a Tony
  - Was one of the first people to come on board. Aster mailed her the script with a letter, she read it and then they met for lunch and she signed onto the film.
  - Aster was very demanding of her and says she met the bar set.
  - Doesn't like horror movies: "I look for challenging work, and this was so complicated, layered, dense and honest. And unusual. It felt really original, even on the page. That's what I hope for in life. And it rarely comes along...but it isn't *just* a horror film. It's this kind of beautiful fragile story about people living with huge amounts of emotional pain." -Collette to the Guardian
- Gabriel Byrne (Steve)
  - also played Wolff's dad on "In Treatment" on HBO: won a golden globe and was nominated for 2 Emmys
  - films: *Excalibur* (1981), *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Stigmata* (1999), *End of Days* (1999), *Spider* (2002), *Jindabyne* (2006), *Vampire Academy* (2014), *The 33*
  - also produces: Academy Award-nominated *In the Name of the Father* (1993).
- Alex Wolff (Peter)
  - gained fame as "Nat" in Nickelodeon's "The Naked Brothers Band"
    - once he broke out of kids' shows he gravitated towards darker films
  - his character, Peter, suffers from PTSD

- method actor: “I like to stay totally in the mood of what’s going on,” not to mess with the mood of the film on set- Wolff to Hollywood reporter
- “I don’t know many movies where it’s this demanding for each role and each character.” - Wolff to Hollywood reporter
- loves horror movies: *Goodnight Mommy*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, *Halloween*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Cabin in the Woods*, *Babadook*
- also directs and writes in upcoming film *The Cat and The Moon*, in which he also stars
- very close with Ari
- Milly Shapiro (Charlie)
  - played Matilda on Broadway, previously
  - *Hereditary* is her first film
  - “I remember when she came into the audition I was immediately so relieved—and then so excited.” -Aster to *Vanity Fair*
  - went to the same school as Wolff so they already knew each other
- Ann Dowd (Joan)
  - “She also happens to be the loveliest woman on Earth...it’s fun to be playing with that, too, because in the film she’s conspicuously warm and nice. It’s always hard to believe when someone has such deep reserves of empathy and affection.” -Aster to *Vanity Fair*
  - films: *Green Card*, *Lorenzo's Oil*, *Philadelphia*, *Garden State*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Marley & Me*, *Side Effects*, *St. Vincent*, *Captain Fantastic*

## **DIRECTING** (Ari Aster)

- Previous Projects: short film *The Strange Thing About the Johnsons*
- Despite his family drama, Aster comes from a very supportive family with two artists for parents: mom a poet, dad a jazz drummer.
  - “I’ve been very fortunate in that I’ve had parents who supported and encouraged me and haven’t really questioned what I’m doing or asked me to question it. If anything, that’s why I make such dark stuff. I’ve never been made to feel that would disappointed anybody.” -Aster to Hollywood Reporter
- Earned graduate degree from American Film Institute in 2010.
- He didn’t set out to be a horror director: had other projects he tried to get off the ground but couldn’t get the momentum needed as they weren’t genre-driven (Hollywood Reporter).
- Very ambitious- wants to make a film in every genre
  - would love to make a musical
  - has written 10 other films, including a sci-fi, “ready to go” which he hopes to make now that he has a name for himself
- currently has a Scandinavian horror film in pre-production, his only other horror film
  - will shoot in Hungary in late summer or early fall
  - tentatively called *Midsomer*

- plot: “centers on a young woman, already dealing with the death of her parents, who joins her boyfriend and his friends on a trip to Sweden, specifically to a remote town with unique midsummer traditions. Things go south from there.”  
-Hollywood Reporter

## TRIVIA

- “In Peter's first scene at school, the words "Escaping Fate" is on the chalkboard with the teacher discussing it. This is a reference to Halloween (1978), where the main character discusses the same thing in class. Appropriately, this movie was released the same day as the trailer for Halloween (2018).” -IMDb

## PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Pawel Pogorzelski)

- Aster spent three weeks shot-listing every single shot of the film's 156 scenes (LA Times)
  - worked out all blocking with cinematographer and sequenced scenes well in advance of shooting...because of this, he knew they had to build a house rather than finding one (Hollywood Reporter)
- All shot on a soundstage in Utah
  - because it was a set, no ceilings
    - “I miss ceiling, no ceilings was hard” - Wolff to Hollywood reporter
- Collette's famous “scream” scene was filmed in one take at 2 am as last shot of movie.
- Was originally a 3 hour movie, but 30 scenes were cut.
  - “In the original cut, and in the script, the audience was forced to really stew ... The breakdown of communication was chronicled in more pummeling detail.”  
-Aster to Hollywood Reporter
- Scene where Charlie dies and camera is focused on Peter's face when Annie finds out is Aster's favorite (Vanity Fair)
- First shot coming into house that looks like miniature:
  - “I think it's a good metaphor for what's going on. Everyone is sort of faking it, a lot of people are skating over what's really going on.” - Wolff to Hollywood reporter
  - “various houses inside a house that, like Russian dolls trapped in larger dolls, convey an impression of lives imprisoned by forces they can't control.” - Wall Street Journal

## EDITING/VFX (Jennifer Lame, Lucian Johnston)

- slow paced
- “They use a slew of techniques, like long takes and quick, jarring cuts, to keep their audience on edge. The viewer is never allowed to get comfortable; you're always a little freaked out, feeling like something is about to happen.” - Monkeys Fighting Robots

## SOUND/MUSIC (Colin Stetson)

- Colin Stetson did music
  - past films: *12 Years a Slave*

- has worked with artists: Arcade Fire, Feist, Bon Iver
- this was his first horror film: he wanted to create an unconventional soundtrack for horror and avoid cliches
  - “ I was trying to accomplish the same goals of tension and release, but not using the sounds that are conventionally associated with the genre. Since you want to do this to avoid those sort of pitfalls, but also to maintain that sense of theme, the sounds that you're hearing are not what you associate with [the genre].” -Stetson to Thrillist
- director Aster approached Stetson to do the soundtrack because he listened to his past music while writing the screenplay
- unlike in most films, he was approached to do the score 3 years ago while the screenplay was just a draft which gave him more room to work
- his approach to scores: “Just identify what is the thrust of it, what's the structure, what's the best way to accomplish the goal of it all. Establish what the instrumentation is going to be, how you're going to find the sounds.” -Thrillist
- used low woodwinds, clarinets, high saxophones to imitate the typical, synthy strings you'd hear in a horror film
- would sing under instruments, putting mic to throat to achieve throaty sound: “I would say that the majority of the sounds throughout the whole thing are created with my voice, but you'd never know it to hear it.” -Stetson to Thrillist
- played live to the picture during the entire recording process, no sequencing or looping
- “The whole structure of the score mirrors the structure of the film, and it does so in every way that it's built up. So the culmination of the film, the ending of the movie, there's a coming together of all the vast elements that have been hiding in plain sight throughout the course of the score. When they do come to fruition, it's been building, but you'd never know the specific path that has all been laid out there for you. It was one of the more fun aspects, seeding things from different perspectives throughout.” -Stetson to Thrillist
- Wolff would listen to soundtrack with headphones in before shooting scenes
- used sound editing to intensify Charlie's tongue-click

## PROMOTION

- Marketing did a great job of masking what the film is actually about
- people who attended a midnight screening of *Hereditary* had creepy dolls delivered to their doors the next morning, including *Moonlight* director Barry Jenkins: <https://www.avclub.com/a24-is-promoting-hereditary-by-leaving-creepy-dolls-on-1823747601>
- Film School Rejects calls the trailers “lying clickbait”, tricking viewers to attending movie who normally wouldn't

## BOX OFFICE

- Earned \$13 million opening weekend

- 1.4 million people attended opening weekend; best turnout for an A24 movie so far

## RECEPTION

- Rotten Tomatoes: 92%
  - “*Hereditary* uses its classic setup as the framework for a harrowing, uncommonly unsettling horror film whose cold touch lingers long beyond the closing credits.”
- Cinemascore: D+
- Being called the scariest movie of the year by many critics (LA Times)
- has been compared to *The Exorcist*

## SEQUELS

- Aster told Fandango he has a “very weird and crazy” idea for *Hereditary 2* that would be “extremely orthodox”; says he’ll have to wait and see how the movie does in the box office

## MEDIA:

[https://media.vanityfair.com/photos/5b19ac0f032f33621033f980/master/w\\_690.c\\_limit/Embed-Hereditary.jpg](https://media.vanityfair.com/photos/5b19ac0f032f33621033f980/master/w_690.c_limit/Embed-Hereditary.jpg)

[https://media.vanityfair.com/photos/5b19ac090341dd3d59e088a9/master/w\\_960.c\\_limit/Hereditary-Review-Director-Interview.jpg](https://media.vanityfair.com/photos/5b19ac090341dd3d59e088a9/master/w_960.c_limit/Hereditary-Review-Director-Interview.jpg)

[https://www.monkeysfightingrobots.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/hereditary\\_poster.jpg](https://www.monkeysfightingrobots.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/hereditary_poster.jpg)

<http://ksassets.timeincuk.net/wp/uploads/sites/55/2018/01/Screen-Shot-2018-01-30-at-13.22.00-920x584.png>

movie clip: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hereditary-review-fine-tuned-terror-1528401749>

alternate trailer with cast/director interviews: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_3KIS0VPL4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_3KIS0VPL4)

compilation of clips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pf03D AV3E>