

The Shawshank Redemption

The Shawshank Redemption is a 1994 American drama film written and directed by Frank Darabont, based on the 1982 Stephen King novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. It tells the story of banker Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins), who is sentenced to life in Shawshank State Penitentiary for the murder of his wife and her lover, despite his claims of innocence. Over the following two decades, he befriends a fellow prisoner, contraband smuggler Ellis "Red" Redding (Morgan Freeman), and becomes instrumental in a money laundering operation led by the prison warden Samuel Norton (Bob Gunton). William Sadler, Clancy Brown, Gil Bellows, and James Whitmore appear in supporting roles.

Darabont purchased the film rights to King's story in 1987, but development did not begin until five years later when he wrote the script over an eight-week period. Two weeks after submitting his script to the Castle Rock Entertainment film studio, Darabont secured a \$25 million budget to produce *The Shawshank Redemption*, which started pre-production in January 1993. While the film is set in Maine, principal photography took place from June to August 1993 almost entirely in Mansfield, Ohio, with the Ohio State Reformatory serving as the eponymous penitentiary. The project attracted many stars of the time for the lead roles including Tom Hanks, Tom Cruise, and Kevin Costner. Thomas Newman provided the film's score.

While *The Shawshank Redemption* received positive reviews on its release, particularly for its story and the performances of Robbins and Freeman, it was a box office disappointment, earning only \$16 million during its initial theatrical run. Many reasons were cited for its failure at the time, including competition from films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Forrest Gump*, to the general unpopularity of prison films, lack of female characters, and even the title, which was considered to be confusing for audiences. Even so, it went on to receive multiple award nominations, including seven Academy Award nominations, and a theatrical re-release that, combined with international takings, increased the film's box office gross to \$58.3 million.

Over 320,000 VHS copies were shipped throughout the United States, and based on its award nominations and word of mouth, it became one of the top rented films of 1995. The broadcast rights were acquired following the purchase of Castle Rock by the Turner Broadcasting System, and it was shown regularly on the TNT network starting in 1997, further increasing its popularity. The film is now considered to be one of the

The Shawshank Redemption



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Frank Darabont
Produced by	Niki Marvin
Screenplay by	Frank Darabont
Based on	<i>Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption</i> by Stephen King
Starring	Tim Robbins Morgan Freeman Bob Gunton William Sadler Clancy Brown Gil Bellows James Whitmore
Music by	Thomas Newman
Cinematography	Roger Deakins
Edited by	Richard Francis-Bruce

greatest films of the 1990s. As of 2017, the film is still broadcast regularly, and is popular in several countries, with audience members and celebrities citing it as a source of inspiration, and naming the film as a favorite in various surveys. In 2015, the United States Library of Congress selected the film for preservation in the National Film Registry, finding it "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".

Production company	Castle Rock Entertainment
Distributed by	Columbia Pictures
Release date	September 10, 1994 (Toronto) September 23, 1994 (United States)
Running time	142 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$25 million ^[2]
Box office	\$58.3 million ^[3]

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Plot

In 1947 Portland, Maine, banker Andy Dufresne is convicted of murdering his wife and her lover, and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences at the Shawshank State Penitentiary. He is befriended by Ellis "Red" Redding, an inmate and prison contraband smuggler serving a life sentence. Red procures a rock hammer and a large poster of Rita Hayworth for Andy. Working in the prison laundry, Andy is regularly assaulted and raped by "the Sisters" and their leader, Bogs.

In 1949, Andy overhears the captain of the guards, Byron Hadley, complaining about being taxed on an inheritance and offers to help him shelter the money legally. After an assault by the Sisters nearly kills Andy, Hadley beats and cripples Bogs, who is subsequently transferred to another prison; Andy is not attacked again. Warden Samuel Norton meets Andy and reassigns him to the prison library to assist elderly inmate Brooks Hatlen. Andy begins managing financial matters for other prison staff, guards from other prisons, and the warden himself. He also begins writing weekly letters to the state legislature requesting funds to improve the prison's decaying library.

Brooks is paroled in 1954 after serving 50 years, but he cannot adjust to the outside world and eventually hangs himself. The legislature sends a library donation that includes a recording of *The Marriage of Figaro*; Andy plays an excerpt over the public address system and is punished with solitary confinement. After his release from solitary, Andy explains that hope is what gets him through his time, a concept that Red dismisses. In 1963, Norton begins exploiting prison labor for public works, profiting by undercutting skilled labor costs and receiving bribes. Andy launders the money using the alias "Randall Stephens".

Tommy Williams is incarcerated for burglary in 1965. Andy and Red befriend him, and Andy helps him pass his GED exam. A year later, Tommy reveals to Red and Andy that his cellmate at another prison had claimed responsibility for the murders for which Andy was convicted. Andy approaches Norton with this information, but Norton refuses to listen and sends him back to solitary confinement when he mentions the money laundering. Norton has Hadley murder Tommy under the guise of an escape attempt. Andy attempts to discontinue the laundering but relents after Norton threatens to destroy the library, remove Andy's protection from the guards, and move him to worse conditions. Andy is released from solitary confinement after two months, and he tells a skeptical Red that he dreams of living in Zihuatanejo, a Mexican coastal town. Red promises that if he is ever released, he will visit a specific hayfield near Buxton and retrieve a package Andy buried there. He worries about Andy's well-being, especially when he learns Andy asked a fellow inmate for six feet (1.8 meters) of rope.

At the next day's roll call, the guards find Andy's cell empty. An irate Norton throws a rock at a poster of Raquel Welch hanging on the cell wall, revealing a tunnel that Andy dug with his rock hammer over the last 19 years. The previous night, Andy used the rope to escape through the tunnel and prison sewage pipe, taking Norton's suit, shoes, and ledger, containing proof of the money laundering. While guards search for him, Andy poses as Randall Stephens, withdraws the laundered money from several banks, and mails the ledger and other evidence of the corruption and murders at Shawshank to a local newspaper. State police arrive at Shawshank and take Hadley into custody, while Norton commits suicide to avoid arrest.

After serving 40 years, Red is paroled. He struggles to adapt to life outside prison and fears that he never will. Remembering his promise to Andy, he visits Buxton and finds a cache containing money and a letter asking him to come to Zihuatanejo. Red violates his parole by traveling to Fort Hancock, Texas, and crossing the border into Mexico, admitting that he finally feels hope. He finds Andy on a beach in Zihuatanejo, and the two friends are happily reunited.

Cast

- Tim Robbins as Andy Dufresne:
A banker sentenced to life in prison in 1947 for the murder of his wife and her lover^[4]
- Morgan Freeman as Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding:
A prison contraband smuggler who befriends Andy^{[5][6]}
- Bob Gunton as Samuel Norton:
The pious and strict warden of Shawshank penitentiary^[4]
- William Sadler as Heywood:
A member of Red's gang of long-serving convicts^{[5][7]}
- Clancy Brown as Byron Hadley:
The brutal captain of the prison guards^{[8][9]}
- Gil Bellows as Tommy Williams:
A young convict imprisoned for burglary in 1965^{[5][10]}
- James Whitmore as Brooks Hatlen:
The elderly prison librarian, imprisoned since the early 1900s^[11]

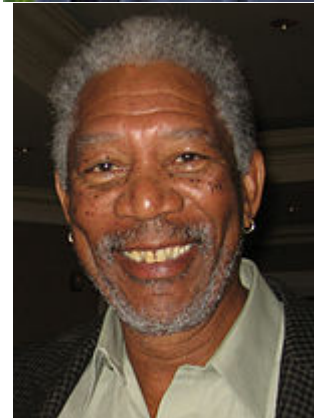
The cast also includes: Mark Rolston as Bogs Diamond, the head of "The Sisters" gang and a prison rapist;^[12] Jeffrey DeMunn as the prosecuting attorney in Dufresne's trial; Alfonso Freeman as Fresh Fish Con; Ned Bellamy and Don McManus as, respectively, prison guards Youngblood and Wiley; and Dion Anderson as Head Bull Haig.^[5] Renee Blaine portrays Andy's wife, and Scott Mann portrays her golf-instructor lover Glenn Quentin.^[13] Frank Medrano plays Fat Ass, one of Andy's fellow new inmates who is beaten to death by Hadley,^{[5][14]} and Bill Bolender plays Elmo Blatch, a convict who may actually be responsible for the crimes of which Andy is accused.^[15] James Kisicki portrays a bank manager.^[16]

Analysis

The film has been interpreted as being grounded in Christian mysticism.^[17] Andy is offered as a messianic, Christ-like figure, with Red describing him early in the film as having an aura that engulfs and protects him from Shawshank.^[18] The scene in which Andy and several inmates tar the prison roof can be seen as a recreation of the Last Supper, with Andy obtaining beer/wine for the twelve inmates/disciples as Freeman describes them as the "lords of all creation" invoking Jesus' blessing.^[19] Director Frank Darabont responded that this was not his deliberate intention,^[20] but he wanted people to find their own meaning in the film.^[21] The discovery of *The Marriage of Figaro* record is described in the screenplay as akin to finding the Holy Grail, bringing the prisoners to a halt, and causing the sick to rise up in their beds.^[22]

Early in the film, Warden Norton quotes Jesus Christ to describe himself to Andy, saying, "I am the light of the world", declaring himself Andy's savior. But this description can also reference Lucifer, the bearer of light.^[23] Indeed, the warden does not enforce the general rule of law, but chooses to enforce his own rules and punishments as he sees fit, becoming a law unto himself, like the behavior of Satan.^[4] The warden has also been compared to former United States President Richard Nixon. Norton's appearance and public addresses can be seen to mirror Nixon's. Similarly, Norton projects an image of a Holy man, speaking down sanctimoniously to the servile masses while running corrupt scams, like those which made Nixon infamous.^[24]

Zihuatanejo has been interpreted as an analogue for heaven or paradise.^[25] In the film, Andy describes it as a place with no memory, offering absolution from his sins by forgetting about them or allowing them to be washed away by the Pacific Ocean, whose name means "peace". The possibility of escaping to Zihuatanejo is only raised following Andy's admission of guilt over his wife's death.^[25] Similarly, Red's freedom is only earned once he accepts he cannot save himself or atone for his sins. Freeman has described Red's story as one of salvation as he is not innocent of his crimes, unlike Andy who finds redemption.^[26] While some Christian viewers interpret Zihuatanejo as heaven, it can also be interpreted as a Nietzschean form of guiltlessness achieved outside traditional notions of good and evil, where the amnesia offered is the destruction rather than forgiveness of sin, meaning Andy's aim is secular and atheistic. Just as Andy can be interpreted as a Christ-like figure, he can be seen as a Zarathustra-like prophet offering escape through education and the experience of freedom.^[25]



Tim Robbins in 2012 (*left*) and Morgan Freeman in 2006



Andy and Red's reunion was filmed at the Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge, Saint Croix, Virgin Islands. The location has been interpreted as a form of escape or paradise.

Ebert argued that *The Shawshank Redemption* is an allegory for maintaining one's feeling of self-worth when placed in a hopeless position. Andy's integrity is an important theme in the story line, especially in prison, where integrity is lacking.^[27]

Robbins himself believes that the concept of Zihuatanejo resonates with audiences because it represents a form of escape that can be achieved after surviving for many years within whatever "jail" someone finds themselves, from a bad relationship, job, or environment. Robbins said that it is important that such a place exists for us.^[28] Isaac M. Morehouse suggests that the film provides a great illustration of how characters can be free, even in prison, or unfree, even in freedom, based on their outlooks on life.^[29] Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre described freedom as an ongoing project that requires attention and resilience, without which a person begins to be defined by others or institutions, mirroring Red's belief that inmates become dependent on the

prison to define their lives. Andy displays resilience through rebellion, by playing music over the prison loudspeaker, and refusing to continue with the money laundering scam.^[4]

Many elements can be considered as tributes to the power of cinema. In the prison theater, the inmates watch the film *Gilda* (1946), but this scene was originally intended to feature *The Lost Weekend* (1945). The interchangeability of the films used in the prison theater suggests that it is the cinematic experience and not the subject which is key to the scene, allowing the men to escape the reality of their situation.^[30] Immediately following this scene, Andy is assaulted by the Sisters in the projector room and uses a film reel to help fight them off.^[31] Then in the end of the film, Andy passes through a hole in his cell hidden by a movie poster to escape both his cell and ultimately Shawshank.^[32]

Andy's and Red's relationship has been described as a non-sexual love story between two men,^[33] that few other films offer, where the friendship is not built on conducting a caper, car chases, or developing a relationship with women.^[34] Philosopher Alexander Hooke argued that Andy's and Red's true freedom is their friendship, being able to share joy and humor with each other.^[4]

Production

Development

Darabont first collaborated with author Stephen King in 1983 on the short film adaptation of "The Woman in the Room", buying the rights from him for \$1—a Dollar Deal that King used to help new directors build a résumé by adapting his short stories.^[9] After receiving his first screenwriting credit in 1987 for *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*, Darabont returned to King with \$5,000^[3] to purchase the rights to adapt *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*, a 96-page novella from King's 1982 collection *Different Seasons*, written to explore genres other than the horror stories for which he was commonly known.^[35] Although King did not understand how the story, largely focused on Red contemplating his fellow prisoner Andy, could be turned into a feature film, Darabont believed it was "obvious".^[9]

Five years later, Darabont wrote the script over an eight-week period. He expanded on elements of King's story. Brooks, who in the novella is a minor character who dies in a retirement home, became a tragic character who eventually hanged himself. Tommy, who in the novella trades his evidence exonerating Andy for transfer to a nicer prison, in the screenplay is murdered on the orders of Warden Norton, who is a composite of several warden characters in King's story.^[9] Darabont opted to create a single warden character to serve as the primary antagonist.^[36] Among his inspirations, Darabont listed

the works of director Frank Capra, including *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), describing them as tall tales; Darabont likened *The Shawshank Redemption* to a tall tale more than a prison movie.^[37] He also cited *Goodfellas* (1990) as an inspiration on the use of dialogue to illustrate the passage of time in the script.^[38] King never cashed the \$5,000 cheque from Darabont for the rights to *The Shawshank Redemption*; he later framed it and returned it to Darabont accompanied by a note which read: "In case you ever need bail money. Love, Steve."^[39]

At the time, prison-based films were not considered likely box office successes, but Darabont's script was read by then-Castle Rock Entertainment producer Liz Glotzer, whose interest in prison stories, and reaction to the script, led her to threaten to quit if Castle Rock did not produce *The Shawshank Redemption*.^[9] Director and Castle Rock co-founder Rob Reiner also liked the script. He offered Darabont between \$2.4 million^[40] and \$3 million to allow him to direct it himself.^[9] Reiner, who had previously adapted King's 1982 novella *The Body* into the 1986 film *Stand by Me*, planned to cast Tom Cruise as Andy and Harrison Ford as Red.^{[9][41]}

Castle Rock offered to finance any other film Darabont wanted to develop. Darabont seriously considered the offer, citing growing up poor in Los Angeles, believing it would elevate his standing in the industry, and that Castle Rock could have contractually fired him and given the film to Reiner anyway. But, he chose to remain the director, saying in a 2014 *Variety* interview, "you can continue to defer your dreams in exchange for money and, you know, die without ever having done the thing you set out to do".^[9] Reiner served as Darabont's mentor on the project instead.^[9] Within two weeks of showing the script to Castle Rock, Darabont had a \$25 million budget to make his film^[2] (taking a \$750,000 screenwriting and directing salary plus a percentage of the net profits),^[40] and pre-production began in January 1993.^[37]



Director Frank Darabont (pictured in 2011) bought the adaptation rights to *The Shawshank Redemption* for \$5,000 in 1987.

Casting



Clancy Brown in 2015

Freeman was cast at the suggestion of producer Liz Glotzer, who ignored the novella's character description of a white Irishman, nicknamed "Red". Freeman's character alludes to the choice when queried by Andy on why he is called Red, replying "Maybe it's because I'm Irish."^[38] Freeman opted not to research his role, saying "acting the part of someone who's incarcerated doesn't require any specific knowledge of incarceration ... because men don't change. Once you're in that situation, you just toe whatever line you have to toe."^[2]

Darabont looked initially at some of his favorite actors like Gene Hackman and Robert Duvall for the role of Andy Dufresne, but they were unavailable;^[38] Clint Eastwood and Paul Newman were also considered.^[42] Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, and Kevin Costner were offered, and passed on the role^[9] —Hanks due to his starring role in *Forrest Gump*,^[38] and Costner because he had the lead in *Waterworld*.^[43] Johnny Depp, Nicolas Cage, and Charlie Sheen were also considered for the role at different stages.^[43]

Cruise attended table readings of the script, but declined to work for the inexperienced Darabont.^[9] Darabont said he cast Robbins after seeing his performance in the 1990 psychological horror *Jacob's Ladder*.^[44] When Robbins was cast, he insisted that Darabont use experienced cinematographer Roger Deakins, who had

worked with him on *The Hudsucker Proxy*.^[9] To prepare for the role, Robbins observed caged animals at a zoo, spent an afternoon in solitary confinement, spoke with prisoners and guards,^[33] and had his arms and legs shackled for a few hours.^[2]

Cast initially as young convict Tommy, Brad Pitt dropped out following his success in *Thelma & Louise*^[9] (the role went to a debuting Gil Bellows);^[2] James Gandolfini passed on portraying prison rapist Bogs.^[9] Bob Gunton was filming *Demolition Man* (1993) when he went to audition for the role of Warden Norton. To convince the studio that Gunton was right for the part, Darabont and producer Niki Marvin arranged for him to record a screen test on a day off from *Demolition Man*. They had a wig made for him as his head was shaved for his *Demolition Man* role. Gunton wanted to portray Norton with hair as this could then be grayed to convey his on-screen aging as the film progressed. Gunton performed his screen test with Robbins, which was filmed by Deakins. After being confirmed for the role, he used the wig in the film's early scenes until his hair re-grew. Gunton said that Marvin and Darabont saw that he understood the character which went in his favor, as did the fact his height was similar to Robbins' allowing Andy to believably use the warden's suit.^[36]

Portraying the head guard Byron Hadley, Clancy Brown was given the opportunity to speak with former guards by the production's liaison officer, but declined believing it would not be a good thing to say that his brutal character was in any way inspired by Ohio state correctional officers.^[45] William Sadler, who portrays Heywood, said that Darabont had approached him in 1989 on the set of the *Tales from the Crypt* television series where he was a writer, about starring in the adaptation he was intending to make.^[46] Freeman's son Alfonso has a cameo as a young Red in mug shot photos,^[38] and as a prisoner shouting "fresh fish" as Andy arrives at Shawshank.^[47] Among the extras used in the film were the former warden and former inmates of the Reformatory, and active guards from a nearby incarceration facility.^{[48][2]} The novella's original title attracted several people to audition for the non-existent role of Rita Hayworth, including a man in drag clothing.^[40]

Filming

On a \$25 million budget,^[49] principal photography took place over three months^[9] between June and August 1993.^{[50][51]} Filming regularly required up to 18-hour workdays, six days a week.^[9] Freeman described filming as tense, saying, "Most of the time, the tension was between the cast and director. I remember having a bad moment with the director, had a few of those." Freeman referred to Darabont's requiring multiple takes of scenes which he considered had no discernible differences. For example, the scene where Andy first approaches Red to procure a rock hammer took nine hours to film, and featured Freeman throwing and catching a baseball with another inmate throughout it. The number of takes that were shot resulted in Freeman turning up to filming the following day with his arm in a sling. Freeman sometimes simply refused to do the additional takes. Robbins said that the long days were difficult. Darabont felt that making the film taught him a lot, "A director really needs to have an internal barometer to measure what any given actor needs."^[9] He found his most frequent struggles were with Deakins. Darabont favored more scenic shots, while Deakins felt that not showing the outside of the prison added a sense of claustrophobia, and it meant that when a wide scenic shot was used, it had more impact.^[2]

Marvin spent five months scouting prisons across the United States and Canada, looking for a site that had a timeless aesthetic, and was completely abandoned, hoping to avoid the complexity of filming the required footage, for hours each day, in an active prison with the security difficulties that would entail.^[52] Marvin eventually chose the Ohio State



Ohio State Reformatory, also known as the Mansfield Reformatory, served as the fictional Shawshank prison.

Reformatory in Mansfield, Ohio to serve as the fictional Shawshank State Penitentiary in Maine, citing its Gothic-style stone and brick buildings.^{[52][51]} After nearly a century of use, the facility had been closed three years earlier on New Year's Eve, 1990,^[53] due to inhumane living conditions.^[51]

The 15-acre reformatory, housing its own power plant and farm, was partially torn down shortly after filming was completed, leaving the main administration building and two cell blocks.^[51] Several of the interior shots of the specialized prison facilities, such as the admittance rooms and the warden's office, were shot in the reformatory. The interior of the boarding room used by Brooks and Red was in the administration building; exterior shots of the boarding house were taken elsewhere. Internal scenes in the prison cellblocks were filmed on a soundstage built inside a nearby shuttered Westinghouse Electric factory. Since Darabont wanted the inmates' cells to face each other, almost all the cellblock scenes were shot on a purpose-built set housed in the Westinghouse factory^[51] except for the scene featuring Elmo Blatch's admission of guilt for the crimes for which Andy was convicted. It was filmed in one of the actual prison's more confined cells.^[54] Scenes were also filmed in Mansfield, as well as neighboring Ashland, Ohio.^[55] The oak tree under which Andy buries his letter to Red was located near Malabar Farm State Park, in Lucas, Ohio;^[42] it was destroyed by winds in 2016.^[56]



The Bissman Building in Mansfield, Ohio served as the Halfway house in which Brooks and later Red would reside following their release from prison.

Just as a prison in Ohio stood in for a fictional one in Maine, the beach scene showing Andy and Red's reunion in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, was actually shot in the Caribbean on the island of Saint Croix, one of the U.S. Virgin Islands.^[57] The beach at 'Zihuatanejo' is the Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge,^[58] a protected area for leatherback sea turtles.^[59] Scenes shot in Upper Sandusky included the prison wood shop scene where Red and his fellow inmates hear "The Marriage of Figaro" (the woodshop is now called the Shawshank Woodshop),^[42] and the opening court scene which was shot at the Wyandot County Courthouse.^[58] Other shooting locations included Pugh Cabin in Malabar Farm State Park, where Andy sits outside as his wife engages in an affair,^[60] Butler, Ohio which stood in for Buxton, Maine,^[61] and The Bissman Building in Mansfield, which served as the hotel where Brooks stayed following his release.^[62]

While the film portrays Andy escaping to freedom through a sewer pipe described as a "river of shit", Robbins crawls through a mixture of water, chocolate syrup, and sawdust. The stream into which Robbins emerges was actually certified toxic by a chemist according to production designer Terence Marsh.^[47] Of the scene, Robbins said, "when you're doing a film, you want to be a good soldier—you don't want to be the one that gets in the way. So you will do things as an actor that are compromising to your physical health and safety."^[63] As for the scene where Andy rebelliously plays music over the prison announcement system, it was Robbins' idea for Andy to turn the music up and not shut it off.^[47] While in the finished film the inmates watch Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (1946), they were originally intended to be watching Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* (1945), a film about the dangers of alcohol. As the footage was too costly to procure from Paramount Pictures, producer Niki Marvin approached *The Shawshank Redemption's* domestic distribution rights-holder Columbia Pictures, who offered a list of lower-priced titles, one of which was *Gilda*.^[64]

Post-production

The final cut of the theatrically released film runs for 142 minutes,^[1] and was dedicated to Allen Greene, Darabont's former agent who died during filming from AIDS.^[65] The film's first edit ran for nearly two and a half hours, which Glotzer considered "long", and several scenes were cut including a longer sequence of Red adjusting to life post incarceration;

Darabont said that in test screenings the audience seemed to be getting impatient with the scene as they were already convinced that Red would not make it.^[33] Another scene cut for time showed a prison guard investigating Andy's escape tunnel; it was thought this slowed down the action.^[66] The film originally had a cold open that played out Andy's crime, with his trial playing throughout the opening credits, but these scenes were edited together to create a more "punchy" opening.^[67] One scripted scene, which Darabont described as his best work, was left unfilmed because of the shooting schedule.^[68] In the scene, a dreaming Red is sucked into the poster of Rita Hayworth to find himself alone and insignificant on the Pacific shore, saying "I am terrified, there is no way home." Darabont said that he regretted being unable to capture the scene.^[69]

In Darabont's original vision for the end of the film Red is seen riding a bus towards the Mexican border, leaving his fate ambiguous. Glotzer insisted on including the scene of Red and Andy reuniting in Zihuatanejo. She said Darabont felt this was a "commercial, sappy" ending, but Glotzer wanted the audience to see them together.^[9] Castle Rock agreed to finance filming for the scene without requiring its inclusion, guaranteeing Darabont the final decision.^[70] The scene originally featured a longer reunion in which Andy and Red recited dialogue from their first meeting, but Darabont said it had a "golly-gee-ain't-we-cute" quality and excised it.^[71] The beach reunion was test audiences' favorite scene; both Freeman and Robbins felt it provided the necessary closure. Darabont agreed to include the scene after seeing the test audience reactions, saying: "I think it's a magical and uplifting place for our characters to arrive at the end of their long saga..."^[70]

Music

The film's score was composed by Thomas Newman. He felt that it already elicited such strong emotions without music that he found it difficult to compose one that would elevate scenes without distracting from them. The piece, "Shawshank Redemption", plays during Andy's escape from Shawshank and originally had a three-note motif, but Darabont felt it had too much of a "triumphal flourish" and asked that it be toned down to a single-note motif. "So Was Red", played following Red's release from prison, and leading to his discovery of Andy's cache, became one of Newman's favorite pieces. The piece was initially written for a solo oboe, until Newman reluctantly agreed to add harmonica—a reference to the harmonica Red receives from Andy to continue his message of hope. According to Darabont, harmonica player Tommy Morgan "casually delivered something dead-on perfect on the first take", and this is heard in the finished film.^[72] Newman's score was so successful that excerpts from it were used in movie trailers for years afterwards.^[35]

Release

Theatrical

Leading up to its release, the film was test screened with the public. These were described as "through the roof", and Glotzer said they were some of the best she had seen.^{[9][73]} It was decided to mostly omit Stephen King's name from any advertising, as the studio wanted to attract a "more prestigious audience" who might reject a film from a writer known mostly for pulp fiction works like *The Shining* and *Cujo*.^[74]

Following early September premieres at the Renaissance Theatre in Mansfield, and the Toronto International Film Festival,^{[75][16]} *The Shawshank Redemption* began a limited North American release on September 23, 1994. During its opening weekend, the film earned \$727,000 from 33 theaters—an average of \$22,040 per theater. Following a Hollywood tradition of visiting different theaters on opening night to see the audiences view their film live, Darabont and Glotzer went to the Cinerama Dome, but found no one there. Glotzer claimed that the pair actually sold two tickets outside the theater with the promise that if the buyers did not like the film, they could ask Castle Rock for a refund.^[9] While critics praised the film, Glotzer believed that a lackluster review from the *Los Angeles Times* pushed crowds away.^{[9][73]} It received a wide release on October 14, 1994, expanding to a total of 944 theaters to earn \$2.4 million—an average of

\$2,545 per theater—finishing as the number nine film of the weekend, behind sex-comedy *Exit to Eden* (\$3 million), and just ahead of the historical drama *Quiz Show* (\$2.1 million), which was in its fifth week at the cinemas.^{[35][49]} *The Shawshank Redemption* closed in late November 1994, after 10 weeks with an approximate total gross of \$16 million.^[76] It was considered a box office bomb, failing to recoup its \$25 million budget, not including marketing costs and the cinema exhibitors' cuts.^[9]

The film was also competing with *Pulp Fiction* (\$108 million),^[3] which also premiered October 14 following its *Palme d'Or* award win, and *Forrest Gump* (\$330 million)^[3] which was in the middle of a successful 42-week theatrical run.^[73] Both films would become quotable cultural phenomena. A general audience trend towards action films starring the likes of *Bruce Willis* and *Arnold Schwarzenegger* was also considered to work against the commercial success of *The Shawshank Redemption*.^[9] Freeman blamed the title, saying it was unmemorable,^[9] while Robbins recalled fans asking: "What was that *Shinkshonk Reduction* thing?".^[21] Several alternative titles had been posited before the release due to concerns that it was not a marketable title.^[46] The low box office was also blamed on a lack of female characters to broaden the audience demographic, and the general unpopularity of prison films.^[21]

After being nominated for several Oscars in early 1995,^[9] the film was re-released between February and March.^[76] In total, the film made about \$28.3 million in North American theaters, and about \$30 million from other markets for a worldwide total of \$58.3 million.^[3] In the United States, it became the 51st-highest-grossing film of 1994, and the 21st-highest grossing R-rated film of 1994.^[49]

Post theatrical

Despite its disappointing box-office returns, in what was then considered a risky move, *Warner Home Video* shipped 320,000 rental video copies throughout the United States in 1995. It went on to become one of the top rented films of the year.^[35] Positive recommendations and repeat customer viewings, and being well-received by both male and female audiences, were considered key to the film's rental success.^[21]

Ted Turner's Turner Broadcasting System had acquired Castle Rock in 1993, which enabled his TV channel, *TNT*, to obtain the cable-broadcast rights to the film.^[3] According to Glotzer, because of the low box office numbers, TNT could air the film at a very low cost, but still charge premium advertising rates. The film began airing regularly on the network in June 1997.^{[3][9][9]} TV airings of the film accrued record-breaking numbers,^[21] and its repeated broadcast was considered essential to turning the film into a cultural phenomenon after its poor box office performance.^[9] Darabont felt the turning point for the film's success was the Academy Award nominations, saying "nobody had heard of the movie, and that year on the Oscar broadcast, they were mentioning this movie seven times".^[44] In 1996, the rights to *The Shawshank Redemption* were passed to *Warner Bros.*, following the merger of its parent company *Time Warner* with the Turner Broadcasting System.^[77]

By 2013, *The Shawshank Redemption* had aired on fifteen basic cable networks, and in that year occupied 151 hours of airtime, rivaling *Scarface* (1983), and behind only *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993). It was in the top 15 percent of movies among adults between the ages of 18 and 49 on the *Spike*, *Up*, *SundanceTV*, and *Lifetime* channels. Despite its mainly male cast it was the most watched movie on the female-targeted *OWN* network. In a 2014 *Wall Street Journal* article, it was estimated that based on the margins studios take from box office returns, home media sales, and television licensing, *The Shawshank Redemption* had made \$100 million. Jeff Baker, then-executive vice president and general manager of Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, said that the home video sales had earned about \$80 million.^[3] While Warner Bros. does not report what it earns in licensing the film for TV, in 2014 current and former executives at the studio confirmed that it was one of the highest valued assets in Warner Bros. \$1.5 billion library.^[78] That same year, Gunton said that by its tenth anniversary in 2004, he was still earning six-figure residual payments, and was still earning a "substantial income" from it, which was considered unusual so many years after its release.^[79]

Reception

Critical response

The Shawshank Redemption opened to generally positive reviews.^{[83][84][85]} Some reviewers compared the film to other well-received prison dramas, including: *Birdman of Alcatraz*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Cool Hand Luke*, and *Riot in Cell Block 11*.^{[86][87]} Gene Siskel said that like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Shawshank Redemption* is an inspirational drama about overcoming overbearing authority.^[87]

Entertainment Weekly's Owen Gleiberman said that Freeman makes the Red character feel genuine and "lived-in".^[6] Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* said that Freeman was quietly impressive, but lamented that Red's role in the film had limited range, restricted to observing Andy. She considered Freeman's commanding performance made him a much stronger figure than simply an observer. Maslin said that Freeman's performance was especially moving when describing how dependent Red had become on living within the prison walls.^[88] *Variety*'s Leonard Klady suggested that Freeman had the "showier" role, allowing him "a grace and dignity that come naturally", without ever becoming banal,^[80] and *The Washington Post*'s Desson Howe called Freeman a "master" of comedic and poignant cadence.^[89] Even Kenneth Turan's *Los Angeles Times* review, which Glotzer credited with derailing the film's box office success, praised Freeman, saying his "effortless screen presence lends *Shawshank* the closest thing to credibility it can manage".^[90]

Of Robbins' performance, Gleiberman said that in his "laconic-good-guy, neo-Gary Cooper role, [Robbins] is unable to make Andy connect with the audience".^[6] Conversely, Maslin said that Andy has the more subdued role, but that Robbins portrays him intensely, and effectively depicts the character as he transitions from new prisoner to aged father figure,^[88] and Klady stated that his "riveting, unfussy ... precise, honest, and seamless" performance anchors the film.^[80] Howe said that while the character is "cheesily messianic" for easily charming everyone to his side, comparing him to "Forrest Gump goes to jail", Robbins exudes the perfect kind of innocence to sell the story.^[89] *The Hollywood Reporter* stated that both Freeman and Robbins gave outstanding, layered performances that imbued their characters with individuality,^[81] and *Rolling Stone*'s Peter Travers said that the pair create something "undeniably powerful and moving".^[86] Gunton and Brown were deemed by Klady as "extremely credible in their villainy",^[80] Howe countered that Gunton's warden was a clichéd character who extols religious virtues while having people murdered.^[89]

Maslin called the film an impressive directorial debut that tells a gentle tale with a surprising amount of loving care,^[88] and Klady saying the only failings came when Darabont focused for too long on supporting characters, or embellished a secondary story.^[80] *The Hollywood Reporter* said that both the directing and writing were crisp, while criticizing the film's long running time.^[81] Klady said that the length and tone, while tempered by humor and unexpected events, would dampen the film's mainstream appeal, but the story offered a fascinating portrait of the innate humanity of the inmates.^[80] Gleiberman disliked that the prisoners' crimes were overlooked to portray them more as good guys.^[6] Turan similarly objected to what he perceived as extreme violence and rape scenes, and making most of the prisoners seem like a "bunch of swell and softhearted guys" to cast the prison experience in a "rosy glow".^[90] Klady summarized the film as "estimable and haunting entertainment", comparing it to a rough diamond with small flaws,^[80] but Howe criticized it for deviating with multiple subplots, and pandering by choosing to resolve the story with Andy's and Red's reunion, rather than leaving the mystery.^[89] Ebert noted that the story works because it is not about Andy as the hero, but how Red perceives him.^[75]



Roger Deakins' cinematography was praised by critics,^{[80][81]} and his work led to him winning the American Society of Cinematographers award for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography.^[82]

Deakins cinematography was routinely praised,^[80] with *The Hollywood Reporter* calling it "foreboding" and "well-crafted",^[81] and Travers saying "the everyday agonies of prison life are meticulously laid out ... you can almost feel the frustration and rage seeping into the skin of the inmates".^[86] Gleiberman praised the choice of scenery, writing that the "moss-dark, saturated images have a redolent sensuality" that makes the film very realistic.^[6] *The Hollywood Reporter* said of Newman's score, "at its best moments, alights with radiant textures and sprightly grace notes, nicely emblematic of the film's central theme",^[81] and Klady describing it as "the right balance between the somber and the absurd".^[80]

Accolades

The film was nominated for seven Academy Awards in 1995, the most for a Stephen King film adaptation:^[91] Best Picture (Marvin), Best Actor (Freeman), Best Adapted Screenplay (Darabont), Best Cinematography (Deakins), Best Editing (Richard Francis-Bruce), Best Sound Mixing (Robert J. Litt, Elliot Tyson, Michael Herbick, and Willie D. Burton),^[92] and Best Original Score (Newman, his first Academy Award nomination).^[72] It did not win in any category.^[91] It received two Golden Globe Award nominations for Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture for Freeman, and Best Screenplay for Darabont.^[93]

Robbins and Freeman were both nominated for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role at the inaugural Screen Actors Guild Awards in 1995.^[94] Darabont was nominated for a Directors Guild of America award in 1994 for Best Director of a feature film,^[95] and a Writers Guild of America Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.^[96] Deakins won the American Society of Cinematographers award for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography,^[82] while producer Niki Marvin was nominated for a 1994 Golden Laurel Award by the Producers Guild of America.^[96]

Legacy



The Shawshank tree after being split by lightning in 2011. It became a symbol of hope for its role in the film.

Darabont later adapted and directed two other King stories, *The Green Mile* (1999) and *The Mist* (2007).^[97] In a 2016 interview, King said that *The Shawshank Redemption* was his favorite adaptation of his work, alongside *Stand by Me*.^[98]

The oak tree, under which Andy leaves a note for Red directing him to Zihuatanejo, became a symbol of hope for its role in the film, and is considered iconic.^{[56][99]} In 2016, *The New York Times* reported that the tree attracted thousands of visitors annually.^[100] The tree was partially destroyed on July 29, 2011, when it was split by lightning; news of the damage was reported across the United States on newscasts, in newspapers, and on websites as far away as India.^{[101][99]} The tree was completely felled by strong winds on or around July 22, 2016,^[99] and its vestiges were cut down in April 2017.^[102] The remains were turned into *The Shawshank Redemption* memorabilia including rock hammers and magnets.^[103]

The prison site became a tourist attraction,^[51] with many of the rooms and props remaining including the false pipe through which Andy escapes,^[53] and a portion of the oak tree from the finale, after it was damaged in 2011.^[42] The surrounding area is also visited by fans, while local businesses market "Shawshanwiches" and Bundt cakes in the shape of the prison. The prison itself was to be torn down completely following filming, but was eventually sold to enthusiasts for \$1.^[53] According to the Mansfield/Richland County Convention and Visitors Bureau (later renamed Destination Mansfield),^[57] tourism in the area had increased every year since *The Shawshank Redemption* premiered, and in 2013 drew in 18,000 visitors and over \$3 million to the local economy.^[42] In late August that year, a series of events were held in Mansfield to celebrate the film's 20th anniversary including a screening of the film at the Renaissance Theatre, a bus tour of certain filming

locations, and a cocktail party at the Reformatory. Cast from the film attended some of the events including Gunton, Scott Mann, Renee Blaine, and James Kisicki.^[16] As of 2017, Destination Mansfield operates the Shawshank Trail, a series of 15 marked stops around locations related to the film across Mansfield, Ashland, Upper Sandusky, and St. Croix.^[57]

Lasting reception

Contemporary review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes offers a 91% approval rating from 66 critics, with an average rating of 8.2/10. The consensus reads, "*The Shawshank Redemption* is an uplifting, deeply satisfying prison drama with sensitive direction and fine performances."^[104] The film also has a score of 80 out of 100 on Metacritic based on 20 critics indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[105]

In 1999, film critic Roger Ebert listed *Shawshank* on his list of *The Great Movies*.^[85] The film has been nominated for, or appeared on, the American Film Institute's lists celebrating the top 100 film or film-related topics. In 1998, it was nominated for AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies list, and was No. 72 on the 2007 revised list, outranking *Forrest Gump* (No. 76) and *Pulp Fiction* (No. 94).^{[106][107]} It was also No. 23 on AFI's 100 Years...100 Cheers (2006) list charting inspiring films.^[108] The characters of Andy and Warden Norton received nominations for AFI's 100 Years...100 Heroes & Villains list;^[109] AFI's 100 Years...100 Movie Quotes list for "Get busy livin', or get busy dyin'";^[110] AFI's 100 Years...100 Songs list for "Duetto – Sull'Aria" (from *The Marriage of Figaro*);^[111] and AFI's 100 Years of Film Scores for Newman's work.^[112] In 2005, the Writers Guild of America listed Darabont's screenplay at No. 22 on its list of the 101 Greatest Screenplays,^[113] and in 2014, *The Shawshank Redemption* was named Hollywood's fourth favorite film, based on a survey of 2,120 Hollywood-based entertainment industry members; entertainment lawyers skewed the most towards the film.^[114] In 2017, *The Daily Telegraph* named it the seventeenth-best prison film ever made.^[115] *The Shawshank Redemption* appeared on several lists of the greatest films of the 1990s, by outlets including: *Paste* and *NME* (2012),^{[116][117]} *Complex* (2013),^[118] *CHUD.com* (2014),^[119] *MSN* (2015),^[120] *TheWrap*, *Maxim*,^{[121][122]} and *Rolling Stone* (2017).^[123]

Cultural impact

In November 2014, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences celebrated the film's 20th anniversary with a special one-night screening at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills, California.^[44] In 2015, the film was selected by the United States Library of Congress to be preserved in the National Film Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant". Darabont responded: "I can think of no greater honor than for *The Shawshank Redemption* to be considered part of our country's cinematic legacy."^[83] *Variety* said that the word "Shawshank" could be used to instantly convey images of a prison.^[35]

Critics have sometimes struggled to define the immense public appreciation for the film.^[83] In an interview, Freeman said, "About everywhere you go, people say, '*The Shawshank Redemption*—greatest movie I ever saw'" and that such praise "Just comes out of them". Robbins said, "I swear to God, all over the world—all over the world—wherever I go, there are people who say, 'That movie changed my life'".^[9] In a separate interview, Stephen King said, "If that isn't the best [adaptation of my works], it's one of the two or three best, and certainly, in moviegoers' minds, it's probably the best because it generally rates at the top of these surveys they have of movies. ... I never expected anything to happen with it."^[124] In a 2014 *Variety* article, Robbins claimed that South African politician Nelson Mandela told him about his love for the film,^[9] while it has been cited as a source of inspiration by several sportsmen including Jonny Wilkinson (UK), Agustín Pichot (Argentina), Al Charron (Canada), and Dan Lyle (USA),^[125] and Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York.^[126] Gunton said he had encountered fans in Morocco, Australia, South America,^[127] Germany, France, and Bora Bora.^[36] Director Steven Spielberg said that the film was "a chewing-gum movie—if you step on it, it sticks to your shoe".^[38]

It has been the number 1 film on IMDb's user-generated Top 250 since 2008, when it surpassed *The Godfather*, having remained at or near the top since the late 1990s.^{[9][74]} In the United Kingdom, readers of *Empire* magazine voted the film as the best of the 1990s, the greatest film of all time in 2006, and it placed number four on *Empire*'s 2008 list of "The 500 Greatest Movies of All Time" and their 2017 list of "The 100 Greatest Movies".^{[21][128][129][130]} In March 2011, the film was voted by BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio 1Xtra listeners as their favorite film of all time.^[131] It regularly appears on *Empire*'s top 100 films, was named the greatest film to not win the Academy Award for Best Picture in a 2013 poll by Sky UK (it lost to *Forrest Gump*),^[132] and ranked as Britain's favorite film in a 2015 YouGov poll. When the British Film Institute analyzed the demographic breakdown of the YouGov poll, it noted that *The Shawshank Redemption* was not the top-ranked film in any group, but was the only film to appear in the top 15 of every age group, suggesting it is able to connect with every polled age group, unlike *Pulp Fiction* which fared better with younger voters, and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) with older voters.^[73] A 2017 poll conducted by Gatwick Airport also identified the film as the fourth-best to watch while in flight.^[133] When film critic Mark Kermode interviewed a host of United States moviegoers, they compared it to a "religious experience".^[73] It was also voted as New Zealand's favorite film in a 2015 poll.^[134]

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- [List of films considered the best](#)
- [List of number-one DVDs of 2002 \(UK\)](#)
- [List of number-one DVDs of 2006 \(UK\)](#)

External links

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- *The Shawshank Redemption* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111161/>) on IMDb
 - *The Shawshank Redemption* (<https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/55199>) at the American Film Institute Catalog
 - *The Shawshank Redemption* (<http://www.tcm.turner.com/tcmdb/title/title.jsp?stid=20338>) at the TCM Movie Database
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 - *The Shawshank Redemption* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shawshank_redemption) at Rotten Tomatoes
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