

Blu-ray Review: Criterion Releases Controversial ‘Heaven’s Gate’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 14, 2012 - 9:57am

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CHICAGO – Michael Cimino’s “Heaven’s Gate” remains one of the most controversial films of the modern age. Some would go as far as to say that the film’s financial failure in 1980 ushered in an era of studio control in that decade that killed the American auteur movement of the ’60s and ’70s that so redefined the form. It’s not much of a stretch given the historical reputation of a movie that got out of control in the hands of a director who couldn’t manage his own vision. Or is history wrong? Is it an underappreciated classic? Check out the gorgeous new Criterion Blu-ray and decide for yourself.

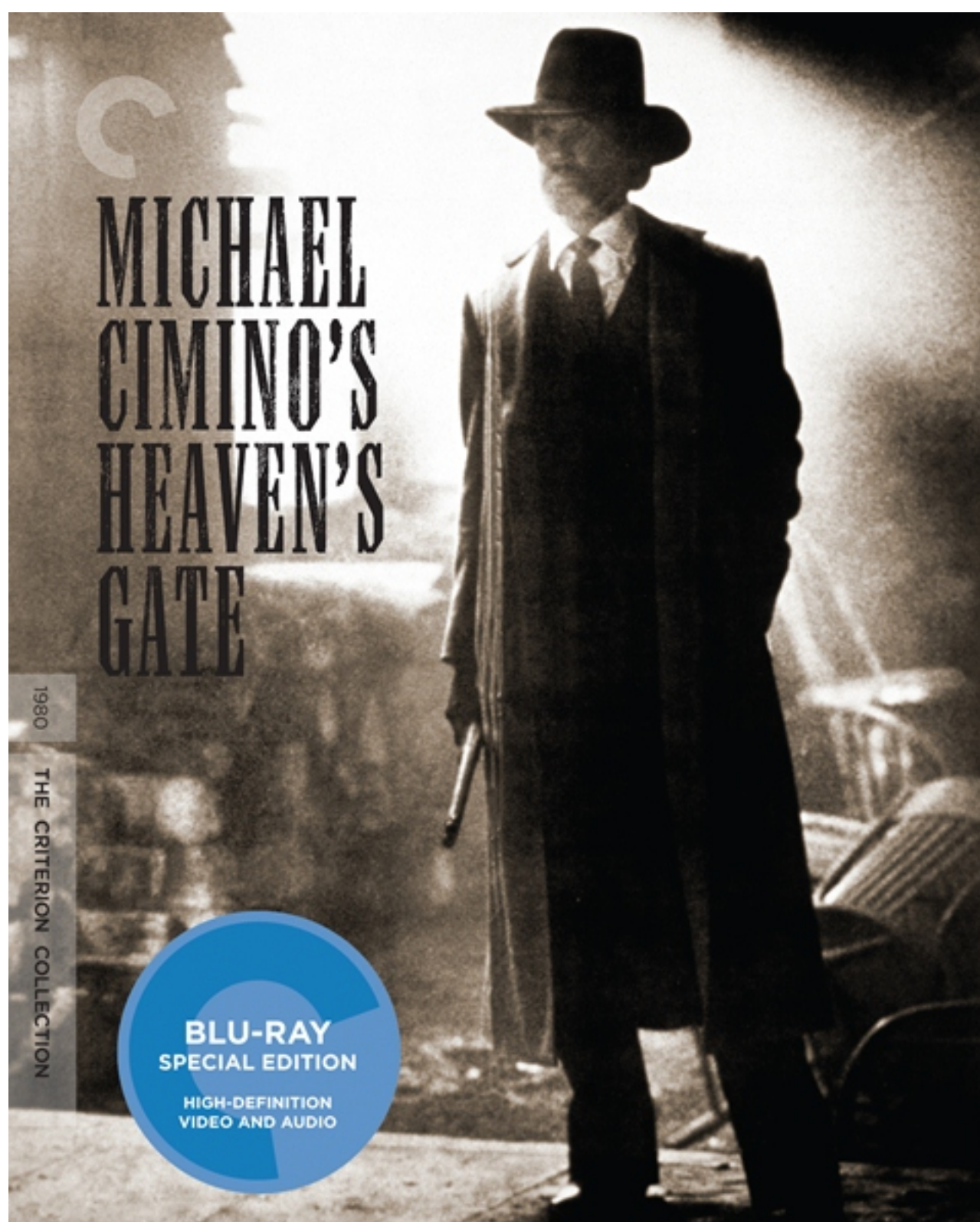


Rating: **4.5/5.0**

The truth is that “Heaven’s Gate” is nowhere near the disaster that the history books would have you believe. It’s also not exactly the artistic success that its studio wanted in 1980 from the director of the Oscar-winning “The Deer Hunter.” When art and commerce meet, you can sometimes have disasters like “Heaven’s Gate,” a film so notoriously loathed by some audiences that the studio took it back, drastically recut it, and released it in a nearly-incoherent version. Here on the Blu-ray is the restored version that Cimino wants you to remember, the tale of American Western expansion in all its HD glory.

The film looks strikingly great and one first notices the scope of Cimino’s unbridled vision. To be honest what works and what doesn’t work about “Heaven’s Gate” are often the same thing. The refusal to adhere to a typical blockbuster pacing allows for some beautiful moments and striking performances but it also allows for bloat and ridiculous excess in terms of extras, sets, etc. I believe there could have been a stunning version of “Heaven’s Gate” that was slightly more compressed on every level - script, production, and editing. However, it’s far from an awful film and features some spectacular moments along the long journey.

The Criterion release is most essential for its remastering of the preferred cut of the film but it also includes an entire second disc of special features. I wish that they had included the truncated version just for history’s sake so I could see exactly how the studio mangled the film and set in motion a pattern of film interference that arguably persists to this day.



Heaven's Gate was released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on November 27, 2012

Photo credit: Courtesy of The Criterion Collection

Synopsis:

A breathtaking depiction of the promise and perils of America's western expansion, *Heaven's Gate*, directed by Michael Cimino, is among Hollywood's most ambitious and unorthodox epics. Kris Kristofferson brings his weathered sensuality to the role of a Harvard graduate who relocates to Wyoming as a federal marshal; there, he learns of a government-sanctioned plot by cattle barons to kill the area's European settlers for their land. The resulting battle is based on the bloody real-life Johnson County War of 1892. Also starring Isabelle Huppert and Christopher Walken, *Heaven's Gate* is a savage and ravishingly shot take on western movie lore. This release presents the full director's cut, letting viewers today see Cimino's potent original vision.

Special Features:

- o Audio Interview With Cimino And Producer Joann Carelli
- o Interviews With Actor Kris Kristofferson, Soundtrack Arranger and Performer David Mansfield, And Second Assistant Director Michael Stevenson
- o Restoration Demonstration
- o Teaser and TV Spot
- o Booklet Featuring An Essay By Critic And Programmer Giulia D'Agnolo Vallan and a 1980 Interview With Cimino

"Heaven's Gate" stars Kris Kristofferson, Christopher Walken, John Hurt, Sam Waterston, Brad Dourif, Isabelle Huppert, and Joseph Cotten. It was written and directed by Michael Cimino and released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on November 27, 2012.



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