

Blu-ray Review: Neon Brilliance of Michael Mann's Influential 'Thief'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 12, 2014 - 10:59am

- [Blu-ray Review](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [James Belushi](#) [5]
- [James Caan](#) [6]
- [Michael Mann](#) [7]
- [Robert Prosky](#) [8]
- [The Criterion Collection](#) [9]
- [Thief](#) [10]
- [Tuesday Weld](#) [11]
- [Willie Nelson](#) [12]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [13]

Michael Mann's "Thief" is a crime movie that's more about the criminal than his illegal acts. It's about a man who has been torn down to nothing who slowly puts pieces back into his life, like a love affair and a family, only to learn that he has to give all of them up for his own safety. It's a fascinating film, stunning in its technical acumen and with stellar performances from James Caan, Tuesday Weld, and Robert Prosky (making his film debut). It's also a great inclusion in The Criterion Collection, perfectly remastered and with some interesting interview insights.

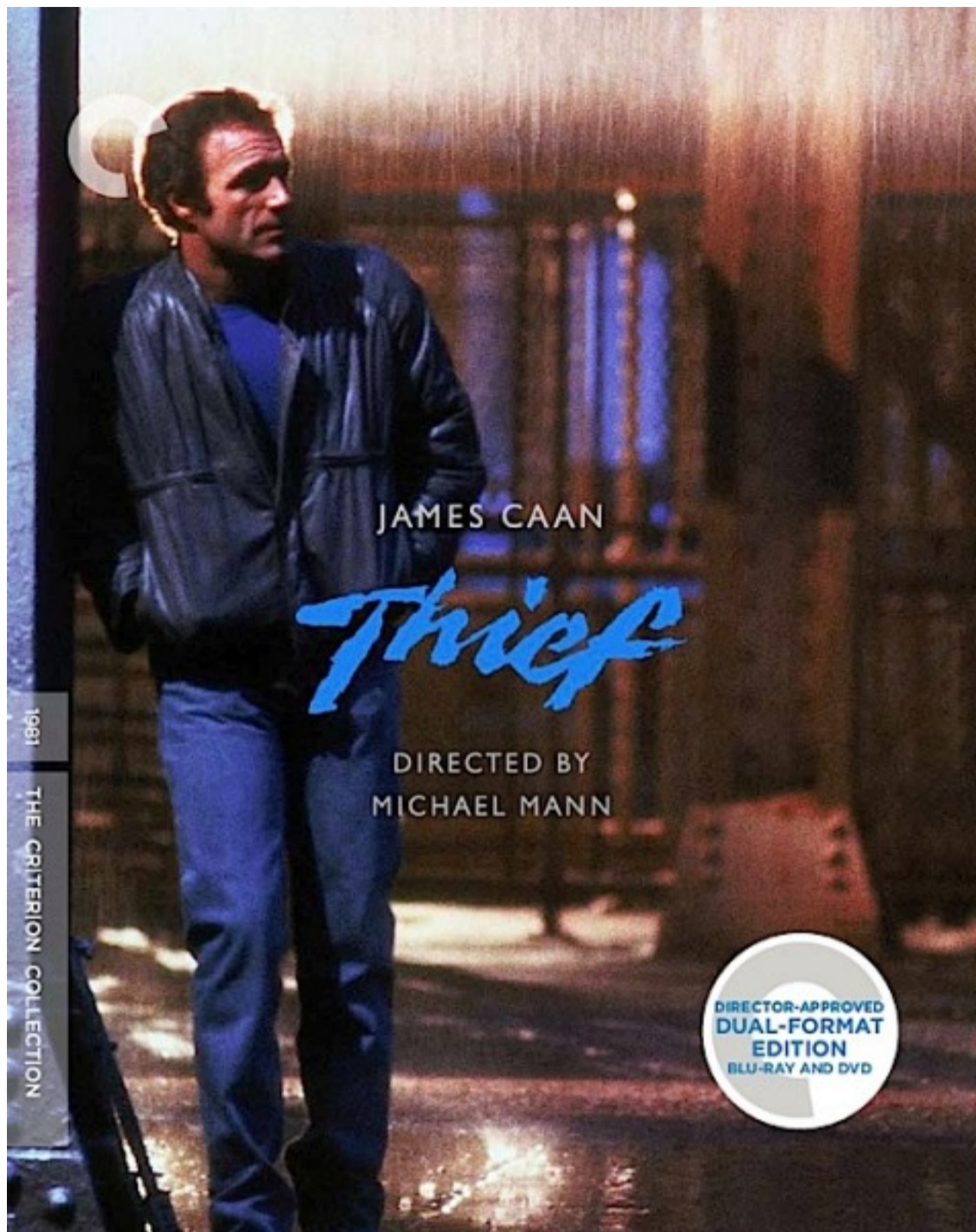


Rating: **4.5/5.0**

What is "Thief"? Like most Michael Mann films, it's hard to pin down into a genre. Yes, there are traditional elements of the crime film and even some degree of noir but it's so distinctly character driven that it transcends the cliches of its genre. Who is Frank (Caan)? He's a jewel thief but he makes clear both to his new employer (Prosky) and his love (Weld) that he is not attached to anything or anyone. He goes on his own. He is a loner and "Thief" actually has thematic echoes of the Western more than a noir or crime flick.

Mann's technical skill, which is practically unmatched in his generation, is fully on display this early in his career. The rain, the light, the neon, the flash of gunfire, the explosions & the blood — no one shoots a crime flick like Michael Mann. And yet the scene of the film, and arguably his career, is the diner scene about half an hour in. Jimmy Caan and Tuesday Weld are given about ten minutes to converse, to tell their back stories, and to fully ground these characters in ways that we don't often get in literature, much less film. It's one of my favorite scenes of all time.

And Caan says in the commentary track he shared with Mann that it's his favorite scene of his career before the two gentlemen essentially go silent to watch it. The commentary track is strong but it was recorded two decades ago. More current are the interview special features, including new ones with Mann, Caan, and Tangerine Dream. Caan says he's most proud of two or three pictures and "Thief" is one of 'em. You can't blame him.



Thief will be released on Blu-ray and DVD on January 14, 2014

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Synopsis:

The contemporary American auteur Michael Mann burst out of the gate, his bold artistic sensibility fully formed with *Thief*, his first debut feature. James Caan stars, in one of his most riveting performances, as a no-nonsense ex-con safecracker planning to leave the criminal world behind after one final diamond heist, but discovering that escape is not as simple as he hoped. Finding hypnotic beauty in neon and rain-slick streets, sparks and steel, *Thief* effortlessly established the moody stylishness and tactile approach to action that would define such later iconic entertainments from Mann as *Miami Vice*, *Manhunter*, and *Heat*.

Special Features:

- o Audio Commentary Featuring Mann and Actor James Caan
- o New Interviews With Mann, Caan, and Johannes Schmoelling Of The Band Tangerine Dream, Which Contributed The Film's Soundtrack
- o Trailer
- o Booklet Featuring An Essay By Critic Nick James

"Thief" stars James Caan, Tuesday Weld, Willie Nelson, James Belushi, and Robert Prosky. It was written and directed by Michael Mann. It will be released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on January 14, 2014.



[14]

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- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/michael-mann>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/robert-prosky>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-criterion-collection>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/thief>
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