

Butcher's Crossing (film)

Butcher's Crossing is a 2022 American Western film directed by Gabe Polsky in his narrative feature film debut,^[3] based on the 1960 novel of the same name by John Edward Williams.^{[3][4]} It stars Nicolas Cage, Fred Hechinger, Xander Berkeley, Rachel Keller, Jeremy Bobb, and Paul Raci.^[4]

It had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 9, 2022 and was released in the United States on October 20, 2023 by Saban Films.^[5]

Plot

In 1874, Will Andrews, the naive son of a pastor, has dropped out of Harvard and travels to Butcher's Crossing, a tiny frontier town in Kansas built on the buffalo hide trade. He wishes to see as much of the country as he can and experience the Wild West. Sold on the romanticism of going on a buffalo hunt, Will seeks out McDonald, a former acquaintance of his father's, who currently runs the waning buffalo trade for the town. When McDonald refuses to oblige the young man, Will falls in with Miller, an intense and experienced buffalo hunter who spins him a tale of a remote Colorado pass where one of the few remaining massive herds can be found. Though warned about Miller and the folly of this enterprise, Will puts up all of his money to fund the expedition.

With Will's money, they purchase supplies and hire Charlie Hoge, a drunk, one armed, bible-thumper, to be wagon driver and camp cook, and Fred Schneider, a crude, but pragmatic, 'skinner' who insists on being paid a salary due to his doubts about Miller's stories.

The journey to the pass is difficult for Will, who is thrilled and enchanted with the scenery, but unused to rigorous hardships. The team encounters many difficulties which make them doubt the veracity of Miller's claim and ability to lead them, and Will's sanity begins to falter, but eventually they reach the mountain pass to discover an untouched herd with thousands upon thousands of buffalo. Will is ecstatic and awed, believing the beautiful nature surrounding them is "God", elated at being able to experience something so beautiful.

Butcher's Crossing



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Gabe Polsky</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Gabe Polsky</u> <u>Liam Satre-Meloy</u>
Based on	<i><u>Butcher's Crossing</u></i> by <u>John Edward Williams</u>
Produced by	<u>Gabe Polsky</u> <u>Molly Connors</u> <u>Amanda Bowers</u> <u>Will Clarke</u> <u>Andy Mayson</u>
Starring	<u>Nicolas Cage</u> <u>Fred Hechinger</u> <u>Xander Berkeley</u> <u>Rachel Keller</u> <u>Jeremy Bobb</u> <u>Paul Raci</u>
Cinematography	<u>David Gallego</u>
Edited by	<u>Nick Pezzillo</u>

Miller begins his hunt. What starts as a thrilling adventure soon becomes an obsessive, methodical onslaught of endless slaughter. Miller revels in dropping hundreds of buffalo a day, leaving Will and Schneider scrambling to skin the carcasses, with Miller refusing to slow down his kills. The ceaseless rounds of blood and butchery wear on Will and his mental and physical health, as he begins to feel their presence is corrupting the sacred space of the pass. He becomes numb to the gore as time passes and the valley becomes filled with skinned corpses.

After three weeks of constant butchery, Schneider points out that they have overstayed their intended time and already have more hides than they can carry. He proposes they stop and return before the weather turns and they become trapped. Miller refuses. He is obsessed and won't stop until every buffalo in the herd is dead. Will sides with Miller and the team stays to continue the slaughter despite Schneider's protests at the pointless waste of killing more than they can carry.

Predictably, the team becomes trapped by a blizzard. They are now forced to live out the winter in the mountains. They are low on food, because they have killed all but a handful of the buffalo and left the previous carcasses to rot. Schneider is frustrated at becoming trapped because they wouldn't listen, and lashes out at Hoge, who has descended into paranoid religious mutterings. In revenge, Hoge poisons Schneider's food. Will's sanity slips further, and Miller obsesses over the triumph of returning to town with the largest haul ever seen once he's killed every single buffalo. The team settles in to endure a long, boring slog of survival as they wait the winter out.

When spring comes, Hoge is killed after the poisoning is discovered, and the team is antsy to return. Unable to haul all of the 4,600 hides they have collected, they pile 1,600 in their wagon and leave the remaining 3,000 with the intent to return for them. An exultant Miller is impatient to return to the town, triumphant with his haul, but their damaged wagon falls off a cliff, taking Schneider and the 1,600 hides with it, as Miller and Will numbly stare on.

Will and Miller rush to town, hoping to get another wagon in order to return for the 3,000 remaining hides. But Butcher's Crossing is much changed. Largely abandoned and derelict, the pair are horrified to learn that the bottom has fallen out of the buffalo hide market while they were trapped for the winter. If they had returned the previous fall as they had intended, instead of been greedy and staying until every buffalo was killed, they could have sold their hides and become immensely wealthy. Now, with no buyers, the hides are completely worthless. The town has collapsed after its main source of commerce dried up.

Robbed of his victory, Miller sets the old buffalo exchange building on fire.

A much-changed Will says he has "seen what [he] needed to see" on the buffalo hunt when asked if the experience was worth it, and rides into the wilderness, alone.

Music by	<u>Leo Birenberg</u>
Production companies	<u>Altitude Film</u> <u>Entertainment</u> Gabe Polsky Productions Phippen Pictures <u>Ingenious Media</u> <u>Saturn Films</u>
Distributed by	<u>Saban Films</u>
Release dates	September 9, 2022 (<u>TIFF</u>) October 20, 2023 (United States)
Running time	107 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Box office	\$15,648 ^[2]

Cast

- Nicolas Cage as Miller^[3]
- Fred Hechinger as Will Andrews^[6]
- Jeremy Bobb as Fred Schneider^[7]
- Paul Raci as McDonald^[7]
- Xander Berkeley as Charlie Hoge^[7]
- Rachel Keller as Francine^[7]

Production

Principal photography began in Montana in October 2021.^[4]

Release

In September 2021, it was announced that Saban Films had acquired North American, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Scandinavia distribution rights to the film, while Altitude Film Distribution was handling international sales and distributing the film in the UK and Ireland.^[8]

Butcher's Crossing had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 9, 2022.^[9] It was theatrically released in the United States on October 20, 2023.^[10]

Box office

As of January 26, 2024, *Butcher's Crossing* grossed \$15,648, in the United Arab Emirates.^[2]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 74% of 61 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.9/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Butcher's Crossing* benefits from Nicolas Cage's lead turn, which helps make this largely boilerplate Western more compelling than not."^[11] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 55 out of 100, based on 14 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.^[12]

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.butcherscrossingmovie.com>)
 - *Butcher's Crossing* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1462759/>) at IMDb
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