

2024 Is the Best Year for Western Movies in Ages

By James Evenden

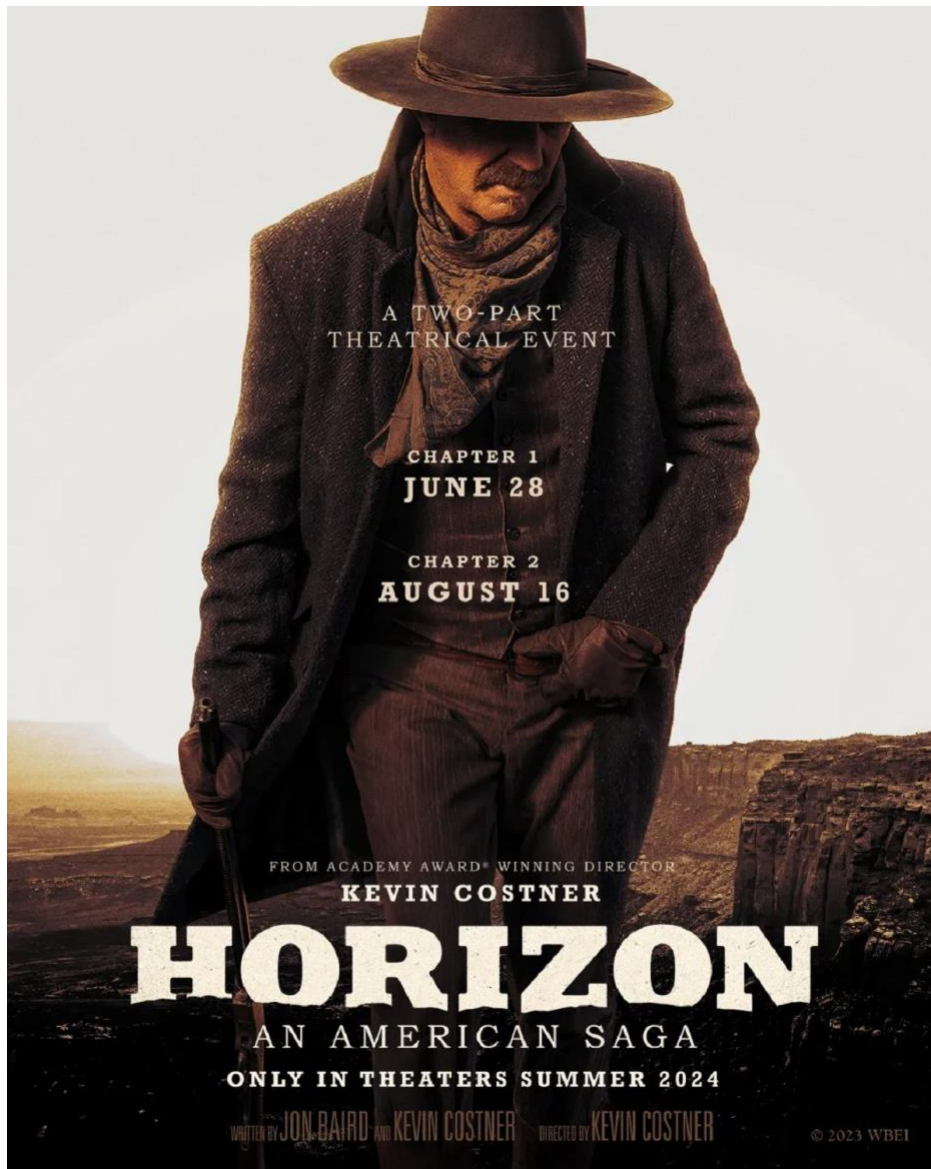


If 2024 is anything to go by, the **Western** isn't dead. This year, Kevin Costner debuted the first of his self-directed *Horizon* series at Cannes, a 3-hour self-financed passion project. If Costner can get his 3-hour Western epic shown at Cannes, in light of the poor reviews it received, the genre must still have some sway in the film landscape.

Movies like *The Thicket*, which has just been released, *The Last Stop in Yuma County*, *The Dead Don't Hurt*, *The Settlers*, and *Place of Bones* have seen the genre face renewed popularity and attention. It isn't just the obvious modern production value that separates these 2024 releases from the Westerns of old, but the transformed attitude to the West's inhabitants. Sympathetic, more realistic views of settlers only began to feature in the genre's Revisionist era in the late 1960s.

So why has 2024 been such a good year for Westerns? What does it say about our current appetite for old-fashioned stories of good versus evil? Have the signs been there for a Western revival? Here's all you need to know about the genre's resurgence.

The 21st Century Western So Far



Horizon 2/5

Horizon centers around fictional characters and takes place in pre- and post-Civil War America, and details the exploration of the American West. Depicting a twelve-year span, the movies feature an ensemble cast portraying various characters and their experiences pioneering into new territory from their homes.

Release Date

June 28, 2024

Director

Kevin Costner

Cast

Kevin Costner , Sienna Miller , Jena Malone , Luke Wilson , Sam Worthington , Michael Rooker , Thomas Haden Church , Jamie Campbell Bower , Isabelle Fuhrman

Runtime

3h 1m

Main Genre

Western

The essential components of the Western, that of good versus evil, still make up the large majority of current movies. They might be presented in more psychologically complex ways, but the DNA of the Western is all over contemporary cinema. Some films, like Taylor Sheridan's *Hell or High Water* and *Wind River*, are more overt examples of a modern Western story, down to their American country settings. Even a superhero film, like *Logan*, can be likened to more revisionist titles in the Western canon, like *Shane*. The characters in *Logan* even watch the end of *Shane* in the movie, so the comparisons are intentional.

Hell or High Water, *Wind River*, and *Logan* distill the archetypal Western cowboy into a man seeking justice or a wearied man on his last legs. This is the same archetype seen in movies from the 1960s, like *The Man Who Shot Liberty Vallance* and *Once Upon a Time in the West*, two of the genre's darker entries. **2024's Westerns should not surprise those who have been paying attention.** The genre might be more novel, but the building blocks have changed shape for modern times. They have not been removed.

The 21st century Western like Costner's *Horizon* has the benefit of hindsight that films from the genre's peak did not have. Today, we can take a more sweeping and nuanced view of that period, with modern film-making techniques and the contemporary audience's taste for moral complexity in their characters.

Why Has 2024 Been Such a Successful Year for Westerns?



The 2024 Western has different purposes compared to those from the 2010s. This year has been unpredictable for movies so far. A film with a relatively small budget can create a social media storm, like *Longlegs*. Just when people thought *Pixar* was on its last legs, they made a billion dollars with *Inside Out 2*. This year, the Western has unknowingly capitalized on an interesting year.

This could mean a lot of things, but primarily, it points to a collective desire for change. Even though *Deadpool & Wolverine* was met with critical and box office success, the jury is still out on whether it has done enough to win favor back with general audiences for superhero movies. It shows that a genre might be on its way out, and the Western might be coming back into fashion.

A 2024 Western can add an asterisk to what was presumed to be a dead genre. As a genre that was such a product of its time, technically and culturally, movies like *Horizon* with a Cannes-sized influence (and enthusiastic filmmakers) can rewrite the missed opportunities for representation and narrative diversity.

Where Can the Western Go From Here?

Speculation aside, 2024 is a return to the Western in the same way that 2025 could be a return to musicals. **What marks the Western's return as promising is the opportunity to rewrite cinematic history while honoring what has come before.** To show how far we have come with our cinematic depictions of marginalized communities that have often been depicted as the enemy.

If the Western genre can do this is anyone's guess, but the potential is enough to excite movie fans who still see John Wayne riding over the range, or Clint Eastwood coming to growl and grimace with a pistol in his hand. **The Western, in many ways, defined the ways we see heroes and villains on screen**, and those benchmarks have changed and grown as we define those malleable terms in several ways.

Most things in movie fashion are impossible to predict. One year, an actor who has not been seen in a decade will win an Oscar. The perfect movie on paper fails to impress. However, with this unpredictability, the possibility is that our original movie superheroes on horseback are never gone for good. They just come back better.