



Kevin Costner

Hatfields & McCoys

Debuts Monday, May 28, 9 p.m.

HISTORY
By Ken Tucker



Jena Malone

AT FOUR AND A HALF-PLUS HOURS, the three-night, Kevin Costner-starring *Hatfields & McCoys*—a re-creation of a 19th-century rural feud that's probably one generation beyond common knowledge—could have been a tedious bore. And did I mention that it was directed by the guy who took the fall for *Waterworld* (see sidebar on next page)? But, working once again with Costner, director Kevin Reynolds—who, to be fair, did a bang-up job with Costner on *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*—summons a vivid tableau of backwoods life. Costner, as Devil Anse Hatfield (yes, his real first name, Devil, rarely pops up on those lists of popular baby-boy names), and Bill Paxton,

as Randall McCoy, head up the clans that clash, and both men give distinctively soulful performances.

Here's a summary of the epic squabble, for those who don't know it: Just after the Civil War, friends and side-by-side Confederate soldiers Hatfield and McCoy return to their homes and drift apart. Arguments and misunderstandings grow like weeds between their respective plots of land in West Virginia and Kentucky. Everything from timber rights to the supposed theft of a pig ultimately results in bloody fistfights and deadly gun battles. Costner deserves credit, here and in his 2003 film *Open Range*, for doing variations on the Western genre capable of surprising audiences with their freshness and depth. He manages to keep Hatfield's corncob-pipe-smoking stoic from being a hillbilly cliché. Similarly, Paxton's McCoy, a devout man with a healthy streak of fear, is a complex figure in this saga. You can understand why these men initially admired and eventually hated each other. As Hatfield says at one point, "If ever two men misunderstood each other, it was us."

Hatfields & McCoys occasionally gets bogged down in the miniseries' chief subplot, a drawling Romeo-and-Juliet romance between Johnse Hatfield (Matt Barr) and Roseanna McCoy (Lindsay Pulsipher). But Jena Malone is around to spice things up as a devious McCoy cousin who tempts Johnse, and Tom Berenger, nearly unrecognizable



Bill Paxton

beneath whiskers and buckskin, is fine as Devil Anse's uncle and ruthless ally. *Hatfields & McCoys* is nearly hijacked by an interloper: Andrew Howard, in a delightfully showy performance as Bad Frank Phillips, an ex-Pinkerton agent who exploits the feud by becoming a sadistic killer for hire, collecting bounty rewards as the Hatfields and the McCoys commit crimes in the course of their fighting.

In stretching the tale over three nights, the pacing sags at times, and recriminations can get repetitive. It also doesn't help that Reynolds shot the miniseries in that perpetual sepia tone that gives everything a faux-antique look. But overall, *Hatfields & McCoys* is engrossing, and enlightening about a feud that proves to be a lot more than the bumpkin brawl of pop legend. **B+**

And Speaking of Feuds...

THERE CERTAINLY IS A colorful history of contention behind *Hatfields & McCoys*, and not just on screen. The miniseries reunites Kevin Costner with frequent director Kevin Reynolds 17 years after the floating wreckage of their previous film—the open-ocean catastrophe *Waterworld*—drenched their friendship in acrimony. The Kevin's relationship began in 1985, when Reynolds gave Costner one of his first starring roles in the small buddy film *Fandango*. They grew close, and Reynolds even helped Costner with his 1990 directorial

debut, *Dances With Wolves*. But it was while working on their next film, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, that the cracks in the dam began to appear, as the pair squabbled over story, screen time, and Costner's accent.

Then came *Waterworld*, and after that, the flood. The two were still fuming over *Robin Hood* when the project was first pitched to them, but following a hatchet-burying session, they agreed to move forward on one of the most famously disastrous productions in Hollywood history. A ballooning budget, sinking sets,

and resurfacing creative differences led Reynolds to quit; he told EW before the film hit theaters, "In the future Costner should only appear in pictures he directs himself. That way he can always be working with his favorite actor and his favorite director." Harsh words, but apparently not insurmountable. The men have reconciled once more to make, appropriately, a miniseries about America's most famous feud. "We had differences," Costner told EW in January.



Kevin Reynolds and Kevin Costner on the set of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*

"It happens, especially when the stakes are as high as they were with *Waterworld*. But out of fire comes steel. And I've always had a real belief in him as a director." Sounds like it's a whole lot of water under the bridge. —Keith Staskiewicz