

'Range' evokes mythic West

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — Strong, silent cowboys wrangle with ruthless land barons in the blazing-guns western "Open Range" (Touchstone).

Kevin Costner, who dons a director's cap as well as a Stetson in the film, indulges in a kind of spacious filmmaking, which effectively evokes the mythic tone of this most American of genres.

Costner is cowboy Charley Waite, a decent man still haunted by his shadowed past as a commando during the Civil War and later as a hired gun. He has found relative peace driving cattle herds across the open range, alongside father-figure Boss Spearman (Robert Duvall).

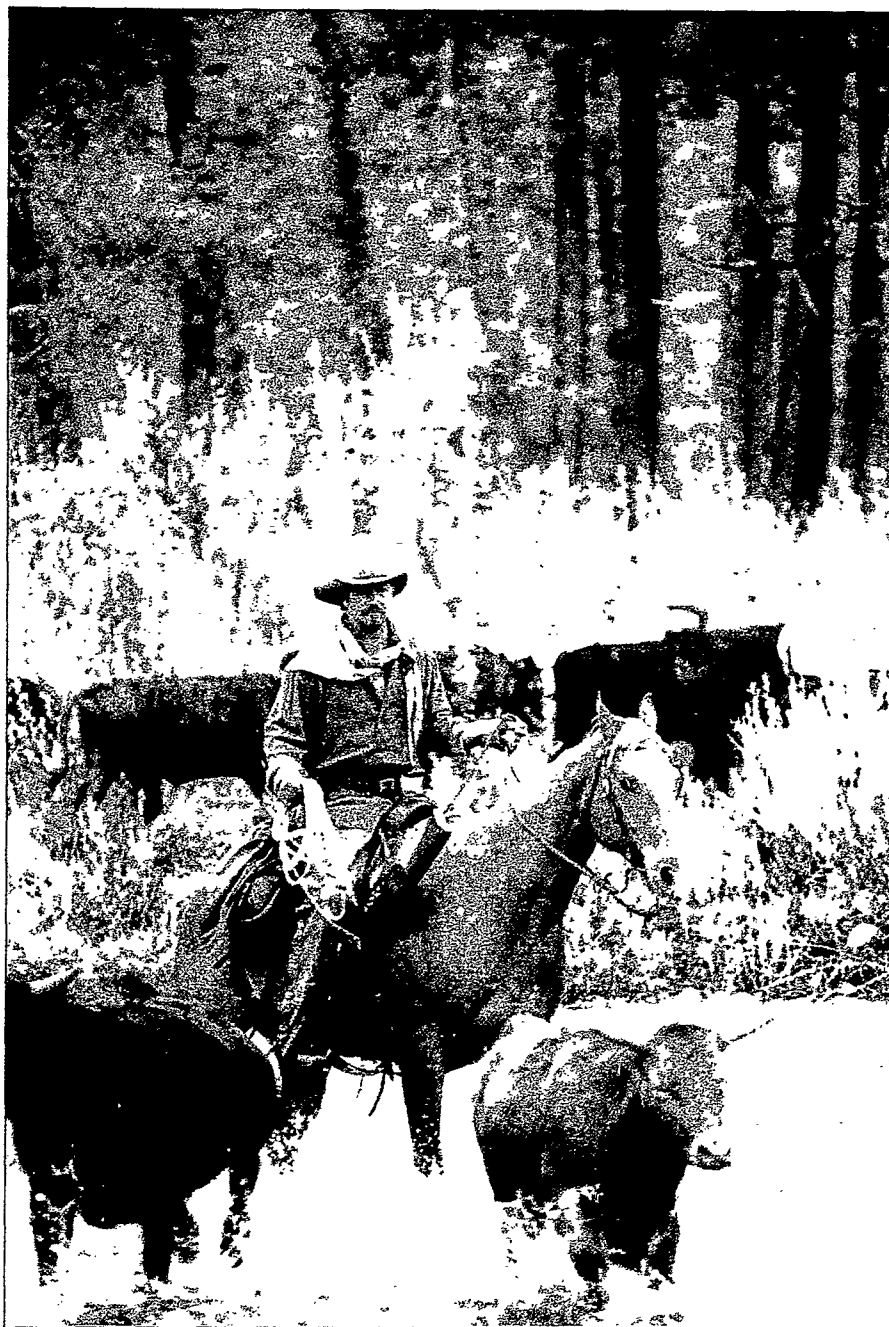
But times are changing. The frontier is disappearing, as the "open" range is closed in by the fences of rich ranchers like Denton Baxter (Michael Gambon), who view "free grazers" like Waite and Spearman as vermin, to be dealt with accordingly.

When a posse of Baxter's men kill one of Waite's hands and critically wound another, Waite and Spearman vow to exact retribution. The ensuing confrontations with the town's corrupt sheriff (James Russo), a sadistic tin star on Baxter's payroll, unleash Waite's inner demons.

The only balm for his seething rage is Sue Barlow (Annette Bening), the town doctor's cultured, spinster sister, who immediately takes a shinning to the troubled gunslinger. But before Waite can hang up his revolver, he and Spearman must stand up to Baxter and his quick-draw lackeys in a high-noon showdown.

First the good. After the assault of Hollywood's summer schlock and awe campaign, it is refreshing to see a movie that at least attempts narrative and character development.

Echoing the big-sky grandeur of classic Western films with their inherent paeans to freedom, honor and friendship, Costner genuflects more than once at the altar of John Ford. Costner has herded just about every cowpoke cliché onto the screen, but the unabashed earnestness of his storytelling makes it harder to find fault



Touchstone Pictures/CNS

Kevin Costner stars as cowboy Charley Waite in the movie "Open Range."

with its formulaic predictability.

Now the bad. The music director's face should adorn a wanted poster for compounding every moment of melodrama with a swell of strings.

And finally the ugly. The action of the film is fueled by a problematic theme of revenge. Given the story's historical context, the inability to de-

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fer law enforcement to legitimate authorities often forced good people to resort to vigilante justice.

But Waite and Spearman's single mindedness seems driven by darker impulses of the eye-for-an-eye variety.

Due to recurring gunplay, including a violently jarring image and minimal vulgar language, the USC-CB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

USCCB rates new movies

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

'AUTUMN SPRING'

Tender, bittersweet comedy about an old man (famed Czech actor Vlastimil Brodsky) who invents various colorful personalities in order to come to terms with his own mortality. A poignant meditation on life's fragility and fleetingness. Subtles. Minimal rough language, as well as emotionally complex themes. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'DON'T TEMPT ME'

Curious satire in which a nightclub singer (Victoria Abril) from heaven and a waitress (Penelope Cruz) from hell are dispatched to Earth by their respective bosses (Penny Ardant and Gael Garcia Bernal) to battle for the soul of a boxer (Demian Bichir). The film cannot maintain its quirky tone while muddling through the sometimes thought-provoking but often banal ideas about God and life after death. Subtles. An implied sexual encounter and several sexual references, some harsh violence, much rough language and some profanity. The USCCB classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'THE MEDALLION'

Pointless martial-arts comedy about a Hong Kong cop (Jackie Chan) who is endowed with superhuman powers by a sacred amulet in order to protect its young guardian from a madman bent on using the talisman's powers for his own evil designs. With action violence and some crass humor and double entendres, the USCCB classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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