

There is a popular potboiler of a western soap opera on television these days about the mythical largest ranch in Montana. John Dutton—played by Kevin Costner—owns the Yellowstone Ranch and nearly everyone else is attempting, by hook or crook, to relieve him of this burden of ownership. Land developers want it, the State of Montana wants it, the nearby Native American reservation wants it (back) and Mr. Dutton’s dysfunctional kids are all lusting for it as well. To tell the truth, I wouldn’t mind having the place myself...

“The rich,” according to F. Scott Fitzgerald, “are different than you and me.” Ernest Hemingway replied, “Yes, they have more money.” This long-running series has beautiful scenery, good looking horses, violence, gun-fights, sex, profanity, fistfights, strangulations, hangings, murders, kidnappings, explosions, nudity, rich people behaving badly and even more sex. In short, everything the American public likes and requires in an entertainment venue. No wonder the show is so popular—although any actual resemblance to real ranching culture is purely coincidental.

John Dutton is a widower and has four kids. One son, a livestock agent—whatever that is—is killed off early in the show. From everything I determine, a livestock agent is really a brand inspector with an automatic weapon. (If that doesn’t scare you, nothing will.) Mr. Dutton has three remaining children—all of whom are in competition for his attention and the eventual inheritance. Two sons plus daughter, Beth, whose foul mouth would make my old Marine drill instructor turn crimson with embarrassment. John Dutton has been offered \$500 million for the ranch but declines as he wishes to leave it for the kids to fight over after he takes the inevitable “dirt nap.”

Jamie is an adopted son and the official “black sheep” of the Dutton family. Everybody hates him, especially after he teams up with his ex-con biological father to make mischief with the Dutton clan. Beth, the daughter, for this and other reasons threatens to kill him. Sibling rivalry run amok. Most Yellowstone fans hope she is eventually successful. If you don’t already hate Jamie by a couple of hours into the show, well, he is also a lawyer. Recently I learned a group of scientists are now using lawyers as subjects in laboratory experiments. It seems they discovered there are some things

Yellowstone

Ranching for rich folks.
By Bill Jones



KEVIN COSTNER ON THE ‘YELLOWSTONE’ SET VIA INTERNET

Was it John Dutton’s idea to allow women to move into the bunkhouse? This is kind of like inviting Colonel Sanders to babysit your chickens.

a lab “white rat” simply will not do.

In the first episode of the “Yellowstone” series we get an inkling of how John Dutton can support a million-acre ranch with just 300 cows. He has a helicopter and a bunkhouse of cowboys. John and one of his sons (the one later shot and killed in a modern-day Indian uprising) spot a cow in a distant pasture calving and they both rush to pull the calf. They are successful and the calf jumps up in a couple of minutes and runs off to join the herd. It looks like it weighs 300 pounds. So that is how the ranch is a financial success. All the calves are born already half grown!

Kayce, the remaining son, is probably the only real cowboy of the Dutton clan. He marries a pretty, young Native American girl and moves to the reservation. (As a sidebar, I find out the actress is not really a Native American at all, despite what she said to get the role. Look it up!) Kayce and his bride have an emotional roller coaster of a relationship. They fuss and fight like the Hatfields and McCoy’s. When not feuding, they are engaging in various versions of “hide the salami.” By the way, I know about feuds, as my paternal grandmother was a McCoy. Don’t get me started...

Kayce becomes a Montana livestock agent, although he has no training or expertise. In fact, he is the chief livestock agent of Montana, appointed by his father John Dutton, in what looks to be the greatest example of nepotism in the history of the world.

(Apparently, Montana is a lot like Mexico. Anyone wearing a badge is automatically a police officer.) Kayce is a former Navy seal and subsequently becomes involved in more firefights than what occurred during the entire Iraq war.

Another thing. Whose idea was it to allow women to move into the Yellowstone bunkhouse? This is kind of like inviting Colonel Sanders to babysit your chickens. It results in jealousy, fights, at least one stabbing and other bar/brothel activities before Mr. Dutton bans the women from bunking with ranch cowboys. Later, one young woman (the one with pink hair who swears better than daughter Beth) weasels her way back in. Never underestimate a cowgirl who can rope and ride.

The most interesting character is Rip Wheeler, the ranch foreman and straw boss. Rip is a brawler, thug and enforcer who is in charge, among other things, of branding the cattle and new ranch employees. I am not making this up. (Is branding humans against the law? Not that it makes any difference to Rip or this crew. Cowboys I know—most of them independent as a hog on ice—would resist this procedure. It would be kind of like trying to insert a hot poker up a wildcat’s, well, you get the idea.) Anyway, John Dutton likes Rip probably more than any of his kids. Rip will do anything John asks of him. Someone needs to be taken out and hanged? No problem! A rattlesnake needs to be thrown in the face of a pesky competitor? Give me the snake!

Rip is hooked up with Beth, eventually marries her and is invited to move into the Yellowstone Ranch big house. One big happy (slightly Mafia) family. Does Rip have any designs on the Yellowstone Ranch? Of course not! He just loves amoral, alcoholic women who happen to be filthy rich. Quit being such a cynic. And the beat goes on.

Is this unbelievable ranch/western fantasy story worth watching? Probably not. But I reluctantly confess I can’t wait for the next season.

I am so ashamed.... ■

Bill Jones, a regular RANGE contributor, continues to submit his politically incorrect rants despite all efforts to discourage him. Bill maintains if you are not offended by something in his articles just be patient. He will get around to you eventually. A Vietnam veteran, he also states writing for RANGE is better than psychotherapy...and also a lot cheaper.