

## Document Citation

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# Kevin Costner and Hollywood hold their breath — it's time for problem-ridden, media-bashed adventure film to sink or swim

By JOHN HORN  
Associated Press

Unmerciful ocean currents. Deadly script problems. Huge cost overruns. A directorial walkout. Cutthroat media. "Waterworld" has faced just about every obstacle except one: the audience.

The most expensive movie ever made arrives in theaters today, as a nightmarish year of struggle gives way to the first moviegoer's reaction to the opening scene: a web-

toed Kevin Costner urinating in a cup and drinking its purified contents.

There can — and probably will — be books written about the many things that went wrong making "Waterworld." But because the film cost some \$175 million, the final chapter of the "Waterworld" story can't be written until the crowds decide whether the futuristic thriller is worth the price of admission.

"I hope the film will be remembered as a really great action movie that stretched the genre a little bit," Costner says. "It's a really good movie. But for me, it doesn't match up with my sensibility."

Costner plays a character named the Mariner, an often churlish loner who, as an unfilmed part of the script has it, murdered his own father. The Mariner lives on a hodgepodge trimaran that would whip Dennis Conner's fastest America's Cup entry.

The boat is the Mariner's escape not only from dangerous hoodlums named Smokers (led by Dennis Hopper) but also from any other human contact: He wants to be left alone.

The battle-filled story follows the Mariner as he reluctantly rescues a young girl named Enola (Tina Majorino) and her adoptive mother, Helen (Jeanne Tripplehorn), from the Smokers.

Enola bears on her back a strange tattoo that may be a map to dry land — whoever has Enola, therefore, has hope. A key plot point that never made it to the screen helps explain



*'I don't know what I've done to people. I don't know if they have it out for me. Usually, when somebody has it out for you, it's like you've done something to them. So I can't trace my life and find what I've done to anybody, do you know what I mean?'*

— Kevin Costner

Enola's link to soil: She was found as an infant floating at sea, bobbing in a basket with dirt in it.

Director Kevin Reynolds ("Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves") left the film in late April in a dispute with Costner, producer Chuck Gordon and Universal Pictures.

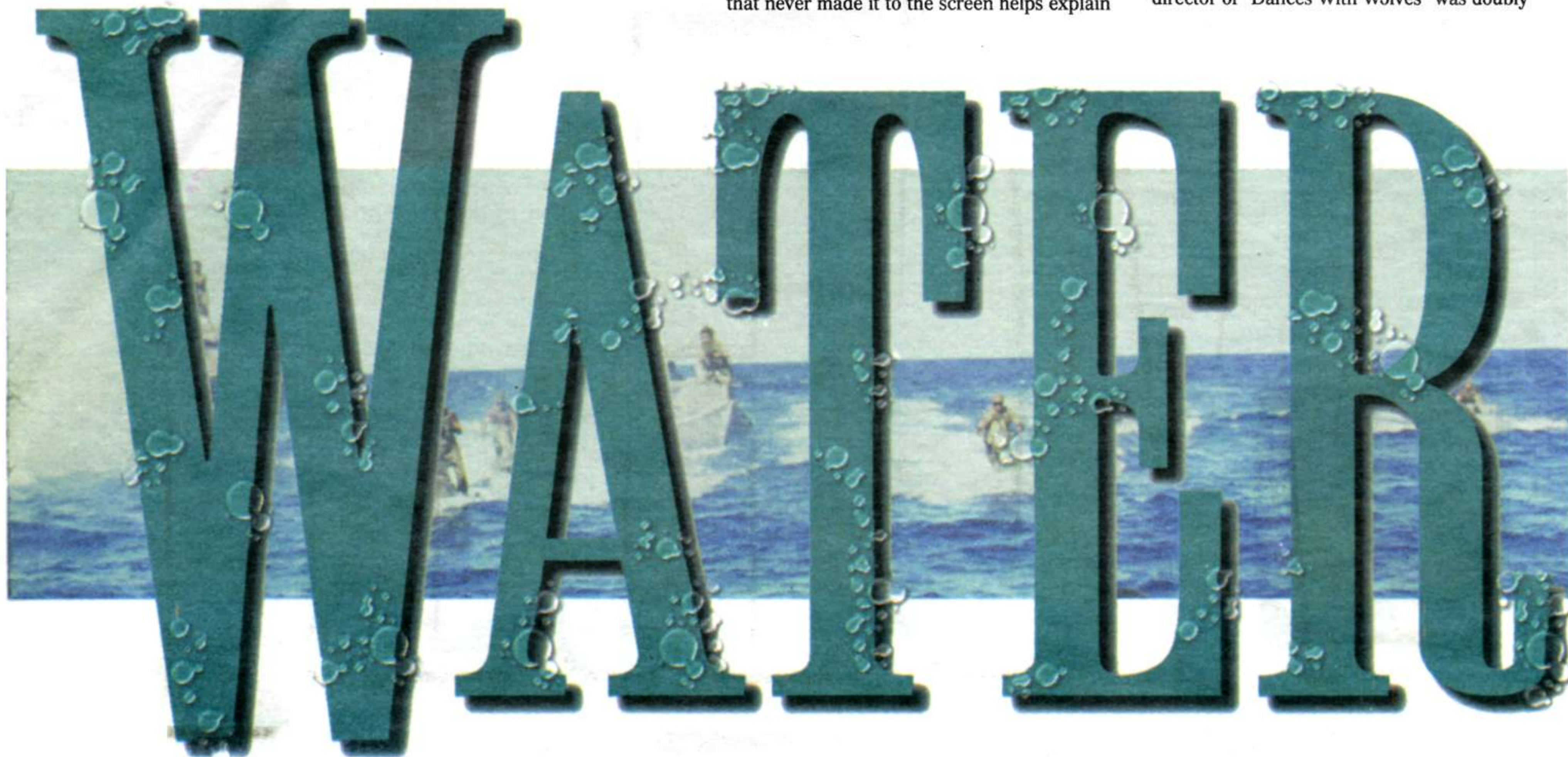
Costner, who gave up a percentage of the film's profits for finishing funds, says Reynolds' cut was all explosions and no story or character; Reynolds declined to be interviewed.

In a furious spate of last-minute editing, Costner supervised the making of a new "Waterworld." The Academy Award-winning director of "Dances With Wolves" was doubly



Universal

**DISASTER ON THE HORIZON?** Jeanne Tripplehorn, center, and Tina Majorino co-star with Kevin Costner in his \$175 million gamble. Dennis Hopper, far right, gets heavy duty as the Smokers' leader.





handicapped from the start: A release date was bearing down like a runaway train and people disagreed about his own character.

Costner thought the Mariner should be angry and distant. Universal preferred Audie Murphy in mahi mahi pants.

The studio's target was financial, and it had some telling arrows in its quiver: Costner played somewhat unsympathetic characters in both "Wyatt Earp" and "A Perfect World" — and neither film was a hit.

Costner mostly prevailed. In the finished film, the Mariner throws the verbose Enola overboard in one scene, wallops her mother with an oar in another.

"I think what you'll see is women want me to be more romantic and not so hard on the women," says Costner, adding that he won't let box-office considerations trump story essentials.

"I had to fight the mentality of the studio: to love Kevin Costner, you can't be that way ...

"I think that it's really attractive to be around somebody that you don't know what they're like, and maybe you think you don't like them and then at the end you do. ... If the Mariner's anti-social, you have to show that."

The debut of "Waterworld" has been preceded by the most negative media coverage of any movie since 1963's "Cleopatra," which cost \$213 million in current dollars. The most

expensive movie made before "Waterworld" was last year's "True Lies," which cost about \$115 million.

Costner and producer Gordon, who oversaw the eight months of "Waterworld" filming, understand why a movie this costly attracted the attention it has.

What they can't understand is the venom.

"I don't know what I've done to people," Costner says. "I don't know if they have it out for me. Usually, when somebody has it out for you, it's like you've done something to them. So I can't trace my life and find what I've done to anybody, do you know what I mean?"

Adds Gordon: "So many people seem to want this movie to fail. And it's really disgusting."

If the negative publicity has any advantage, and it may not, it at least builds awareness and lowers the audience's expectations.

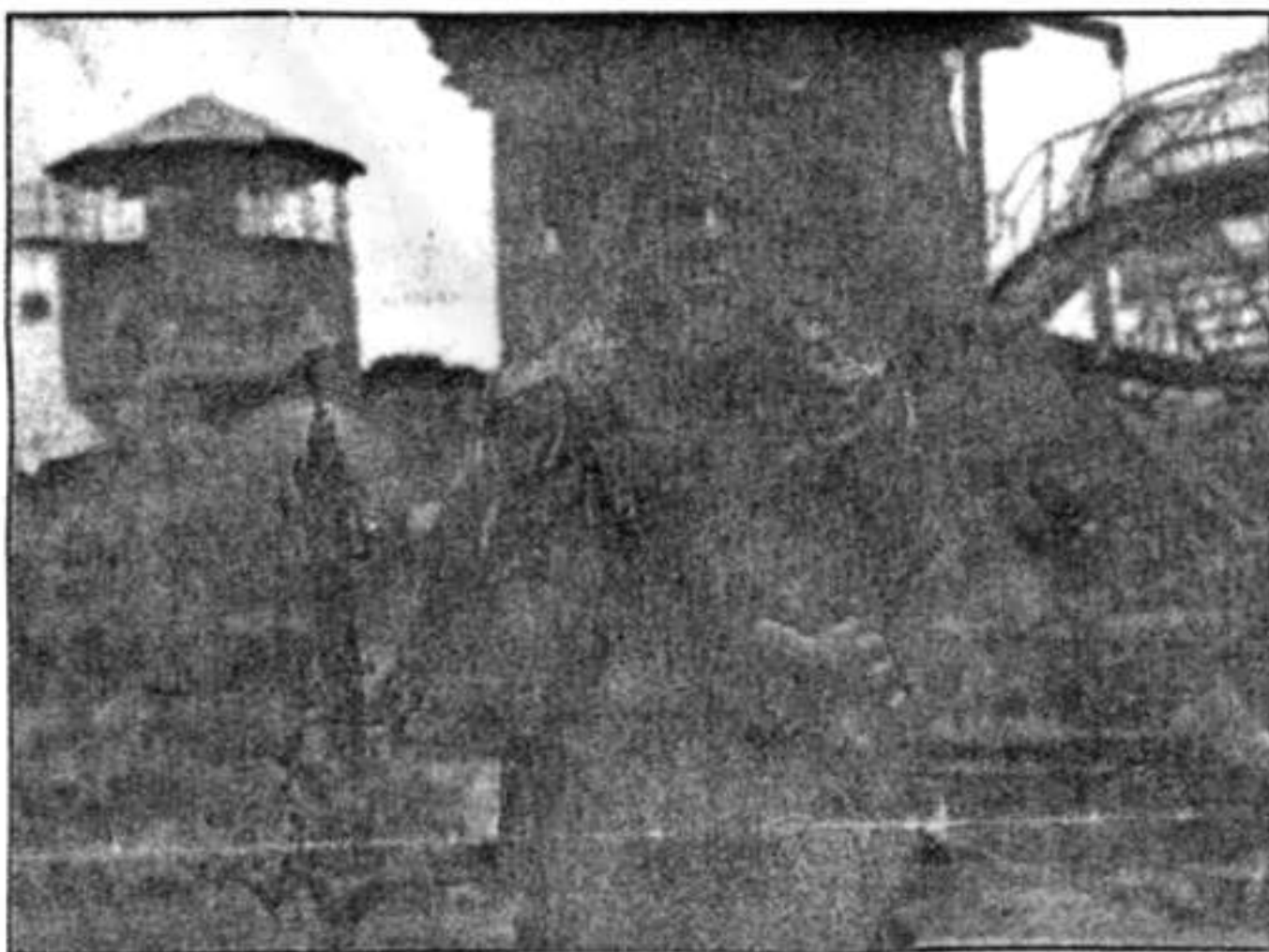
"People are coming in expecting just this total debacle, and they seem to be enjoying the movie — not everybody, but a majority of people," Gordon says. "It's almost like they are shocked. There's still a movie there."

Indeed, the movie features its share of overwhelming battle sequences and special effects. Some of the movie's millions are not visible, however, since they went into off-screen delays, not on-screen action. And one scene involving a giant sea creature looked incomplete and confusing.

If Costner and Gordon could do it over again, they say, they would make sure the script was ready before film was loaded in the cameras. And they would not underestimate the hardship of working on water.

"I never felt like it was slipping away," Gordon says. "We were over budget, were over schedule. Most big action movies are. I didn't really have a sense it was slipping away. I just thought, 'Boy, this is bigger than we ever dreamed.'"

Will that also be true at the box office? Gordon, Costner and everybody else who has been watching the many developments of "Waterworld" will have an idea after this weekend.



**NO MORE MR. NICE GUY:** Costner's Mariner, above and far right, may be anti-social, but he also may be the best hope of his aquatic civilization.