

Alaska gets its own paranormal story: Ghost Wars

By Michael Storey



Syfy's new *Ghost Wars* stars Vincent D'Onofrio (left) and Avan Jogla as inhabitants of an isolated Alaskan town battling paranormal forces.

TV has been having a love affair with Alaska in recent years. It has been relatively tame so far.

Consider such rugged reality fare as *Alaska: The Last Frontier*, *Gold Rush*, *Yukon Men*, *Deadliest Catch*, *Alaskan Bush People*, *Ice Road Truckers*, *Alaskan Women Looking for Love* and even the short-lived *Sarah Palin's Alaska*.

All of which reminds me of Alaska-based scripted series such as *Northern Exposure*, the quirky comedy/drama that ran from 1990 to 1995, or even NBC's *Klondike* (1960-61) starring a young James Coburn.

Perhaps it's the breathtaking scenery or the remote isolation with the ever-present hint of danger, but Alaska seemed ripe for a good, old fashioned ghost story. Syfy has come through.

Ghost Wars airs at 9 p.m. today. It's the first season's third episode, but previous episodes can be found at syfy.com.

Pedigree? The series was created by Simon Barry (*Continuum*) and the executive producers have worked on *Fargo*, *Van Helsing*, *Hell on Wheels* and *Code Black*.

Syfy came up with a swell tagline for the show: "You don't die in a ghost war. You just change sides."

What's going on? Our hero is young "troubled medium and local pariah" Roman Mercer (Avan Jogia). He explains ghosts when he tell us, "They're stuck here. They're angry and they blame us."

"Here" is the small Alaska town of Port Moore. As Roman was attempting to leave town on a bus, a powerful earthquake (or ... something) struck the island, shut down the bridge, isolated the town and "awakened a supernatural force hell-bent on destruction."

Cue the foreboding cello music. There's a lot of cello music.

As a medium, Roman can see dead people, such as Maggie, his Casper-friendly spirit gal pal. She calls his special ability a "gift." About that, Roman grumbles, "Nothing good has ever come from this 'gift.'" And that's about to be proved.

Why Port Moore? Why is there a ghost war? Maggie explains, "If a soul wants to move on but finds itself trapped, that soul will lash out at the living. They'll come at you and I can't protect you."

Let the paranormal thrill ride begin.

Ghost Wars also has a pony-tailed Vincent D'Onofrio (*Law and Order: Criminal Intent*) with an unkempt horseshoe moustache as the faith-challenged Reverend Dan; Kim Coates (*Sons of Anarchy*) as the town con artist, Jimmy; and rocker/actor Meat Loaf Aday as town hate monger and rabble-rouser Doug.

I don't normally care for ghost stories, but this one has me intrigued due to the conflicted character of Roman. Check it out. The series is rated TV-14 for violence.

- ***The Eleven***, 8 p.m. today on A&E. A second episode follows at 9. The remaining four episodes will air at 9 p.m. on subsequent Thursdays.

The investigative series explores the horrific murders of 11 teenage girls in the Galveston, Texas, area in the 1970s and deals with the reopening of the cases of two of the victims.

The series follows journalist Lise Olsen and retired police detective Fred Paige as they re-examine the murders after discovering a confession letter from Edward Harold Bell, who is serving a 70-year sentence for an unrelated murder.

In his 1998 letter, Bell describes some of the girls' deaths in gruesome detail and refers to many of the victims by name. Yet in face-to-face interviews, Bell denies the written confession. It will be a challenge, but Olsen and Paige will try to link Bell to the girls he calls "the 11 who went to heaven."

There's a rush. A parole hearing for Bell is looming.

Each episode will use dramatizations as well as interviews with friends, family and witnesses. The series is rated TV-14 for dialogue, violence and sexual situations.

- ***Hit the Road***, 9 p.m. Tuesdays on the AT&T Audience Network. I'm not going to spend much space on this TV-MA "comedy" because not many viewers are even aware there is an AT&T Audience Network. But you might accidentally stumble upon it while surfing the lineups of AT&T U-verse or DirecTV (a subsidiary of AT&T).

We loved Jason Alexander in *Seinfeld*. We loved Amy Pietz in *Caroline in the City*. But as the parents in a dysfunctional singing family traveling around in a rundown tour bus, they fall flat.

Hit the Road will have 10 episodes. Not only is it not funny, it's gratuitously raunchy and vulgar and painfully puerile. Frankly, it's embarrassing for veteran actors of this caliber. Alexander even co-created the thing. I had to force myself to finish the pilot, but having been warned, you don't even have to go there.