

VARIETY TV Reviews

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Hannah's Law

(Movie; Hallmark Movie Channel, Sat. June 9, 8 p.m.)

By Laura Fries

Filmed in Canada by Nomadic Pictures Prods. 3 and Sony Pictures Television. Executive producers, Mike Ogiens, John Fasano; producers, Chad Oakes, Mike Frislev; director, Rachel Talalay; writer, John Fasano.

Hannah Beaumont - Sara Canning
Frank McMurphy - John Pyper-Ferguson
Wyatt Earp - Greyston Holt
Doc Holliday - Ryan Kennedy
James Lockwood - Billy Zane
Stagecoach Mary - Kimberly Elise
Isom Dart - Danny Glover

"Hannah's Law," a revisionist version of Western "her-story," could have alternatively been called "The Good, the Bad and the Pretty." Set in the rough-and-tumble but surprisingly clean-looking old West of Dodge City, young Hannah Beaumont ("Vampire Diaries'?") is a bounty hunter who always brings 'em in alive. Writer John Fasano cleverly weaves in legendary historical figures like Wyatt Earp, but hampers the tale with unimaginative dialogue and romance more befitting of Harlequin than Zane Grey. A clear attempt at an action-romance Western, the resulting pic is more like "Fifty Shades of Dust."



Sara Canning in "Hannah's Law"

More comfortable with a shotgun than a fancy dress, Hannah brushes elbows with the likes of famed lawman Earp (Greyston Holt) and Doc Holliday (Ryan Kennedy). Despite amorous advances from both, she's focused on bringing to justice the men who killed her family 12 years ago. She has the support and trust of friend Stagecoach Mary (Kimberly Elise), but when the McMurphy gang comes to town gunning for her, she must face them alone.

Women heroines, especially in the Wild West, are hard to come by and usually reduced to stoic strength rather than the brute kind. It's a nice twist to the classic Western revenge drama to feature a tough-as-nails woman bounty hunter, but the diminutive Canning just doesn't convey bad-ass. The physical fight scenes are painful, and unless you're willing to play it a little ugly, the exercise comes off more like romantic fan-fiction.

Canning is aided by a colorful supporting cast, most notably Danny Glover as the old bounty hunter who trained Hannah but thinks of her as a daughter. The movie, which works as a standalone, does set the stage nicely for a sequel, and quite possibly a prequel. Either would benefit from the return of characters like Kennedy as the morally ambiguous Doc Holliday and Elise as Stagecoach Mary, the first African-American and second woman ever to be employed as a mail carrier in the U.S. In fact, Stagecoach Mary Fields' life would make great fodder for a film of its own.

By contrast, Billy Zane has what amounts to a glorified cameo as the local cattle baron, with a scruffy beard instead of an evil mustache to twirl.

Director Rachel Talalay provides some nicely choreographed gunfights, especially the epic showdown, while Ken Krawczyk's camerawork is evocative of the wild frontier. Hallmark also benefits from some fortuitous timing -- coming, as it does, on the heels of History's highly rated oater "Hatfields & McCoys."

Camera, Ken Krawczyk; editor, Bridget Durnford; casting, Sharon Bialy, Sherry Thomas, Russell Scott. 120 MIN.

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