

Tuned In: Discovery pans for gold with scripted 'Klondike'

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Dan Power/Discovery Channel

Bill Haskell (Richard Madden) (left) and Byron Epstein (Augustus Prew) on Chilkoot Pass in "Klondike" on Discovery.

By Rob Owen / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

PASADENA, Calif. -- Discovery Channel joins the growing ranks of cable networks offering original scripted programming with its miniseries "Klondike" (9 p.m. Jan. 20, 21 and 22).

The three-part, six-hour program is based on Charlotte Gray's 2010 book "Gold Diggers: Striking It Rich in the Klondike," a nonfiction account of the last gold rush in 1897. (A disclaimer on the miniseries states that some of the fictional characters, dialogue and events are inspired by real-life counterparts.)

This miniseries is essentially a Western with a murder mystery and romance as its prime components. "Klondike" follows recent college grad Bill Haskell (Richard Madden, who played Robb Stark on HBO's "Game of Thrones") and his best friend, Byron Epstein (Augustus Prew),

as they travel to Dawson City in Canada's Yukon Territory to try to strike it rich at a Klondike gold claim.

Tragedy follows and soon Haskell is out for justice. Along the way he falls for an independent woman, Belinda Mulrooney (Abbie Cornish, "Seven Psychopaths"), befriends a priest (Sam Shepard, "The Right Stuff") and future novelist Jack London (Johnny Simmons, "The Perks of Being a Wallflower").

"Klondike," filmed in Calgary, Canada, offers beautiful scenery and vistas. Its story is relatively familiar as pioneer tales go -- there's nothing as soapy or politically intertwined as seen in AMC's "Hell on Wheels" or FX's "Justified" -- but it is a fairly entertaining yarn.

"Klondike" writer/executive producer Paul Scheuring ("Prison Break") said he created a character who dies early -- Haskell and Mulrooney are based on real people -- because he didn't think viewers would buy into the show if Haskell was only in the Klondike to get rich.

"I created that to serve the larger narrative so one thing that keeps Ben Haskell in the Klondike is he has unfinished business in terms of the mystery of [the murder]," Mr. Scheuring said during a press conference at the first day of the Television Critics Association winter 2014 press tour.

Dolores Gavin, a Discovery development executive, said the network's success with Alaska-set reality series, including "Gold Rush," played a role in making "Klondike" its first scripted project.

"Discovery is about man's relationship to nature, which is sometimes beautiful and sometime agonizing but the relationship in the end is always a meaningful one," she said.

Ms. Gavin also acknowledged that the success of History's "Hatfields & McCoys" miniseries in 2012 helped motivate the desire to get into scripted content. No future projects have been announced and there are no plans for a "Klondike" sequel.

"We had a natural beginning and end. You need to know when to say goodbye and let's find more stories," she said.

Ms. Gavin doesn't rule out a weekly, scripted series if that makes sense with a particular story topic or setting but she said Discovery has no weekly series in development.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/ae/tv-radio/2014/01/10/Discovery-pans-for-gold-with-scripted-Klondike/stories/2014011000480000000#ixzz2q2VznMy9>