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WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR A GOLD BAR?

*Klondike* Miniseries Review: Nothing Gold Can Stay



By [Cory Barker](#) January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014



*Ed. Note: In order to provide a more complete look at Discovery's upcoming miniseries Klondike—which runs for six hours over three consecutive nights—we've decided it review it in a more "traditional" manner, i.e. covering all six hours at once, before its debut on Monday, January 20. Think of this story like a more detailed preview that includes **some** light spoilers, but doesn't reveal too much about what's ahead.*

You just *know* there's too much scripted television out there when Discovery Channel starts churning out nice-looking miniseries events of its own. That's not meant to be a shot at Discovery, which has surely brought many of you joy over the years with *Mythbusters*, Shark Week, or any one of its myriad series about people doing a job that makes you feel bad for sitting in your warm apartment and watching HBO GO (oh, just me?). Indeed, I'm sure the network simply wants a piece of the "limited event" programming pie.

*Klondike* is the cable channel's first-ever scripted mini, but it's definitely a project that slides into the network's lineup alongside the "unscripted" series *Gold Rush* and *Jungle Gold*, the latter of which sounds more like the name of a scratch-off lottery ticket than a TV show. Like those unscripted offerings, *Klondike* is somewhat based in reality. It's based on Charlotte Gray's book [Gold Diggers: Striking It Rich in the Klondike](#), and features a number of real-life figures, including notable author Jack London (shout-out to *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*!) and Belinda Mulrooney (known as "The Richest Woman in Klondike"). Obviously, the miniseries takes some liberties with historical events to weave its tale of the western world's last-gasp gold rush in the Canadian northwest, but as first entries into the scripted game go, this one seems like a smart decision on Discovery's part.

But is *Klondike* really worth watching for you, viewer already saddled with a glut of returning broadcast and cable offerings, not to mention new projects like [True Detective](#), [Helix](#), and [Looking](#)? Meh. Well wait, this is a show set in Canada, so I guess the proper response is "Ehhh."



*Klondike* is far from terrible; in fact, it's totally fine. While it isn't quite the kind of star-studded affair you'd see on HBO, it's jam-packed with actors you'll probably recognize behind the dirt and facial hair, pushing their way through snow, mud, and sloppy accent work: *Game of Thrones*' [Richard Madden](#), who's seemingly still interested in growing beards, wearing huge coats, and starring in projects with wolves, is your leading man Bill Haskell, and he's supported by the likes of [Tim Roth](#) (*Lie to Me*), [Tim Blake Nelson](#) (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*), [Sam Shepard](#) (*Mud*, *Black Hawk Down*), [Ian Hart](#) (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, a recent episode of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*), and [Abbie Cornish](#) (*Limitless*, *Sucker Punch*).

Each of these performers seems up to the challenge of playing in the historical icebox, but unfortunately, they're hampered by sluggish dialogue that relies on clichéd metaphors and overt discussions of *Klondike*'s thematic interest in what makes a (wo)man, what the elements and the competitive gold rush environment does to people, and the like. And while that kind of stuff works at times, the incessant barrage that comes over six hours could easily wear you down—it certainly did me.



The running time is probably *Klondike*'s biggest issue. Charlotte Gray's book is over 400 pages long, and I'm certain that there are reams and reams of factual material from the Yukon gold rush that could have gone into this project. Nevertheless, at six hours, *Klondike* does drag in spots, particularly when the focus moves away from Madden's Bill Hasken. The first two hours set up a central mystery involving Bill and his longtime friend Byron Epstein ([Augustus Prew](#)) that carries through the rest of the story, but there a number of detours and side plots that attempt to cover just about everything that ever happened in this burgeoning location at the time. I'm sure *Klondike* will draw comparisons to a much better show, *Deadwood*, and that makes sense; there's a lot of interest in the development of the town, its racial and gender politics, its leadership, and questions about right and wrong and the role of religion. Some of that works—Sam Shepard is unsurprisingly solid as the aptly named Father Judge, and Tim Roth is always hanging around doing slightly unhinged Tim Roth stuff. But some of it doesn't—the struggle over who 'runs' the town, which plays out pretty derivatively, comes to mind. While nothing about the project is overtly bad, there are stretches of *Klondike* where my attention wavered quite a bit. It might play better across multiple nights, though.



What's more, your interest in *Klondike* might hinge on how much you enjoy Madden's work, and ultimately his chemistry with Abbie Cornish's Belinda. Watching the two of them try to figure out their characters' accents over the course of six hours is quite an adventure, as *Klondike* dedicates a big chunk of its time to their relationship. There are some strong moments between them sprinkled throughout, as Belinda struggles to reconcile her feelings for Bill with the various business deals she's trying to make happen (or prevent from happening) in the town. It's kind of fun to watch some of the inversions at play in their relationship, with Bill doing the chasing and Belinda making some big decisions. But the pairing is sort of representative of the entire project in that it's interesting at times, forgotten at others, and just okay for the rest. Madden actually does really good work when the character is on his own, and that might have something to do with the lack of speaking needed in some of those scenes.

Ultimately, as a first scripted effort from Discovery, *Klondike* is generally impressive enough. The acting is solid, the dialogue is only bad in spots, and it looks really, really good (the production did a nice job shooting on-location in and around Calgary). But I'm not sure if *Klondike* should have been shorter or longer. There will be times where you'll want to move things along to return to some of the more compelling portions of the story, and there will be other times where it seems like there are a trio of characters on the screen who you'd like to see more of. As it stands, *Klondike* manages to do some interesting stuff in its six hours, even if it never elevates itself beyond "sufficient." Amidst the rest of January's overcrowded TV schedule, *Klondike* might have trouble standing out, and it's likely something you're better off stashing on your DVR for those random lulls that come in the spring. **Are you planning to check out *Klondike*? Next Episode TONIGHT AT 9PM**

[Part One](#) Season 1: Episode 1