

TV Review: A&E's 'Bag of Bones' Feels Empty

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 11, 2011 - 2:12pm

- [A&E](#) [2]
- [Anika Noni Rose](#) [3]
- [Annabeth Gish](#) [4]
- [Bag of Bones](#) [5]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [6]
- [Caitlin Carmichael](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Jason Priestley](#) [9]
- [Matt Frewer](#) [10]
- [Matt Venne](#) [11]
- [Melissa George](#) [12]
- [Mick Garris](#) [13]
- [Pierce Brosnan](#) [14]
- [Stephen King](#) [15]
- [Television](#) [16]
- [William Schallert](#) [17]

CHICAGO – A&E's "Bag of Bones" is a mess. There are elements that work but a source material that doesn't exactly translate to the mini-series form along with a mediocre script by Matt Venne and generic direction by Mick Garris add up to an experience that's disjointed and inconsistent. There was a time when a Stephen King mini-series was an event – "The Stand," "It," even "Storm of the Century" – but what's so disappointing about "Bag of Bones" is how inconsequential the whole thing feels.



Television Rating: **2.0/5.0**

King's "Bag of Bones" trods well-worn ground for the author. Once again, the protagonist is a writer, creative block plays a part, and, of course, there must be ghosts. The book has its moments but is also overly familiar for fans of the writer's best work. What was most interesting about the novel was not the King cliches that were being trotted out once again but the feeling that the writer was getting even more personal, crafting a story not about someone else but using his own writer's block as a jumping off point. The result was a novel that sometimes felt blocked itself, one that moved haphazardly at times but was also sometimes a fascinating look into the mind of its author.



Bag of Bones

Photo credit: A and E

As you might imagine, writer's block is pretty hard to convey to cinema or TV. Venne & Garris get the external elements of "Bag of Bones" – they get big scares, nightmarish visions, and loud music beats to make you jump on a cold Sunday night. They don't, at ALL, get the internal ones. The book was built around the inner workings, dreams, and loss of a man. It wasn't a traditional ghost story, and yet Venne & Garris seem bored when they're not allowed to play with their bag of haunted house tricks. The characters of "Bag of Bones" get lost under the emphasis on increasingly intense dream sequences. Believe it or not, another man's nightmare aren't that scary for a viewer. King never really intended them to be – "Bag of Bones" is not at all a book meant to make the hair on the back of your neck stand up – but that's all the adaptation focuses on.



Bag of Bones
Photo credit: A and E

Pierce Brosnan carries much of the weight of the mini-series as its lead, celebrated author Mike Noonan. In the book, his wife Jo (Annabeth Gish) died of an aneurysm but the feeling that Garris & company wanted to "pump up" the book starts early as she's instead hit by a speeding bus in the TV version. Mike holds the dying Jo in his arms and later learns that Jo was pregnant when she died. This revelation throws Mike as he's been told he can't have children and so he wonders if his wife was seeing someone on the side, perhaps when she went to restore that creepy old house on Dark Score Lake. After dreaming of the house a few times, Mike decides to move there for a bit, work on his book, and ask the locals if Jo ever had a male companion at the local diner.

While staving off the exhaustion that must come with increasingly intense nightmares, Mike stumbles into the life of Mattie Devore (Melissa George), a single mother whose husband went crazy, as many around the lake seem to do. Mattie's father-in-law (William Schallert) has been slandering the mother of his granddaughter in an effort to get the girl (Caitlin Carmichael) for himself. Meanwhile, Mike has detailed visions of a blues singer named Sara (Anika Noni Rose), whose story may offer insight into his current dilemmas.

Brosnan is good here, proving himself a consistently engaging dramatic lead yet again. He still doesn't quite get the credit deserved outside of James Bond and Remington Steele. The fact is that he's always interesting and was a good choice for this material. The rest of the cast is a bit less memorable, although I've always liked George and wish she could find the right weekly TV vehicle for her talents. Jason Priestley also delivers in a few scenes, as does the always-good Matt Frewer. Gish and Rose feel a bit wasted.

"Bag of Bones" is the kind of piece cluttered with enough plot — Sara's story, Mattie's story, Mike & Jo's story, the lake – that it probably couldn't have been squeezed into one night merely because of its abundance of arcs but it also doesn't have enough atmosphere to maintain what is ultimately a three-hour running time. It's bloated with jump cuts, repetitive dreams, and some weak dialogue. Venne and Garris simply don't have the delicate touch it takes to bring a piece like this one, a story free of massive set pieces like "The Stand" or "It," to the screen. The result is a bag that's filled with characters and plot arcs but nothing that really matters in the end.

"Bag of Bones" stars Pierce Brosnan, Melissa George, Annabeth Gish, William Schallert, Caitlin Carmichael, Jason Priestley, Matt Frewer, and Anika Noni Rose. It was adapted from a book by Stephen King by Matt Venne and directed by Mick Garris. It plays on A&E on Sunday, December 11th, 2011 and Monday, December 12th, 2011 at 8pm CST both nights.



[18]

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- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/bag-of-bones>
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