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Spike unveils development slate

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Projects from Denis Leary, Brian Robbins and Thom Beers

With the economy in the tank, Spike TV is developing several comedy projects that find pathos and humor in underachievement. The network has five new half-hours in the works to bulk up its fledgling scripted slate (along with an equal number of unscripted projects). The new half-hours feature struggling men wanting more out of life -- or to just slack off. "From a comedy perspective, rooting for the underdog always works," said Kevin Kay, Spike TV president. The projects also tackle several settings that have proven to be comedic fodder in the past. There are pilots set in the world of golf, the military and at a casino, to cite a few. The network hopes to pick up two of the projects to series, one as a companion to its first comedy series, "Blue Mountain State," which was renewed for a second season in February. "It's the most ambitious slate we've had," Kay said. "We're looking to get a little broader and more aware of our 35- to 49-year-olds." The slate's developers include producers such as Denis Leary, Brian Robbins and Thom Beers. In "Kings by Night," a group of underachievers open up an illegal underground casino. The pilot is from Richie Keen ("Important Things With Demetri Martin") and Ben & Dan Newmark and produced by Fremantle. "Rebel League" is about a group of men trying to launch a hockey league to rival the NHL that consists of "has-been and never-was" players. Written by Stephen Engel ("The Big Bang Theory"), the project is produced by Leary and Jim Serpico's Apostle Pictures and Sony; it's based on the book "The Rebel League." "Fort Bush" is a modern update of "Stripes," about two misfit Army drill sergeants with a hard-partying lifestyle. The show is written by Gabe Snyder and Mike Alber ("Jailbait"). In "Back Nine," John Schneider stars as a washed-up golf champion with a sex-addicted caddy named Tiger trying to make it back on the pro tour. Written by Jason Filardi and Mark Perez. And the previously announced "Playing With Guns" teams Danny Masterson and Joey Kern as childhood slacker friends who become small-town cops for the perks. The project is produced by Varsity Pictures' Brian Robbins and Sharla Sumpter Bridgett and by Lionsgate. On the unscripted side, Spike has two shows in development that play with presenting an alternative version of historic events. "Alternative History," from Flight 33 Prods., asks questions like "What if the Nazis won WWII?" and "What if John F. Kennedy had not been assassinated?" The second, called "Weapon X," has "Deadliest Catch" producer Beers looking at whether certain military battles would have had different outcomes if a game-changing weapon had been available. In "On the Rocks," Spike does a riff on Fox's "Kitchen Nightmares" with 3 Ball Prods., but focusing on taverns instead. Restaurateur John Taffer gives tough love advice to struggling establishments. The network also is working on a prank call show titled "Phowned!" from Atlas Media in association with Elvis Duran Group. In the show, callers from New York's "Elvis Duran Morning Show" prank friends and family. And since no cable network's reality slate is complete without a paranormal show, "Haunted Civilization," from Half Yard Prods., will combine history and ghost hunting by looking at some of the world's deadliest locations.