

Gritty showcase drama tells cold facts of Aboriginal reserves

February 1, 2011 [Etan Vlesing](#)



The APTN and Showcase drama *Blackstone* is challenging.

It's also riveting, in-your-face and as smart as Canadian dramatic TV gets these days.

This is not *North of 60* or *Moccasin Flats*.

The made-in-Edmonton drama from Prairie Dog Film + Television doesn't flinch from controversy as it dissects a fictional *Blackstone* first nation reserve to expose tales of addiction, poverty and corruption.

"A lot of the issues that are exposed resonate fairly deep within the community, because it's so familiar. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, it's not for me to decide," series creator and director Ron E. Scott told *Playback Daily*.

And as *Blackstone* spotlights problems that don't come from outside forces, but rather from within the first nation community itself, Canadian TV viewers won't be left eating their vegetables as they tune in.

The series, co-written by Gil Cardinal, features a slew of flawed heroes and likeable villains typical of dramas like *Entourage*, *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*.

"We use three cameras, so the show has a dynamic feel to it," Scott said. Over an eight-episode arc, on top of the TV pilot, dramatic tension in *Blackstone* flows from a new generation of first nation leaders, led by band member Leona Storey (Carmen Moore) looking to end the corruption and mismanagement of former community heads.

Standing in the way of band renewal is a corrupt former chief, played by Eric Schweig, and community members battling alcohol and other personal demons, and life in the big city as a constant temptation.

Another dramatic thread through the turmoil: the police investigate, and eventually prosecute, a case of child abuse.

"There's a lot of complexity in the emotions of all the characters, including the bad guys," Scott insisted.

"What *Blackstone* does is open up an Aboriginal story world to really complex characters that are struggling with life," he added.

Here the drama goes to the heart of a culture of abuse on first nation reserves long considered a taboo subject among Canadians, namely corrupt leaders that prey on the weak with impunity.

"One of the desires of the show is to create this authenticity, so there can be discussion and some accountability that some of this goes on," Scott said, with an eye to raising eyebrows among APTN and Showcase viewers.

"Maybe we can start the discussion of change, with viewers saying 'Did you see *Blackstone*, can you believe they did that,' he added.

Also helping the *Blackstone* cause is a cast, including Michelle Thrush, Roseanne Supernault, Gordon Tootoosis and Nathaniel Arcand, that honed their acting skills in theatre and TV work before taking centre stage with the Showcase and APTN series.

"There's some great performances turned in. Because it's an Aboriginal story world, there's a lot of relatability. The actors may know someone with this or that challenge or affliction," Scott said.

Blackstone airs Tuesdays at 8 p.m. on APTN and Fridays at 11 p.m. on Showcase.

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