

# Canada's 'Blackstone' Drama Eyes U.S. Sale

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**The Canadian TV mobster hit joins the hunt for an American TV deal with a ripped-from-the-headlines show about reservation corruption and crime.**

EDMONTON, ALBERTA – The top stories about Canadian TV these days are mostly about local dramas like ABC's *Motive* and Syfy's *Continuum* sold into the U.S. market for rookie or returning seasons.

That doesn't surprise **Steven Cree Molison**, a co-star on *Blackstone*, the Canadian crime drama about power and politics on a native Indian reserve shooting in and around Edmonton.

"When does it become a Canadian show? We're just an aboriginal drama on APTN," he asks.

Molison's question is rhetorical, and revealing.

"If they sell it (*Blackstone*) into the U.S., it will be a Canadian show. Once it goes down there, the stock will go up here," he adds.

It turns out a U.S. sale of a drama based around the exploits of a reservation crime family is near at hand.

"We are in active discussions with a cable network," says **Ritch Colbert**, a principal of PPI Releasing, the Los Angeles-based distributor that started shopping *Blackstone* stateside after a third season got the drama to 23 episodes.

Colbert adds that the cult drama about a fictional Blackstone First Nation reserve rife with political corruption and economic inequality will hit home with Americans struggling financially

and disillusioned with their ruling class.

“This is as good as TV gets. It covers every aspect of modern U.S. culture in glaring details, whether corruption, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence,” Colbert said.

*Blackstone* deliberately draws a parallel between the mafia in the wider Canadian society and the First Nation reserve’s often corrupt chiefs and councils.

“If you take the life cycle of a reservation and put it right besides the outside world, you’ll see the same dynamic. We learn from the masters,” said **Eric Shweig**, who plays Andy Fraser, the *Blackstone* chief-turned-gangster besieged by inner demons.

The Canadian drama, which faces head-on First Nation issues like alcoholism, drug abuse and interracial romance, opens with a charming yet intimidating Andy Fraser pushed from office by a reforming chief from the city, played by **Carmen Moore**.

“There’s a lot of people who don’t want us to talk about this stuff. The people who have a problem have problems with this getting out,” Moore insisted.

The significance of a U.S. sale extends far beyond fulfilling a need by Canadians for approval and recognition of their homegrown TV by Americans.

For *Blackstone* executive producer, director and writer **Ron E. Scott**, the American deal will bring additional international broadcasters on board for an organized crime drama that does for First Nation reserves what *The Sopranos* did for New Jersey.

“It’s interesting how Canada needs the affirmation of the U.S. On TV, it’s a sense that if it’s good enough for the Americans, it’s a good show,” Scott argued.

“Also, if it will sell to the U.S., that sale will spur additional international broadcast deals,” he added.

American and international audiences will also see via *Blackstone* familiar faces in *The Killing*’s **Garry Chalk** and *Arrow*’s **John Cassini**, both veterans of the TV cop genre.

“For a lot of people, *Blackstone* will be a real eye-opener. There’s some great First Nation actors, and it’s a compelling drama on par with anything else on TV,” said Chalk, who plays Lieutenant Hillis, a bent cop looking to help chief Fraser beat a murder rap.

Cassini, who plays a straight arrow cop in a crooked world looking to solve the murder of a stripper, said the hyper-realism of *Blackstone* is what touches viewers.

“That goes to the writing. This could be anywhere. This could be in Baltimore or Cincinnati,” he said.

Prairie Dog Film + Television’s *Blackstone* is produced by **Jesse Szymanski** and

writer/producer **Damon Vignale**.

The ensemble cast includes Gemini-awarding winning **Michelle Thrush, Nathaniel Arcand, Andrea Menard** and **Tantoo Cardinal**.

The third season of *Blackstone* will debut on APTN in fall 2013.

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