

'Blackstone' tackles "controversial and confrontational" storylines



Ron E. Scott's gritty Aboriginal series a unique take on Canadian drama

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Political corruption, murder, sex and love aren't new television tropes, but what *Blackstone* is doing with them is. The APTN series, which just started production on eight Season 4 episodes in Alberta, takes those common themes and puts them up against the uncommon backdrop of a Canadian First Nations reservation called Blackstone.

Blackstone isn't for the faint of heart or tender of ears. Expletives abound as Chief Andy Fraser (Eric Schweig) uses his formidable political power and hulking frame to get what he wants from the community. His brother, Daryl (Steven Cree Molison) manages a strip bar in the city and rules it with an iron hand. Gail (Gemini winner Michelle Thrush) is a recovering alcoholic trying to get her life back on track with help from her sister, Leona (Carmen Moore). There is violence, death and destruction, all seen through an unflinching lens via *Blackstone's* creator, executive producer, writer and director Ron E. Scott.

"*Blackstone* has always be designed to be controversial and confrontational and not like other TV shows where they're designed to take you to another place," he tells *TV Guide Canada*. "*Blackstone* has always been designed to gauge, and for people to think and to feel. Not every television show does that. Some other shows are just there for entertainment. *Blackstone* has a lot more meat to it."

He's right. And his is one of the few shows that tell a uniquely Aboriginal story. As *Arctic Air* executive producer Jon Cooksey told *TV Guide Canada*, *Blackstone* is the only scripted television series in Canada addressing Aboriginal stories now that CBC chose not to go forward with more *AA*. Scott thinks he knows the reason why.

"Sometimes people might not want to see how many missing Aboriginal women there are," he explains. "They might not want to see some of the things that we touch upon, like corruption and things. All those central, universal themes are prevalent in any culture, any group demographic all over this world. What we do is we get aggressive with some storytelling and try to get out there and entertain people as well."

Though *Blackstone* is very much an ensemble drama, a lot of airtime is spent following Andy around. And why not? Like all good TV sociopaths—think *The Shield's* Vic Mackey, *The Sopranos'* Tony Soprano or *Justified's* Boyd Crowder—Andy is a mix of light and dark, good and bad, nurturing and terrifying. Sure, he wants his family—wife Debbie (Andrea Menard) and son Alan (Justin Rain)—to be together, but he's got no problem having sex with a stripper on the side. He loves his community and will do anything to make it a better place, but he's more than happy to skim money from the coffers to line his own pockets.

It's those conflicting facets of Andy's personality—and many of those in *Blackstone*—that make for an entertaining program. As Scott says, someone that's all good or bad isn't as much fun to watch.

"If they're completely dark and without any redemption, it's tough to see the human elements of them," Scott explains. "There's some real ironic humour within these characters in that they don't realize they're bad themselves. I think one of the interesting things that we try to do is have these multi-dimensional bad guys who you sometimes feel for. This upcoming season will be no different."

Seasons 1-3 of *Blackstone* are available for streaming on [APTN's website](#). Season 4 is slated to air this fall on the network.

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