

## Canadian TV Drama 'Blackstone' Gets First U.S. Audience on Hulu

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**The online streamer has picked up the edgy drama about political corruption and power plays on a First Nation reserve.**

TORONTO – Hulu in the U.S. has acquired the Canadian scripted drama *Blackstone* from Prairie Dog Film and Television.

The online streamer has picked up the first three seasons of the popular APTN drama about political corruption and power plays on a fictional First Nation reservation.

And a fourth season is on its way to Hulu and HuluPlus as part of the distribution deal with PPI Releasing.

"A sale in the U.S. means the world will start to take notice," said *Blackstone* creator and showrunner **Ron E. Scott** of the American deal spurring additional foreign sales.

The darkly brooding series, having just completed shooting on a fourth season in Edmonton, earned a passionate fan base on APTN in Canada before recent talks opened with the CBC, the country's public broadcaster, about a possible second window broadcast.

*Blackstone* has scored with audiences here by going beyond the usual native drama tropes of drug and alcohol abuse and poverty to focus on dramatic characters enduring psychological stress in trying to reconcile with native communities, especially over its role in the infamous Indian residential schools scandal.

Early seasons that portrayed a new generation of First Nation leaders attempting to end the corruption and mismanagement of former band politicians in the third season combined sex and murder into a whodunit police investigation.

With the fourth season shot in large part in a former remand jail in Edmonton, the APTN drama remains accessible to mainstream Canadian audiences for its yanked-from-the-headline tropes and intersecting storylines that conflate the high number of aboriginals in prisons here with the not-so-distant memory of Canada's residential schools system.

Scott explained many Aboriginal youth grew up in Church-run residential schools that took them away from their families and aboriginal identity and, just like a jail, left them in despair and loneliness.

"Their freedom and identity was taken away. They had to do what they were told, just like in jail," he added.

**Carmen Moore**, who plays school counselor Leona Stoney on *Blackstone*, insisted many Aboriginal Canadians turned to violence, drugs and alcohol to cope with the impact of the residential schools system.

"If you live in that world, you will eventually get caught up for doing something illegal," she added.

*Blackstone*'s first season saw the father of Andy Fraser, the *Blackstone* chief and series baddie played by **Eric Schweig**, in a bleak residential school.

By the third season, the arc now features a savvy and manipulative Fraser trying to elude a murder charge and jail after the death of a dancer in a strip club as the series sense of dread and danger thickens.

With the police closing in, *Blackstone* viewers are left to wonder if Fraser's crimes will go unpunished, or whether he will suffer for his misdeeds.

Here there's an echo of *The Sopranos*, another crime drama about a dysfunctional family with a tormented, sorry-for-himself mafia boss as its head, as Andy Fraser seeks psychological healing, even as he becomes harder and darker while trying to win the criminal game.

"Healing and mental health are big issues in the native community, so it's time we show steps one can take to get help and to get better and to free oneself from traumatic experiences," said **Jennifer Podemski**, who plays a prison psychiatrist on the show's upcoming fourth season.

*Blackstone* is produced by Prairie Dog Film + Television, with Scott as executive producer, writer and director, **Jesse Szymanski** as producer and **Damon Vignale** as producer and co-writer.