



Eric Schweig as Andy Fraser

Whodunit?

By Greg David

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Gritty award-winning 'Blackstone' returns

Up until last September, I knew nothing about Blackstone. The APTN prime-time drama wasn't even on my radar, other than seeing the title in monthly highlight email packages sent from the channel's PR department.

Then the Gemini Awards arrived, and Michelle Thrush walked away from the podium with the trophy for Best Performance by an Actress in a Continuing Leading Dramatic Role. In the media room following her win, Thrush admitted she was surprised to win, but championed Blackstone and the character (Gail Stoney) she portrays in it.

Suddenly I wanted to know more about Blackstone. So when I heard the home-grown series was returning Wednesday night, I had to check it out. I'm glad I did.

With a raw, unflinching look at life on a Native Canadian reserve, Blackstone boasts performances and characters usually reserved for networks like FX and HBO and series like Rescue Me and The Shield.

In the cliffhanger Season 1 finale, viewers were left wondering whether Blackstone chief Andy Fraser (Eric Schweig) had murdered his brother, Daryl (Steven Cree Molison), who was in the midst of boffing a stripper in the club's dressing room. Andy had walked into the room mid-coitus, and two gunshots were heard. Did Andy do the deed?

Season 2's "Blood is Thicker than Water" revealed that Andy did half of a criminal act, killing the dancer and putting the gun to his own head. Daryl talked Andy out of killing himself, but urged his brother to get rid of the body.

It was here I immediately drew comparisons between Rescue Me and Blackstone. Rescue Me starred Denis Leary as a conflicted New York City fireman struggling with demons (alcoholism and guilt over surviving 9/11), strained relationships with family and friends and talking to people long dead. Andy is much like that, battling a drinking problem and seeing his dead father at times of stress in his life. As Andy dug a makeshift grave for the dead stripper at the town dump, the spirit of his father haunted him, wondering aloud how Andy would get out of this mess.

It was a good question, especially since the latter half of the storyline dealt with parasite-laden water making Blackstone's citizens sick. Groundwater contaminated by the dump where Andy had buried the body. Awesome.

Andy is also a lot like Vic Mackey from The Shield. Vic was the leader of his police department's strike force, juggling a team of men while also managing tenuous gang truces on the street and strife at home. Andy, while having a fairly decent home life, wears many hats as the chief, alternately trying to work out backroom deals with developers and attempting to quell the tainted water issue without the Canadian government knowing about it. He's got a lot of balls in the air, and if just one of them drops he's in deep doo-doo.

Andy is a tragic figure, and I was immediately drawn to him. He's a big guy, doesn't suffer fools gladly (his dismissal of the government doctor on loan to Blackstone was hilarious) and every other word in his vocabulary begins with the letter "f." (Be aware that's the letter of choice for much of the cast.)

There were other storylines in the second season debut — Thrush's Gail is haunted by her daughter and struggling with sobriety, and sister Leona (Carmen Moore) is dealing with life after being the chief — but Andy's was the most compelling.

With the authorities sniffing around the disappearance of the dancer, Andy finally snapped, tackling one of his underlings and strangling him. As his father danced around, cackling with glee, it appeared Andy was on the verge of killing another member of the reserve.

Blackstone airs Wednesdays at 9 p.m. ET on APTN East.

Thoughts? Comment below.