

REVIEW I CBC drama

Intelligence shows how mean the streets can be

BY MARC HORTON

Jimmy Reardon is constantly alert, checking his rear-view mirror, warning his grade-school daughter to trust no one, sweeping his office for bugs, using pay telephones because his own is tapped.

Reardon, the central figure in *Intelligence*, a remarkably taut CBC cop drama that airs tonight, is a major Vancouver pot dealer and his paranoia is justifiable. The people who are out to get him are numbered in the hundreds: members of at least three cop agencies, other dealers, even, maybe, his ex-wife who wants to start earning money on her own if only Jimmy will front her a load of cocaine.

Reardon, played with gritty realism by Ian Tracey who is best known as cop Mike Leary on *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Da Vinci's City Hall*, isn't the only one who should be looking over his shoulder in *Intelligence*.

In this world of darkness, everyone is out to get everyone else. Ambitious cops plot the downfall of their superiors, harvesters of buds in burgeoning grow operations are suspect, the men who run those operations can also be bought, various drug agencies contend for power in a milieu of violence and blood.

This is classic film noir where no one is what they seem. The good guys cross the line into bad guy territory and the bad guys — well, Reardon at least — have a moral code by which they live.

That code may be harsh, and street justice is swift and uncompromising, but this is a story where there is no black and white. *Intelligence* is a series pilot that comes only in shades of grey.

Reardon's nemesis is a cop named Ted Altman (Matt Frewer), who is second-in-command of Vancouver's Organized Crime Unit. Altman's almost boundless ambition pits him against his boss, Mary Spalding (Klea Scott), who has career aspirations of her own.

In order for her to land a top job with the federal government, she's doing a little undercover recruiting for Ottawa's Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

She's willing to tap informants who have worked for her crew in order to look good for her new potential bosses. It turns out that Mary is willing to cut a deal with just about anyone to get ahead.



Telling good guys from the bad guys is the mystery

But when Altman's briefcase containing sensitive files is stolen from his car during a smash-and-grab, the carefully laid plans of everyone go tragically awry. There are consequences in *Intelligence*, and most of them are downright nasty.

Director Stephen Surjik does a masterful job with a terrific script by Chris Haddock, the creator of *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Da Vinci's City Hall*. The dialogue occasionally approaches the raw, but the mild profanities add a level of reality to the film. Real cops and real bad guys use the f-word, as they do here.

There is also an understanding just how mean the streets of a major city can be and the careful attention to detail gives *Intelligence* an authenticity that's rare in made-for-television crime dramas. For example, the Reardon-owned strip club, The Chick-a-Dee, is seedy in the way that only a place with pole dancers and cheap booze can be.

Viewers, however, should be prepared to pay attention. *Intelligence* is crowded with more than 60 characters, but not one of them is superfluous. They all fit together in a complex jigsaw of double crosses and deceit.

And, better yet, Haddock and Surjik (perhaps with an eye to series television) dare to leave everything open-ended, almost, at the film's end. The bad guys just might win, but just who is the baddest of the bad — the cops and the dealers are in a dead heat — all of which makes *Intelligence* one of the smartest cop dramas in years.

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Ian Tracey as Jimmy Reardon and Klea Scott as Mary Spalding) in *Intelligence* on CBC TV.