

## TV Review: TNT's Riveting 'Southland' Reflects Dark Times

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 13, 2013 - 10:33am

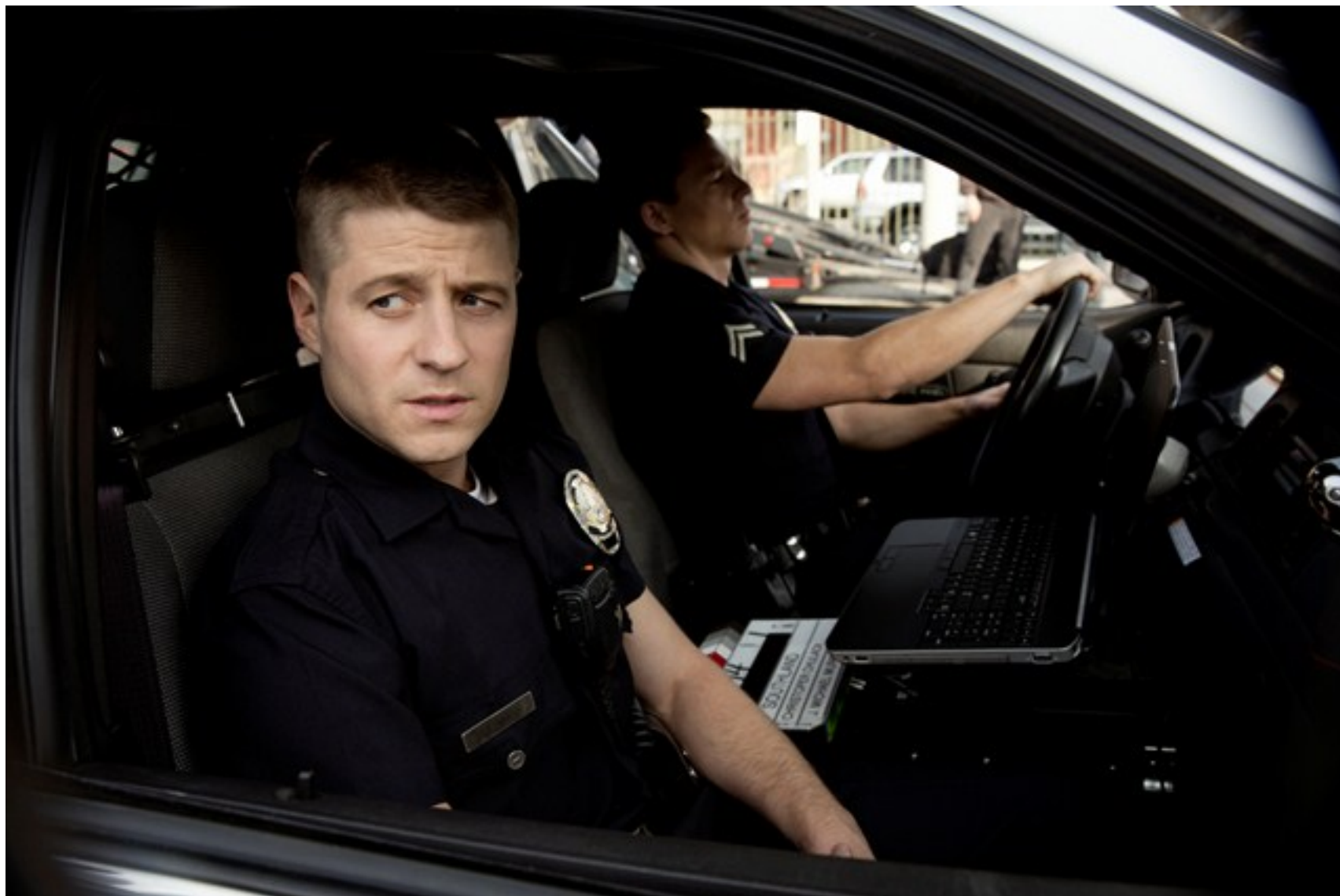
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CHICAGO – I know I've said this before but the season premiere of TNT's "Southland," airing tonight at 9pm CST, feels even darker than last year or the year before. It could be just a show trying to top itself in terms of edgy subject matter but it feels genuine here, like the show is increasingly reflecting our darker times. Life on the streets of Los Angeles isn't getting easier in 2013 and few shows have ever captured what it's like to be a cop in the city of angels more dramatically than the best cop show since "The Shield."



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

The comparison to Shawn Ryan's brilliant drama feel more apt this year as Officer Ben Sherman (Ben McKenzie) continues what now feels like a series-long arc from wide-eyed rookie to bitter veteran. He's not quite Walter White but he is breaking bad in his own way, cutting corners, partying with strippers, refusing to help a bleeding man, and taking a personal call while someone grieves at a crime scene. He's kind of a dick and it will be fascinating to see how this develops. McKenzie has long been the unheralded actor on this show as he has been overshadowed by Michael Cudlitz and Regina King. This could be his season to shine.



Southland

Photo credit: TNT

Of course, no one really shines brighter than another on "Southland" as it is so brilliantly designed as a true ensemble show. Sherman's partner Officer Sammy Bryant (Shawn Hatosy) has followed a similar arc to Sherman in that he too seems more hardened this season, although he sees the cold behavior in his partner and tries to fight the same in himself. Bryant's ex-wife is also back on the scene, trying to cause problems for the officer.



Southland  
Photo credit: TNT

Meanwhile, Officer John Cooper (Michael Cudlitz) has to deal with a new rookie and Detective Lydia Adams (Regina King) has to balance motherhood with being on the force. Chad Michael Murray ("One Tree Hill") guest stars on the first two episodes, Dorian Missick has become a series regular as Lydia's partner Detective Ruben Robinson, and C. Thomas Howell has elevated to a series regular. Alcoholic and obnoxious, Officer Dudek has long served as a warning to the other characters — don't be this obnoxious caricature of what people think of L.A. cops. His upgrade to series regular hints at a creative tone heading into dark territory.

I've always admired the structure of "Southland" in the way that it chronicles a day at a time with different duos of officers around Los Angeles. However, it could have been so easy for lesser writers to turn that structure into something episodic. In fact, when the show made the jump to TNT and jettisoned a lot of its cast for budget reasons, it looked like it would become a multi-case-of-the-week show instead of the character-driven one that we wanted. Watching the end of season four, recently released on DVD, and the beginning of the new season, one is reminded that this show went in the opposite direction. Cooper's demons, Lydia's attempts to balance motherhood with stopping true evil, Sherman & Bryant's development from young cops to bitter ones — these are multi-episode arcs woven into the fabric of the individual cases of the week. The writing is brilliant.



Southland  
Photo credit: TNT

Having said that, "Southland" has always been about its cast. It's the most underrated ensemble on TV BY FAR. Nothing comes close. Cudlitz & King should have been in the supporting performance Emmy conversation every year and Hatosy & McKenzie aren't far behind. Even new faces like Missick's work within the fabric of the show. Like "NYPD Blue" and "The Shield," these are well-rounded characters not just personality-less agents of justice.

There are always shows that I like more than others. It's human nature. And there are shows that are critically acclaimed that I don't understand. Once again, there's never universal agreement about anything. But I'll never understand why more critics and viewers don't get behind "Southland." It seems to be changing. When it's mentioned on the radio show I guest on weekly or I when it comes up with friends, there's a sense that, yes, that IS a great show. History will be very kind to "Southland." When it's done, people will be stunned it didn't get more attention when it aired. Let's just hope it's not done for a long time.

A few years ago, WB released the first season of "Southland" on DVD and then ignored the show. They're playing catch-up, releasing seasons 2-4 in one DVD set last week. It's clearly a rush job. The quality of the transfers are mediocre and even the menus look cheap. Give



this show the treatment it deserves — HD, special features, etc. Maybe next year. Or, at the rate they're going, seasons 5-7 in 2016.



Synopsis:

Rookies learn the ropes. Veterans burn out. Detectives take their work personally. Partners take their addictions too far. Relationships fall apart. Blood spatter patterns provide clues. With fast-moving action filmed on gangland streets and in ritzy cul-de-sacs, Southland tells personal stories of men and women on both sides of the badge as they struggle to make a difference, make a million bucks, or simply survive. In this 6-Disc Set containing all 26 hard-hitting spades from Seasons Two, Three and Four, this highly-acclaimed series follows the intense days and nights of cops, criminals, victims and their loved ones in the sometimes glamorous, mostly gritty City of Angels.

Special Features:

- o A Crime Tour: Southland's Crime Map
- o Backing The Badge: Selected Scene Commentary
- o Unaired Scenes

*"Southland" stars Ben McKenzie, Shawn Hatosy, Michael Cudlitz, Regina King, and Dorian Missick. It returns on February 13, 2013 at 9pm CST on TNT.*



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [15]  
Content Director  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [14]

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