

STRYKER

A film by Noam Gonick

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(Canada, 2004, 93 minutes, Dolby Digital, 1:1.85)

all photos by: Schledewitz



SYNOPSIS

Stryker is the story of a brutal turf war between two street gangs in Winnipeg's North End. Omar (Ryan Black), the mixed-blood leader of the ABS (Asian Bomb Squad), dominates the 'hood with his crew of Filipino enforcers. His nemesis, Mama Ceece (Deena Fontaine), is the girl-thug leader of the Indian Posse. She has just been released from jail and is determined to regain control of her neighbourhood. "Stryker" is Canadian slang for a prospective gang member. This film follows one Stryker (Kyle Henry), a 14-year-old Native arsonist from a northern reserve whose arrival in the city serves as a catalyst in this fierce battle.

THE STORY

Brokenhead First Nation Reserve, northern Manitoba, Canada. The dead of winter. Stryker, a fourteen year-old Native arsonist, burns down an abandoned church on the reservation. He runs away from the scene of the crime, over frozen rivers and through a herd of wild buffalo, and hops aboard a freight train to ride the rails to Winnipeg, Indigenous Peoples' capital of Canada.

Winnipeg's North End is a poverty stricken neighbourhood and home to most of Winnipeg's Native population. Stryker arrives in the North End in the middle of a turf war between two gangs. The North End illicit drug and prostitution trade is controlled by Omar, a part-Native half-breed, and his Asian Bomb Squad, a clique of stylish émigré Filipinos. Omar took control of the North End while his arch rival, Mama Ceece, girl-thug leader of the Indian Posse, was in jail. Mama Ceece is now back on the

streets and fighting to get back her gang and her turf. Filipinos and Natives are clashing in a racial gang war.

When Stryker's train comes crashing to a halt in Winnipeg's North End rail yards, the kid witnesses a violent car jacking: Asian Bomb Squad lieutenant Orville loses a large cocaine shipment to train-jumping Indian Posse boys.

Stryker is impressed by Mama Ceece and the Indian Posse. He wants nothing more than to be in their gang. A "Stryker", in Canadian slang, is a prospective gang-banger who must prove himself with a body count or property damage while being hazed, or "jumped-in" by older gang members. But the Indian Posse wants nothing to do with Stryker.

Wandering the unfamiliar boarded-up streets of Winnipeg's North End alone, Stryker hooks up with Daisy, a Métis (mixed blood) trannie hooker -- and he comes face to face with Omar -- the Napoleon-complex pimp of the district. Omar bitch slaps Daisy, rolling her for "holding out" on him. Stryker helps Daisy walk to her house - a trannie haven for the North End. Stryker has a home.

After having their drugs heisted, the Asian Bomb Squad boys pick up their own castaway off the street, the teen prostitute Ruby, sister to an Indian Posse boy and part time lesbian girlfriend of Mama Ceece. The Asian Bomb Squad delivers Ruby to Omar as a flesh offering to make up for the loss of their drugs to the Indian Posse. At a house party at Daisy's, Omar explodes with abusive rage that the Indian Posse is back and attacking, but he falls for the irresistible Ruby. This is the beginning of the end for Omar. As he party's, his world starts to spiral down: Mama Ceece and the Indian Posse make a frontal attack, fire bombing his car and scrawling the words "Native Land" on it. While Omar is spooked that the war over North End turf is now on, Stryker becomes even more enamored of the Indian Posse.

Stryker leaves the relative safety of Daisy's house in search of the Indian Posse. He finds them but they play nice and proceed

to beat and stomp him in the middle of a North End street. The police arrive and everyone is shuttled to youth prison -- where the Indian Posse encounters their former rivals, The Deuce Crew, another native gang spending a warm winter incarcerated. The two enemy aboriginal gangs collide in an all out brawl, but Stryker breaks it up with an impressive display of talent for arson. Stryker has finally won the Indian Posse's admiration. But Stryker is taken into isolation by the guards, while the others are tossed into the yard to duke it out. Mama Ceece arrives at the barbed wire fence to break things up and pull the two gangs together to work for a common purpose. With a handshake and enough coke to share, the two gangs become one in order to finish off Omar. As Mama Ceece says, "Native peoples gotta come together, take back what's ours."

The police release Stryker into the custody of Talia - an abusive foster mother who has had every member of the Native gangs, from Omar on down, in her clutches at one time or another. Omar is the only one who still considers Talia his mother.

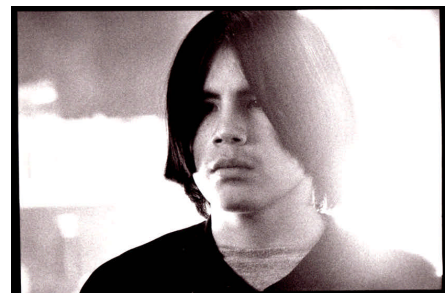
Meanwhile, Omar's bosses are punishing him for his gang's loss of drug merchandise. The sadistic bosses send Omar back to where he came from, back to his days of stripping on ladies night at the local bar. Humiliated, Omar does his strip routine at the sleazy bar, with his "mother" Talia cheering him on, with Mama Ceece and the Indian Posse jeering from the sidelines. All hell breaks loose as the Indian Posse and the Asian Bomb Squad clash in a brutal bar brawl. As the battle rages, Stryker sets fire to the bar, inadvertently knocking out Mama Ceece with a hurled bottle. Everybody runs for the doors as Omar takes his arsonist-saviour Stryker under his arm to safety.

Despite having his lucky firebug talisman Stryker at his side, Omar continues to lose his grip on the North End. The Indian Posse steal his best customers, his own Filipino gang mutinies and rips off his cash, his best whore Daisy turns on him, and Stryker delivers a final traitorous blow by burning down the evil Talia's house.

Omar is alone and defeated. In a frenzy of near insanity he dumps gasoline all over himself. Stryker could light the final match and put Omar out of his misery. But life is sometimes worse punishment than death, so Stryker lets Omar beg for release without delivering it. Stryker walks off into the night.

Alone again, Stryker is sleeping in the freezing North End street. He is picked up by police, beaten and taken out of town for a starlight tour - so named in Winnipeg after the infamous police practice of driving Native youth and other undesirables out of the city limits on cold winter nights and leaving them bloodied to freeze to death on the snow drifts.

Stryker lies near death on the frozen tundra. But, as if in a dream, Stryker wakes up in a herd of buffalo, picks himself up and walks up a snowy hill. At the top of the hill, Stryker stands resolutely before the vista of the Winnipeg skyline - ready to return to his future.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

After generations of genocide at the hands of this place we call "Canada", I saw the surfacing of Native street gangs in Winnipeg as an army of resistance. During the arson epidemics of the last few years, when the city was being burnt to the ground, I cheered these kids on - the gangs pushed back at an impossible situation thrust on them by birthright. It's the oldest story in Canada, and one which we rarely admit to ourselves - but there is an apartheid in effect here - gasoline sniffing, teenage prostitution, crack use, are all symptoms of this system. Native

teens are told how to make it on white middleclass terms, told that it's the only way to transcend their situation. But away from this evil coercion, within the gang underworld, I have found an amazing sense of camaraderie, and a belonging to something pure and raw. Gang family life mimics the abusive ways of the superstructure, yet as misguided as it can be, I admire the impulse to resist. From the first stolen treaties where Cree and Ojibwa land was acquired to create "Manitoba" to the local police custom of "Starlight Tours" - taking undesirable kids out to the frozen outskirts of the city to die of exposure - resistance is vital. Its been said that when the State starts to condone the killing of a particular people, that's when teen gangs emerge - as a way of self-protection. The theory works for the Indian Posse, which made its debut after the Oka uprising in Quebec in the early 1990's, when the military was called in to settle a Mohawk land dispute with the barrel of a gun.

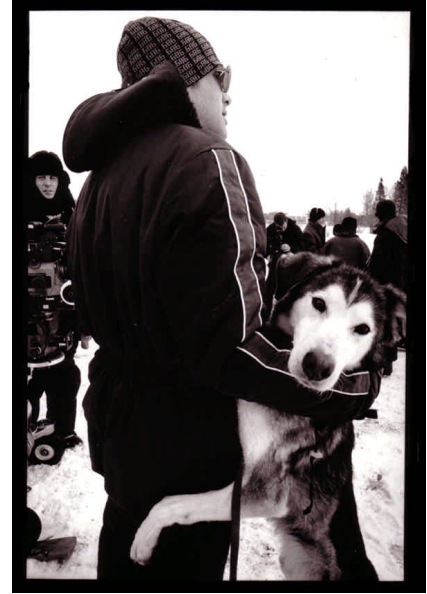
Stryker the fourteen year-old arsonist is an avenging angel - settling the score with a pack of matches as his only weapon. In scene one of the film, the Church takes some payback for its history of residential schools where the priests and nuns attempted to erase a peoples' culture. As Stryker's adventures progress, he settles the score a few more times, torching the lecherous foster mother who keeps photos of all the baby thugs on her refrigerator, but in the end he doesn't kill Omar - the mixed race (Métis) failed overlord. Co-writer David McIntosh and I were determined that in this script no Native people would die - a new-style cowboys and Indians movie.

With the fastest growing aboriginal population in the country, Winnipeg is not only a centre for Native struggles - but also for the rebirth of ancient traditions, like the concept of the "two-spirited people". These transgendered, inter-sex individuals were originally revered in pre-colonial North America, regarded as magically gifted. I see an echo of this in the tranny crack whores of the low track. Daisy is the one person who gets out of the violent cycle, out of the city that is the child poverty and murder capital of Canada. She is the center of goodness in the film.

Omar is all about masculinity in crisis - a failure to live up to the archetypal movie thug. The idea of gangsters pimping for and carousing with other men dressed as women might seem like a stretch, but I've taken little artistic liberty here. Nightlife in the core area of this frontier town is wilder than anything I've managed to get on film. As someone says in the film: "A hole's a hole."

If you believe in the idea that the Native people in North America got here thousands of years ago by walking over a land bridge from Asia, then the members of the Asian Bomb Squad and the Indian Posse aren't really all that foreign to each other. I was partly inspired by Japanese genre flicks, and wanted Stryker to fit in somewhere between the Far East and the mean streets of Winnipeg. This film is about racial strife, one that is very real in this community. Maybe it is the similar DNA that makes the feud between Filipinos and Natives so bitter. Or, maybe it's the way that Filipino immigrants have attained middleclass status within one generation of landing here, while the first people to settle this area millennia ago are still the underdogs.

I really want this film to act as a catalyst - kind of like the way the character of Stryker acts a catalyst for the people he meets on his journey. I hope that people watching this story will be stirred to push back, and that Native youth watching it will feel as inspired and charged by the experience as many of the cast members were. Almost all of the people you see on screen have never acted before, but they have first-hand experience with street life. In talking to the real Indian Posse about the project they said: "it's about time someone gave us the respect to make a movie about us." I do respect the Indian Posse, whoever they are, however many Posse's there are. This film is for street gangs everywhere who are trying to make a world of their own.



Noam Gonick - Bio

The son of a radical Marxist, as a precocious twelve year-old Noam Gonick directed *A Mid Summers Night's Dream* in the local church basement. At eighteen, he ran around naked covered in vegetable oil in a Berlin bomb shelter with a skinhead Artaud ensemble. After a sketchy film school experience he studied filmmakers Guy Maddin and Bruce LaBruce, producing a documentary and book on their work before making his own first feature, *Hey, Happy!* which premiered at Sundance in 2001.



CAST LIST

Stryker - Kyle Henry
Mama Ceece - Deena Fontaine
Omar - Ryan Black
Daisy - Joseph Mesiano
Cody - Nick Oullette
Ruby - Nancy Sanderson
Talia - Dominique Rémy-Root
Jessie - Dylan Mowatt
Mo - Devon Kilmury
IP - Aeon Staniforth, Joseph Morisseau, Riley Courcnene
Orville - Tri Cao
ABS - Chuck Romero Venzon, Rainer Santos, Ryan Miranda
Deuce Crew - Harely Dawes, Eric Star, Rodney Contois, Brent
"Powers" Boulanger
Annie - Dita Vendetta
Connie - Conrad Merasty
Trannies - Allie Yaput, Gail Prudden
Thugs - Karman Omeosoo, Kevin Yeboah
Officer Joe - Brent Neale
Dusty - John Witzke

Hostess - Joanne Rodriguez
Male Stripper - Jansen Peters
Prison Guard - Omar Van den Berg

CAST BIOS



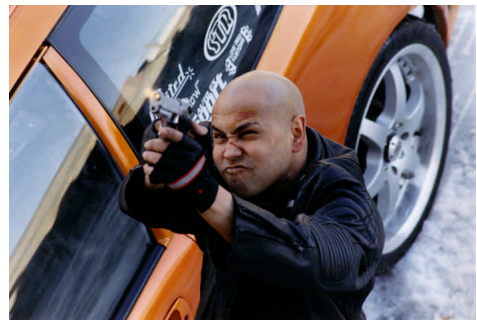
Kyle Henry (Stryker) is fifteen years old and attends Daniel McIntyre Collegiate in Winnipeg, where he is specializing in the graphic arts program. He lives with his mother, younger siblings and stepfather in the Lord Selkirk Housing Project, in the North End of Winnipeg, where some scenes from the film were shot. His family originally comes from the Roseau River Ojibwe reservation. Hearing about the auditions from his aunt Rachel, he took to the bus downtown to try out.

"It was fun, tiring, exciting. I liked everything about shooting the movie, specially meeting Omar - he's a funny guy. The hardest part was running down that snowy riverbank over and over, it was cold and my feet got wet. My favorite part of the movie are the fight scenes."



Deena Fontaine (Mama Ceece) This is Deena's first acting experience. Her ten-year-old son coached her for the audition, saying not to be "too phony". He turned out to be a good director, as Fontaine was so real at her audition, that the casting director was concerned for his safety. She lives with her two children, Nicolas (10) and Kiana (7) - who coached their mom through the rehearsal process, with Kiana stomping around the house as 'baby Mama Ceece'. Born and raised in Winnipeg, her family comes from the Cree reservation at Island Lake in Northern Manitoba. Since Stryker, Deena has performed on screen with Robin Williams in his upcoming film The Big White.

"I never had any support or encouragement from my family, so I really didn't know, but when I did start acting I fell in love with it. My son Nicolas taught me that 'less is better' - he helped me tone things down and get comfortable with the role. I was excited by the intensity of the script - I could relate to a lot of the characters because we see it all the time in the city here. After playing Mama Ceece I had to smudge with sweet grass to get rid of the evil spirits."



Ryan Black (Omar) The only cast member with previous film acting experience, Ryan acted as a mentor to the Native youth performing for their first time on Stryker. He first appeared at the Venice Film Festival in Bruce McDonald's Dance Me Outside (1995). Since then he has performed in Canadian television series (The Rez), on stage (Dry Lips Outta Move to Kapuskasing) and he has his own production company with his sister, Jackie. Ryan's mother works for the largest Native family services organization in North America. His father hails from Trinidad.

"This is not how Natives are commonly depicted in Canadian culture but believe it or not, they are all people I know."

CREW LIST

Directed by Noam Gonick
Director of Photography - Ed Lachman, ASC
Written by Noam Gonick & David McIntosh
Produced by Ryan Black & Noam Gonick
Executive Producer - Juliette Hagopian
Picture Editor, Sound Designer - Bruce Little
Music Producer - Karmen Omeosoo
Casting Director - Jim Heber
Costume Designer - Billy Martin
Production Designer - Mark Gebel
Art Director - Rick Gilbert

MUSIC NOTES

The Stryker Soundtrack was put together with the help of the Beat duo "REZOFFICIAL" consisting of two producers: Stomp and Jmak, both from the central Alberta Four Nations Reserves; Erminskin (Jmak) And Samson (BigStomp) Cree Nations. Along with the help of HellnbackK, this collection of music consists of emotion, aggression and all around good vibe music, with appearances by Slang Blossom (WAB, P-NUTT, DAYBI), Dead Indians (KennyGee), Tomislav (Rezoffical team member), DRO (Rezofficial team member), Raven Hart & Lisa Muswagon, Crossanova and Lancer.

This Soundtrack will not only catch ears but also ranges from traditional hand drum music to Hip-hop. With soulful beats lacing the backdrop for tales past and present this soundtrack adds the perfect touch for the street based movie Stryker.

Soundtrack Producer Karmen Omeosoo A.K.A. HellnbackK has been an active member in the Canadian hip-hop community for upwards of 14 years going on 15. Karmen (25) has been a major force in bringing this soundtrack to life. With years of stage and

studio experience and witty lyrical ability to make you think, HellnbackK has proved time and time again good music speaks for itself. For more info and music downloads go to www.rezofficial.com