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## 'Wind River' reveals mystery, desolation on the reservation

Crime procedural takes an unromanticized look at Native Americans' life in Wyoming

It opens with an 18-year-old girl running barefoot in the snow until she finally collapses, dead. How she got there is the mystery the crime procedural "Wind River" will methodically unravel.

Written and directed by Wyoming native Taylor Sheridan (who also wrote "Sicario" and "Hell or High Water," receiving an Academy Award nomination for the latter), the film is set on the Wind River Wyoming Indian Reservation, an actual reservation with a reputation for desolation.

Wracked by poverty, boredom, despair and the consequent apathy, alcoholism and addiction, the Native Americans on the rez have lost touch with traditional rituals to such an extent that the girl's anguished father must make up his own to channel his grief.

Jeremy Renner ("The Hurt Locker") plays veteran game tracker Cory Lambert. He's a

sniper who hunts mountain lions and wolves that prey on livestock. It is a transferable skill.

The movie's panoramic vistas of snow-blanketed mountains are breathtaking and, in his marbled winter camouflage, Cory blends imperceptibly into the frosted forest. In his solid-white hunting suit, he is invisible even while traversing expanses of open, powdered tundra.

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After Cody finds the girl's body in the snow, agent Jane Banner (Elizabeth Olsen, younger sister of Mary-Kate and Ashley) is sent from the Las Vegas FBI office to help the woefully understaffed tribal police chief (Graham



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Greene, "Dances With Wolves") work the case and cut corners with respect to the government's jurisdiction in tribal territory.

Jane has arrived to conduct what will be a subzero investigation without coat or gloves, and the woman who eventually outfits her asks pointedly, "what were they thinking, bringing you here?" She knows nothing about track-

ing or the Darwinian indifference of frontier justice.

Raiding a meth house to search for witnesses, she wants to stop the action.

"Shouldn't we wait for backup?" she asks.

"This isn't the land of backup," replies the chief, "it's the land of you're on your own."

But Jane is a good officer. In order to succeed she must enlist Cody to help her track the killer. Haunted by demons of his own not-so-distant past, he is compelled to assist her.

As depicted by Renner, Cody is a reassuring presence and the audience grows to rely on his capable leadership, as do the characters.

Though woefully uninformed — while looking for clues, Cory explains, she misses all the signs — Jane is presented as earnest and competent. Sheridan doesn't make her a weak link or a superwoman. She admits her mistake in condescending to the girl's family and acknowledges her dependence on Cody's specialized skills.

He, in turn, is willing to help her get the job done.

After years as a working but little-noticed actor Sheridan has distinguished himself as a "populist" writer (as that term might have been defined a year ago when it embraced a marginalized populace, rather than the "Alt-Right"). In past efforts he has shown us the fear and futility of the drug war at the Mexican border and the desperation sown by the foreclosure crisis.

With "Wind River," Sheridan delivers a visually elegant, if classically formulaic, murder mystery that offers an enlightening, respectful and unromanticized depiction of reservation life.