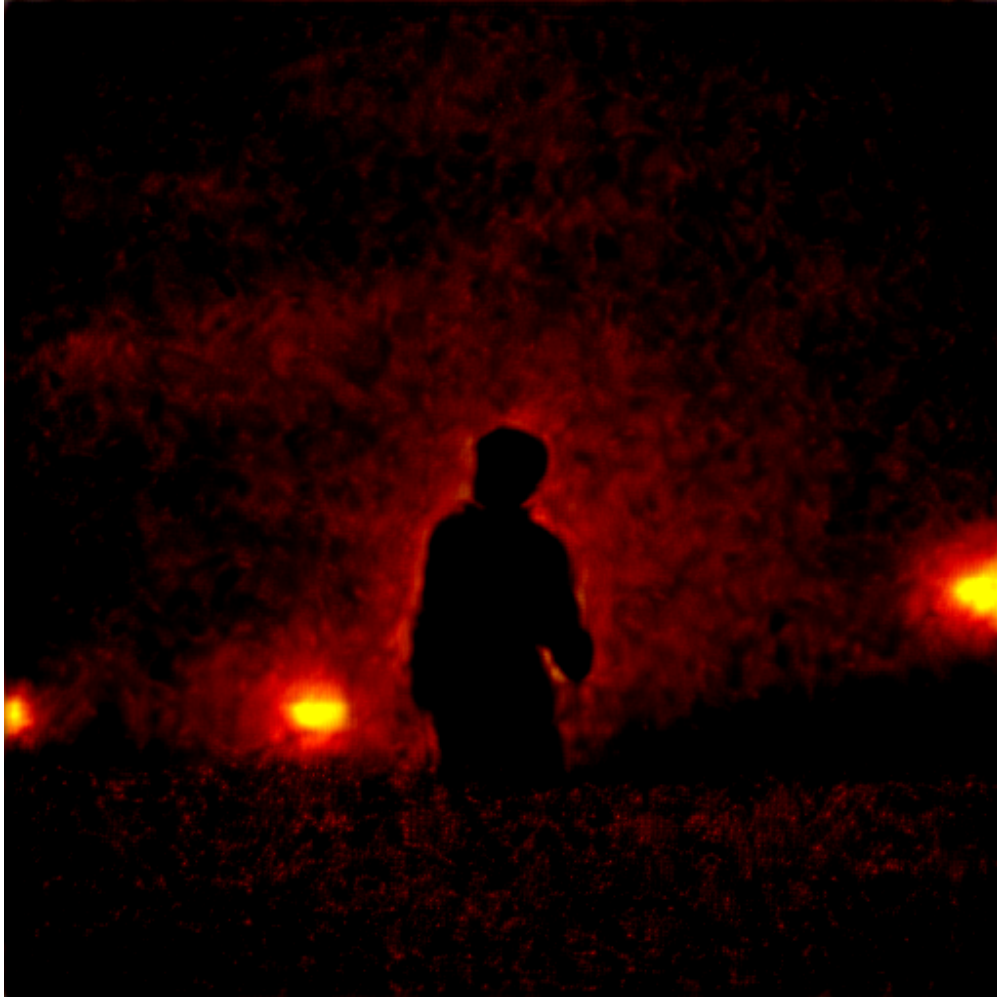


Shot on the Streets

*Making an independent scripted series in Los Angeles — and finding its audience in the age of
FAST*

The Tunnel TV — First Edition — July 2026



This e-book is editorial and educational commentary published by The Tunnel TV in July 2026. It reflects the perspective of an independent scripted production and summarizes publicly reported streaming-industry developments as background for filmmakers, actors, and crew. It is not legal, financial, or career advice, and it does not replace the judgment of a qualified entertainment attorney, agent, or production professional. Casting and hiring practices should follow applicable law and union rules. No statement here should be read as a guarantee of distribution, audience, or career outcome.

Contents



- Foreword
- Chapter 1 — Why Independent, Why Now
- Chapter 2 — Writing a World One Scene at a Time
- Chapter 3 — Directing on Real Streets
- Chapter 4 — Casting the Faces of the Story
- Chapter 5 — Building a Crew on an Independent Budget
- Chapter 6 — Distribution in the Age of FAST
- Chapter 7 — The Long Game of a Series
- Conclusion: Independent, and Made in LA

Foreword

Every scripted series begins as a stubborn idea that refuses to leave. The Tunnel TV began the same way — as a story that could only be told on the streets of Los Angeles, with real characters and real neighborhoods, built from the ground up on a fiercely independent budget. This book is the director's notebook opened up: the choices behind the writing, the blocking, the casting, and the increasingly viable question of how an independent series actually finds an audience in 2026.

It is written for the people who make this kind of work possible — the actors weighing whether to submit, the camera and sound and post professionals deciding whether to lend their craft, and the filmmakers wondering whether independent scripted storytelling is a real path or a romantic one. The answer, as of 2026, is that it is more real than it has been in a long time.

Read it as what it is: notes from a working independent production, honest about the craft and honest about the economics.

Chapter 1 — Why Independent, Why Now

For most of television's history, "independent scripted series" was close to a contradiction. Scripted drama meant a studio, a network, a gatekeeper who decided what got made and what got seen. The distribution bottleneck was the whole game, and independent creators mostly lost it before they started.

That has changed, and the change is structural. Free ad-supported streaming television — FAST — has become one of the fastest-growing corners of the streaming world. Total hours watched on FAST services reached 1.8 billion in August 2025, up 43% year over year, and by mid-2025 nearly 1,870 FAST channels were operating across 21 countries. Roughly a quarter of global FAST viewing now comes from channels launched after December 2023. In plain terms: the audience is there, it is growing, and a meaningful share of it is watching content that did not come from a traditional studio.

For a character-driven series shot on real LA streets, that shift is the opening. It means an independent production can reach viewers without first winning the approval of a gatekeeper who was never going to greenlight something this specific. The gate is not gone entirely, but it is lower than it has ever been.

Independent is no longer a consolation prize. In 2026 it is a strategy.

Field Checklist

- Understand the FAST landscape as a real distribution path
- Build the series to reach an audience without a studio gatekeeper
- Treat independence as a strategic choice, not a limitation

Chapter 2 — Writing a World One Scene at a Time

A series lives or dies on whether its world feels real. The Tunnel TV was written scene by scene, building characters and a setting that could carry more than a single episode — because a series, unlike a film, has to give the audience a reason to come back. The writing discipline for independent scripted work is to make every scene earn its place while quietly planting the seeds of the scenes to come.

Character comes first. A story built on real people in real neighborhoods gets its authenticity from specificity — the way a person talks, the choices they make under pressure, the contradictions that make them human rather than functional. When the characters are true, the plot can be lean, and lean is a gift on an independent budget.

The scene-by-scene method is also a production tool. Writing with a clear-eyed sense of what can actually be shot — the locations available, the cast on hand, the days in the schedule — keeps the script from writing checks the budget cannot cash. The best independent scripts are ambitious in character and disciplined in logistics.

Write the world you can actually shoot, populated by people the audience believes. Everything else follows.

Field Checklist

- Lead with specific, contradictory, believable characters
- Write scenes that can actually be shot within the real budget
- Plant continuity that gives the audience a reason to return

Chapter 3 — Directing on Real Streets

Shooting an independent scripted series on the streets of Los Angeles is a choice with consequences, and most of them are good. Real locations bring an authenticity no soundstage can fake — the light, the texture, the sense that these characters inhabit a real place. That authenticity is a large part of what an independent production can offer that a bigger, glossier one often cannot.

The consequences are logistical. Real streets mean managing light and time of day, ambient sound, permits and permissions, and the simple unpredictability of a world that does not stop for a camera. The director's job is to turn those constraints into style — to make the blocking and camera work serve the story while respecting the reality of the location. A scene blocked to use the actual geometry of a real street feels different from one blocked on a set, and audiences feel the difference even when they cannot name it.

Directing independent work is a continuous negotiation between vision and reality. The craft is in making the reality look like the vision — planning the shot for the light you will actually have, the space you can actually use, and the time you can actually afford.

Let the real place shape the frame. The constraint is also the aesthetic.

Field Checklist

- Use real locations as an authentic asset, not a compromise
- Plan blocking and camera around actual light, sound, and space
- Turn location constraints into deliberate directorial style

Chapter 4 — Casting the Faces of the Story

Casting is where the story stops being words and becomes people. The Tunnel TV casts for the roles that carry the series — the Leading Lady, the Professor, the Gang Leader, the Newscaster — and the standard for an independent production is the same as for any other: find the actor who makes the role inevitable. On an independent budget, casting is even more decisive, because a strong performance can carry a scene that a larger production might have solved with money.

Open casting calls are one of independence's genuine advantages. Without a studio's short list of pre-approved names, an independent series can discover the right actor rather than settle for the available one. That openness is a responsibility as well as an opportunity: casting should be fair, professional, and compliant with applicable law and union rules, and it should treat every actor who submits with respect for the craft and the effort a submission represents.

The goal is fit, not fame. A character-driven series needs actors who disappear into real people, who bring specificity and truth to roles rooted in real neighborhoods. That is what makes an audience believe the world the writing built.

Cast for truth and fit. The right actor makes the role feel like it could never have been anyone else.

Field Checklist

- Cast for fit and truth over recognizability
- Run open calls that are fair, professional, and compliant
- Treat every submission with respect for the actor's craft

Chapter 5 — Building a Crew on an Independent Budget

A scripted series is a collaboration, and the crew is where the collaboration becomes real. Camera, sound, editing, and post are the departments that turn a director's intent into finished episodes, and on an independent production, assembling the right crew is both harder and more important than on a funded one. There is less money to attract people, so the pull has to be the work itself — the chance to do meaningful, character-driven storytelling with real ownership of the craft.

The independent crew relationship is different in kind. When a small team makes a series on a tight budget, everyone's contribution is visible and everyone's skill matters more. A great sound recordist, a resourceful DP, an editor who understands the story's rhythm — each of them shapes the finished series in ways that would be diluted on a larger production. That visibility is the compensation independence offers when the budget cannot compete.

Building the crew means being honest about the constraints and clear about the reward: real creative contribution to a genuinely independent series. Professionals who want that — who want their craft to matter rather than to be one interchangeable input among hundreds — are the ones worth recruiting.

Recruit for craft and commitment. On an independent series, everyone's work shows.

Field Checklist

- Recruit crew on the strength of the work and creative ownership
- Be honest about budget constraints and clear about the reward
- Value each department's outsized impact on a small production

Chapter 6 — Distribution in the Age of FAST

Making the series is half the job; getting it watched is the other half. For an independent scripted production in 2026, the distribution landscape has genuinely shifted. FAST platforms are increasingly partnering with independent creators to feature fresh, authentic voices alongside traditional studio content, and the numbers back the trend — nearly 1,870 FAST channels across 21 countries, 1.8 billion hours watched in a single recent month, and roughly a quarter of viewing coming from channels launched in just the last couple of years.

What this means practically is that independent series now have real paths to an audience that did not exist a decade ago. The old model required a studio to decide the work deserved to be seen. The

new model rewards work that finds its audience directly — content that is authentic, specific, and made for a viewer rather than a committee. A series shot on real LA streets, built on real characters, is exactly the kind of fresh voice these platforms are looking to feature.

Distribution is no longer a single locked door. It is a growing set of channels that increasingly want what independent creators make. The work is to make something worth featuring, then meet the platforms where the audience already is.

Build for the audience, then find the channel that wants your voice. In 2026, that channel increasingly exists.

Field Checklist

- Treat FAST and direct distribution as real, growing paths
- Make work authentic and specific enough to stand out
- Meet the audience where it already watches

Chapter 7 — The Long Game of a Series

A series is not a film; it is a commitment that unfolds over episodes and seasons. Episode 2 of *The Tunnel TV* is now streaming, each chapter paired with director's notes on the choices behind the frame. That structure — the ongoing story, the deepening world, the accumulating audience — is the whole point of a series, and it is also its central challenge. Independent scripted work has to sustain itself creatively and practically over time, not just land a single strong hour.

The long game rewards patience and consistency. An audience built one episode at a time is more loyal than one bought with a marketing spend, but it takes longer to build and it has to be earned every episode. The director's-notes practice — opening up the craft behind each scene — is part of that relationship: it invites the audience into the making of the work, turning viewers into people who are invested in the production's continuation.

Sustaining an independent series means treating it as a body of work, not a one-off. Each episode extends the world, deepens the characters, and adds to the case that this story deserves to keep being told.

Play the long game. A series earns its audience one honest episode at a time.

Field Checklist

- Treat the series as an ongoing body of work, not a single hour
- Build audience loyalty episode by episode
- Invite viewers into the craft to deepen investment

Conclusion: Independent, and Made in LA

The Tunnel TV is a wager on a simple proposition: that a character-driven story, shot on the real streets of Los Angeles, made independently and with genuine craft, can find its audience in 2026 without asking permission from a gatekeeper. Everything in this book — the scene-by-scene writing, the location-driven directing, the open casting, the crew recruited for craft, the FAST-era distribution

— serves that wager.

The landscape has cooperated. The growth of free ad-supported streaming, the appetite of platforms for fresh and authentic voices, and the collapse of the old distribution bottleneck have made independent scripted work more viable than it has been in a generation. The barriers that remain are the honest ones: the discipline to write within a budget, the resourcefulness to shoot on real streets, and the patience to build an audience one episode at a time.

Independent storytelling from the ground up is not a fallback. It is a real way to make real work, and in 2026 it is a way with a growing audience waiting at the other end. Real characters, real neighborhoods, made in LA — and now, finally, findable.

References

1. FAST viewing growth: 1.8 billion hours watched (August 2025), up 43% year over year (industry streaming measurement, 2025). 2. FAST channel counts: nearly 1,870 channels operating across 21 countries as of mid-2025. 3. FAST newer-channel share: roughly 25% of global FAST viewing from channels launched after December 2023. 4. Analyst commentary on FAST platforms partnering with independent creators to feature fresh, authentic voices (2025–2026). 5. The Tunnel TV production notes and director's commentary, Episodes 1–2 (2026).