



THE SANCTUARY

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LOGLINE

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A cunning strip club owner, in a small town sets her sights on opening a cannabis dispensary. A step that pits her against the law, the richest family in town and her biggest nemesis – a respected community leader who also happens to be her mother.

INTRODUCTION

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The Sanctuary is an hour-long crime drama/thriller that mixes sly humor with the small town feel and ruthlessness of Mayor of Kingstown, the raw sexiness of Queen & Slim with edginess reminiscent of Ozark. Set in Pontiac, Michigan – forty miles North of Detroit and twenty miles south of the smallest Native American Reservation in Michigan, Pontiac is named eponymously for a Native American War Chief. It was home to Elizabeth Denison, the first free Black Woman to purchase land in Michigan, Madonna, the undisputed Queen of Pop spent her formative years here, and it is home to the Lomax family – the largest private landholders in Pontiac.

The city is in the middle of a rebirth after a racist police scandal resulted in the department being disbanded and the city was left millions of dollars in debt. The newly elected City Council reluctantly – and in contrast to its socially conservative beliefs – voted to legalize the recreational use of cannabis in order to save the city from financial ruin.

It is here where the weather is extreme, racism is once again repressed and the last vestige of what this city once was that The Sanctuary resides. The Sanctuary is a highly successful strip club frequented by ballers, nerds and the occasional politician. The single level club is larger than it looks at first glance and a bit classier than you would expect in a small Midwest town. JADE DENISON (38), the club's owner and the show's protagonist, is a cunning ex-stripper who is admired by her peers and more than a little feared by her enemies. Now that cannabis is legal and control of the city's expected influx of fungible income is in full swing – Jade wants in and is prepared to get in by any means necessary.



THE STORY

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JADE, having been born and raised in Pontiac is well known in the community. Her family history boasts a pedigree of doctors, scholars and men of the cloth. Her family name used to mean something here. That is until she sullied it by becoming a stripper and then a strip club owner – profiting off the flesh trade as the elders like to say. And now, she's gone a step too far – she plans to cash in on the newly legalized cannabis market by opening a dispensary in the heart of the city. Right next door to The Museum of Pontiac across the street from City Council Chambers and down the block from the street named after her father.

Unfortunately, her timing couldn't be worse. Just a month ago the city council president turned up dead – after being spotted leaving her club AND on the same night that the club's most popular stripper and her boyfriend mysteriously disappeared. Most in the community suspect Jade is involved. And now, gunning for a promotion or simply some respect, LENNIE (40s), a hapless sheriff and strip club barfly – though let him tell it he's only here for the chicken – has teamed with disgruntled resident and rabble-rousing reporter JAKE PONTIAC (30s) to investigate.

The unlikely duo and their unsanctioned investigation have created a public relations nightmare. But for Jade, the biggest things standing between her and her goal is THE LOMAX TWINS (40), whose bid for a dispensary is all but a sure thing and MABLE (60s), respected community leader and Jade's nemesis. Mable led the charge toward cleaning up the city. Ironically, the council president's untimely death is the reason Mable was elected interim City Council president. She is staunchly against the legalization of cannabis and has made it her mission to repeal the law. Oh, and Mable, just happens to be Jade's Mother.







tone & style

Stylized and Sexy is how I would describe the shows aesthetic. Rich colors and dramatic mood lighting will be used to compliment the dark story lines and accentuate the sexy ones – edgy but not overly stagey.

The cinematography will be slow and deliberate. Static shots with interesting framing will allow the characters and action to be the main focus.

The set and production design will add a bit of that small-town quirkiness.

Costumes/Hair/Makeup will be used to accentuate the charisma or repulsion of the characters.











THEMES & SOCIAL RELEVANCE

With a nod towards social issues, the shows storylines will touch on themes that are in the zeitgeist today.

- Importance of Legacy
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Female empowerment
- Police reform
- Sho gets to be a legal cannabis dealer
- Attitude of burning something down to rebuild it
- Win at all cost even if you have to lie and cheat
- Cult like leaders and study of political power
- Morally questionable beliefs
- The clash between conservatism and liberalism
- Family drama



WHY ME?



I come from a big family full of vivid, engaging and unpredictable characters. Growing up in my family has provided me with the material to develop rich characters who are grounded but can also be menacing, relatable and compelling watch.

Case in point: my father, a sly charismatic ladies' man with quick wit. He was in law enforcement for over 20 years until his death. An extremely intelligent man who couldn't shake his taste for alcohol and lust for wild women – the looser the better.

He spent his free time gambling, drinking and experimenting with drugs. Yes, he did this all while on the police force. In fact, when he died it was after a night of partying with a prostitute who promptly stole his car once she discovered he'd died in his sleep. Side note: We did get the car back.

I was one of five girls all vying for our father's affection. And although it was never stated, I was labeled the favorite. This caused a lifetime of sibling rivalry between me and my sisters. At some point, our motivations in life were always to outdo each other – similar to the relationship between Jade and Mable.

I had a cousin who ran a basement strip club out of his house.

20, Any City

24, Any City

I had a family member who disappeared from a night club after her shift ended – she has not been found.

As someone who was born and raised in Detroit Michigan, I've experienced life in a city full of a rich history that is always on the comeback. Above it all Michiganders are pioneers. Say what you will about Jade's line of work, she is nothing if not entrepreneurial and determined.

CHARACTERS

JADE (38)

JADE is the owner of The Sanctuary. Fiercely independent, she left home at a young age hoping to escape her overbearing mother and started her career as a dancer – possibly as a fuck you to her mother. While her mother all but disowned her, Jade’s father was surprisingly supportive. She was always a daddy’s girl and despite him being a pastor he accepted his daughter unconditionally.

After a few wild years, Jade stopped dancing and opened The Sanctuary. But Jade is meant for more and she knows it. As a descendant of Elizabeth Denison, Jade is determined to live up to her lineage and stake her claim in the annals of Pontiac history.



CHARACTERS

MABLE (60)

MABLE – Jade’s mother is the epitome of a religious zealot. Unfortunately, she’s more sanctimonious than pious. She has resented Jade from birth. The kind of mother that guilt trips her children because of the stretch marks left by her pregnancy.

The close bond that Jade shared with her father only intensified the rivalry. Mable is responsible for the conservative changes taking place in the city and is hell bent on shutting down The Sanctuary and legalized cannabis. Don’t let that nice smile fool you.

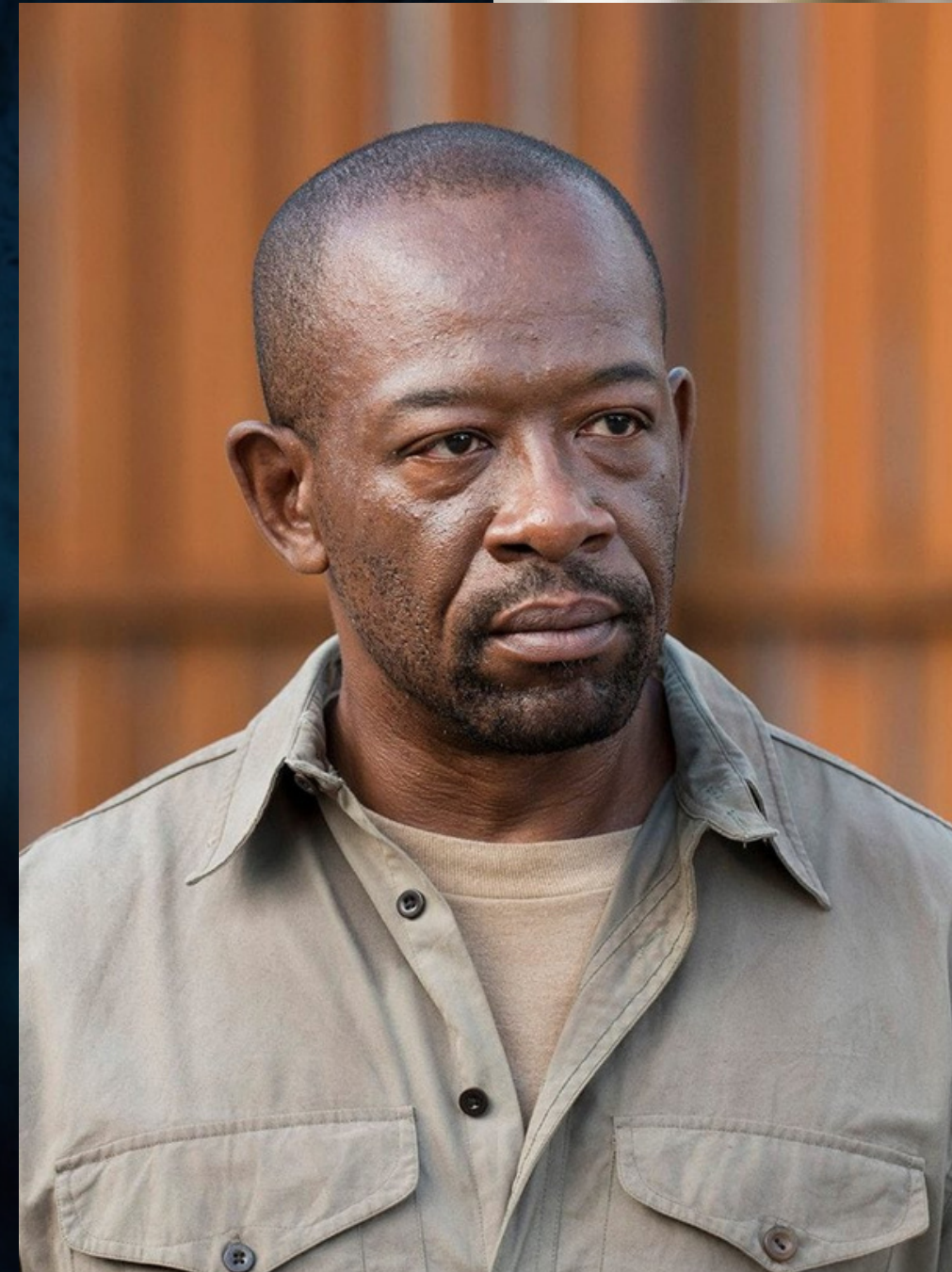


CHARACTERS

LENNIE JAMES (40)

LENNIE JAMES – Hapless cop that spends his lunch breaks at The Sanctuary. He is aware of the illegal shenanigans and goes on down at the club but as long as he doesn't see it (and maybe even if he does), he won't intervene.

But something about Mona Lisa's disappearance arouses his suspicion enough that he decides to do something totally out of character for him – investigate.



CHARACTERS

JAKE PONTIAC (30)

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JAKE PONTIAC – Native American reporter and overall pain in the ass. Jake lives on the reservation and takes pride in being a descendant of the man the town was named after.

Feeling like he was cheated out of an inheritance, he takes every opportunity to remind the locals that they're living on borrowed land – even if he knows it will never be reclaimed. He takes it as his birthright to never let the residents forget it.



CHARACTERS

HENRY & FORD (40)

HENRY & FORD LOMAX (TWINS) – The Lomax family has their hands in everything from politics, to banking. Real estate tycoons, The Lomax Clan was instrumental in forming Pontiac so many years ago or as Native Americans would say ‘stole’ it from their ancestors.

The Brothers Lomax are interested in expanding into the nascent cannabis trade that has infiltrated Pontiac and are not very welcoming to competition. What the Lomax family want they usually get.



EPISODE STRUCTURE

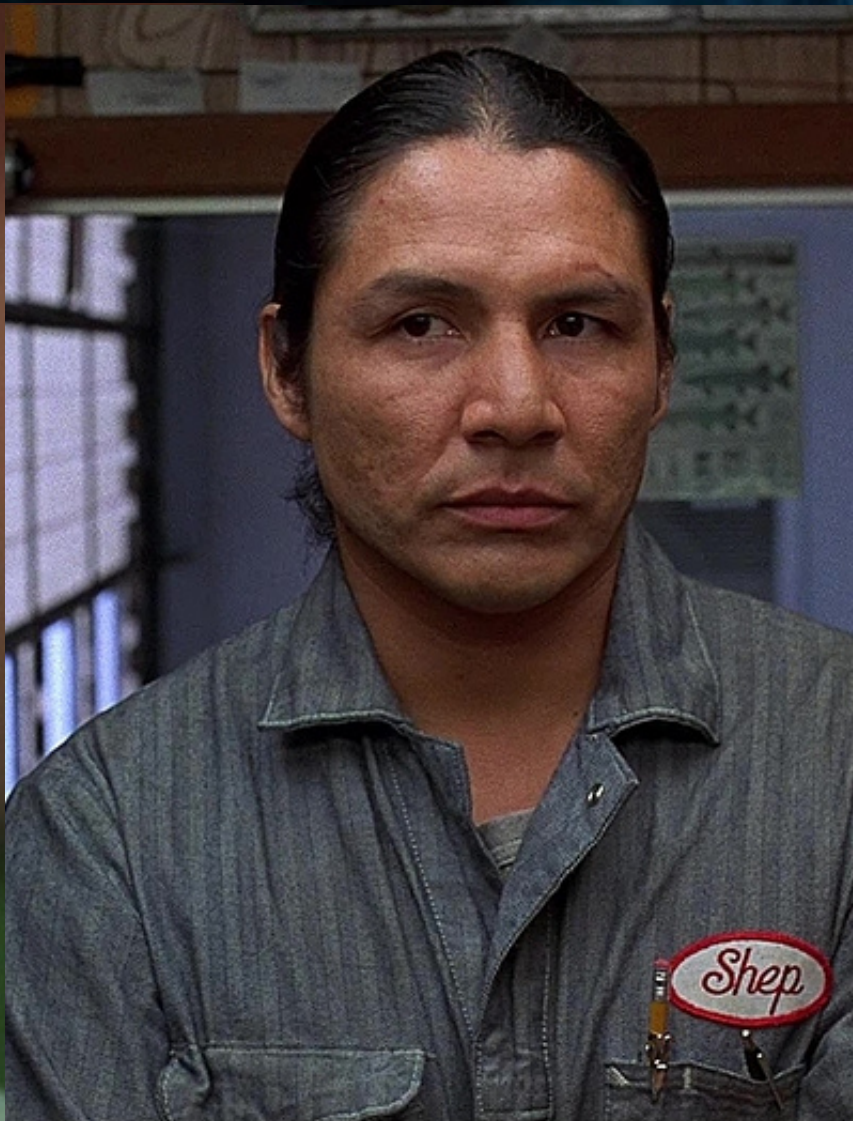
Each episode opens with a 'flashforward' teaser. Act One brings us to the present time. The transition between the two will be almost imperceptible. Gradually, little clues in set dressing, time or day and dialogue will begin to reveal the jump in time. By the beginning of the final act, the story will have caught up to the flashforward as pieces of the storyline unfold.

While the story is anchored at the club, the act of stripping won't be our main focus, we'll photograph the club in wide shots where we get a full view of the busy activity. A shallow depth of field will ensure that our attention is on the foreground action, but we always manage to glimpse pieces of the plot from what is happening in the slightly out of focus background.

Pontiac itself is a main set piece. Its history, legacy and who controls the narrative is where the drama lives. The small town with big city problems in the midst of a rebirth will be evident in the look of the city, street signs named after previous generations and new building construction next to dilapidated buildings in transition from dens of iniquity to houses of worship.



PILOT EPISODE



We open in the dressing room of the strip club. The walls vibrate from the sound of the music seeping in from the main room. We scan the room landing on two young dancers SKY (20s) and BRANDI (20s) butchering the lyrics to Megan Thee Stallions classic street banger, Savage – “I’m that Bitch, been that Bitch, still that Bitch.” In the opposite corner we see MONA LISA (20s), dressed half in her dancer outfit and street clothes. She’s on the phone in deep conversation with someone and by the looks of it a distressing one.

The club’s bouncer JUNGLE (29) taps on the door if only as a warning since he opens it without waiting on a response. The other dancers complain that he enters without warming. He doesn’t care. He tells Mona Lisa that she’s next on stage. She brushes him off and he leaves annoyed.

Shortly, Jungle sticks his head in again to remind Mona Lisa that the boss won’t like it if she’s late to the stage. Mona Lisa abruptly ends the conversation, then heads toward the dressing room exit and, we think, toward the stage.

The action continues in the main floor of the club where we see, so we think, Mona Lisa take the stage. After a couple of beats, we realize Mona Lisa is not the dancer on stage. In the background we see posters throughout the club that say, “Have you seen Mona Lisa?” At this point we realize that the previous scene was a flashback.

In a private area of the club, we meet our protagonist. With a flicker of light from an e-cigarette illuminating her face, we see JADE. She is committed to her ‘girls’ but is just as committed to making her club world class. She believes there’s an art to this shit and expects her dancers to feel the same way. She manages them with the coldness of a street pimp and warmth of a den mother. She makes her way through the club pushing bottle service and lap dances. We can see by her gait that she’s lived a wild life, but at 38 she could still take the stage and show the young girls how it’s done.

At the bar sits LENNIE, dressed in his full police uniform, is finishing a plate of chicken when the bartender, RIA (20s), closes out his tab. The two joke about him being on duty while he remarks that it's his lunch break. Something about the Mona Lisa missing poster catches his eye. He casually (if not suspiciously) asks if anyone has heard anything about Mona Lisa. 'Nope' is Ria's response. He grabs his change and heads out the door, but something in his eyes tells us Lennie isn't done with the subject.

Later, Jade's younger man, DUCATTI (30s) – fit, handsome and looking like trouble – makes his way to the bar where Jade and Ria are discussing the till. Ducatti cuddles up to Jade and gets ready to finagle some cash from her when he sees XAVIER (40s) – big hyper masculine baller and Jades ex-boyfriend – walk in. His presence permeates the room. Ducatti quickly changes his mind heads over to greet Xavier, big dick in tow. The two men are cordial – they've been through this dance many times before. Jade watches from afar – she's not impressed.

In a small conference room cramped with people, all eyes are fixed on a deputy fidgeting with a PA system. Present are a few reporters, a couple of uniformed officers and a few political types. MAYOR LUBRACRIS (60s) reaches for the microphone but before he can begin, he's interrupted by JAKE who asks the mayor if there will be time for questions; annoyed, the mayor responds affirmatively. The press conference is the opportunity for the mayor to introduce the new chief of police and show off how progressive the city has become.

A city council meeting is ending. Before the secretary adjourns the meeting MABLE makes a speech about how important it is to support her campaign against The Sanctuary and cannabis. A foolish member asks her if this vendetta is personal and something that should not involve the council. Mable almost pulverizes him with her eyes – no response needed.

Jade is uncharacteristically exuberant as she gives a guided tour of her building to her lawyer, GUSTAVO (50s). She's explaining her plan for the dispensary while an unimpressed Gustavo attempts to talk her out of it. He doesn't think she needs the money or the fight with the city regarding this location. His argument is briefly interrupted by the entrance of the Lomax twins. The real estate tycoons inquire about buying her building. They too have opened a dispensary and are interested in the competition – this can't be good.

Lennie sees Jade at the club and greets her with a kiss. He mentions that he'd been investigating Mona Lisa's case. Jade responds that she didn't realize he was a detective. Lennie asks if anyone has heard from Mona Lisa again they tell him no – he's becoming a nuisance. As Lennie leaves Xavier walks in. Ducatti sees this and gets agitated. The scene begins to feel a bit like déjà vu. Ducatti tells Jade he wants a massage from one of the dancers. The camera pans around to Jade who nods her approval. We whip pan back to Ducatti with the stripper and we are definitely back to a moment we've seen before. It's at this time we realize we're now in a flashback.

We see Jungle knock on the door – this time from his point of view – he opens the door to the dressing room. He tells Mona Lisa she's next. The ladies complain. He closes the door and smiles to himself – the tap knock is definitely on purpose. Jade gets a text. She goes into the back and disables the camera monitor in one of the rooms and opens the back door. Jade lets in a man who kisses her hand. She responds with, "Hello, Councilman."

Back in the dressing room we see that Mona Lisa never took the stage. One of the dancers agrees to take her shift. Mona Lisa thanks her and turns to leave. As she's heading home, Jade stops her and lets her know that the councilman is here and wants a private session with her. Mona Lisa tells Jade she has to go. Jade gives her a speech about being serious about money and Mona Lisa relents saying that her boyfriend, Ricky, is probably on his way.

Jade calls over Ria and tells her to let the bouncer know not to let Ricky in. We see Mona Lisa as she enters the councilman's room. Jade goes into her office and turns the monitors back on. She watches Mona Lisa begin to dance and then turns her attention to her boyfriend in the other room getting a massage.

At some point, Ducatti sends the dancer out the room and begins performing to the camera. He knows Jade is watching. She begins to touch herself – a sexual game they play. Just then Ricky enters the room and quickly closes the door. Jade and Ducatti both know something is going down. They run out their respective rooms. As they meet up in the hall together shots ring out. Jade opens the door to the private room and sees both the councilman and Ricky dead on the floor with Mona Lisa holding the gun. Fuck.

Lennie is parked in a small ditch on the side of the road getting a blow job when he sees a car pull up followed by a dark SUV, Lennie strains to see. The prostitute asks "what's going on?" – her view is obstructed because she's a'hem down low. The driver of the car gets out and jumps into the SUV; they pull off and disappear into the night.

Lennie gets out of his car and creeps up to the window of the abandoned vehicle and is shocked to see the councilman slumped over dead. He hustles back to his squad car tripping over his own feet. He grabs the radio and gets ready to call it in. He takes a moment to compose himself. The prostitute timidly peaks out the window but her view of the vehicle is obstructed. After reevaluating the situation Lennie decides not to call it in and he pulls off.

Fade to black.

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