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# VENICE of AMERICA

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LOOK BOOK

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# VENICE of AMERICA

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Genre: Noir/Drama | Based on Actual Events

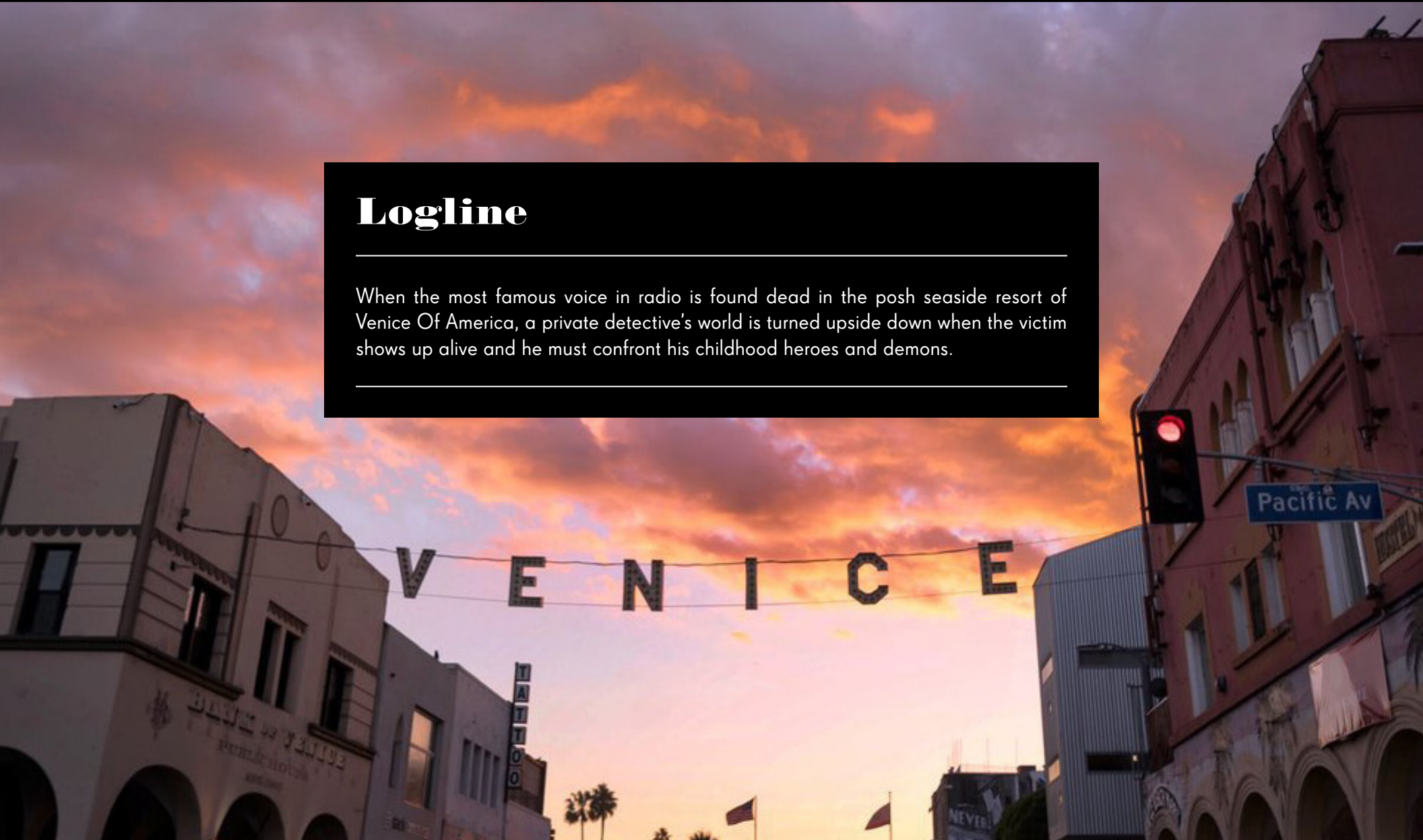
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## Logline

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When the most famous voice in radio is found dead in the posh seaside resort of Venice Of America, a private detective's world is turned upside down when the victim shows up alive and he must confront his childhood heroes and demons.

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**“Now, now. There’s no need for a soapbox in this dive.  
The ceilings are low and you’ll scuff your high hat.”**

- Jake “Spanky” Vargas, pg. 11

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## **Theme**

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This story is about the corruption of the American Dream; it's about how greed, religious hypocrisy, and bigotry have a corrupting influence using the incredible early history of the most famous beachfront in America—Venice Beach, California—as a metaphor to explore this idea.

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**“He capped ‘em both as they were leaving Chaplin’s charity gala... It’s none of my business, but no good business will come from being in The Swede’s business.”**

- Pete, pg. 48

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## Synopsis

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In 1926 Los Angeles the height of prohibition and the golden age of Hollywood clash in the whimsical seaside resort of Venice of America, the “fantasy by the sea” built by Abbot Kinney where the rich and famous come to frolic.

Sister Aimee McPherson, a radio evangelist and “the most famous voice in America” broadcasts a fire and brimstone sermon from the decadent seaside amusement pier.

She slips away from her adoring audience of believers to rendezvous with her secret lover on the pier’s famous Roller Coaster. The couple then weaves their way from the crowds of the boardwalk toward a dark alley to indulge their passions.

But in the darkness there’s the sudden flash-bang of a gunshot...

As the sun rises over the idyllic bungalows and manicured lawns along the canals a group of children fishing find the woman’s body – with one bullet to her face.

The Temple of Angels, the church that Sister Aimee founded, is distrustful of the police and hires Private Investigator Jake “Spanky” Vargas to investigate her death.

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Jake knows Venice better than anyone – and wants nothing to do with it. The detective, formerly with the Venice of America police department, an orphan and hand picked Kinney protégé installed by the “Old Man,” himself, was fired after Kinney’s death and the city’s annexation by Los Angeles.

To this day Vargas suffers from a recurring dream of himself as a child drowning in a beautiful canal while wealthy families frolic and play all around him.

His initial inquires to city officials and police lead nowhere and Jack is advised to leave the case alone, by none other than the Old Man’s son, Thornton.

Vargas meets with Arthur Reese, a flamboyant business partner of Kinney’s, who warns him to leave well enough alone.

He ignores the warnings, and as he scours the wealthy hotels and casinos for clues to Sister Aimee’s murder she turns up alive in an Arizona border town with a fantastic tale of being kidnapped and taken to Mexico.

The case seemingly settled, Vargas can’t get let it go. If Aimee McPherson wasn’t murdered, then who was?

He tracks down the last person to see the dead woman alive - her mysterious lover known as “The Swede”. He’s the “button man,” the paid gun, for mobster and bootlegger Tony ‘The Hat’ Cornero.

Convinced that he’s the killer, Vargas is shocked to find the man knows nothing about the woman murdered in Venice – because he was Sister Aimee’s lover in Mexico.

She wasn’t kidnapped, but on a romantic tryst with him. The Swede’s got photos to prove it. He tells Vargas an incredible tale of how he was supposed to blackmail the church and kill her. But he couldn’t bring himself to murder his lover. As he’s about to share his proof with Vargas, The Swede is killed.

Jack stumbles onto a conspiracy by Cornero to consolidate his power in Venice by getting rid of the famous evangelist critical of his illicit bootlegging while also securing the lucrative paving contract from the City of Los Angeles to fill in the canals to make way for the automobile.

Jake confronts The Swede’s murderer, there’s a fight and a chase through the canals that ends at the famous Venice Pier. Only one of the characters doesn’t live to see the sunset.

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**“Not one more inch or I blow moonlight straight through  
your forehead.”**

- The Swede, pg. 50

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## Why Tell This Story Now?

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We live in an age of uncertainty, in a world being rapidly changed by coronavirus, climate change, new technologies, and economic uncertainty. And much like similar times in the past, audiences crave and demand escapist entertainment.

We yearn for stories of simpler times with iconic – and relatable - everyman and everywoman characters that can transport us from the daily slog of a world grinding us down to a place and time more exotic, more thrilling, more sophisticated; a place that's relatable, but escapist.

1920s Venice Beach is just such a place. It's a world where new technologies like the automobile and radio were rapidly changing society's idea of how to communicate and move around. It's a world recently ravaged by the pandemic of 1918, the First World War, and the culture war of prohibition.

Today, we question what makes America great and want to celebrate the rugged individualism that propelled us through the 20th century. The story of the early years of Venice Beach is a perfect metaphor for today's trying times. It's a story about idealism, passion, greed, corruption, hypocrisy, and love.

Like the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when Film Noir first flourished, we live in an age where the average Joe feels under attack, where the common woman and man are left on the sidelines of the great American rat race. And no matter how hard s/he tries, it's never enough to make it.

To paraphrase the great Preston Sturges, **VENICE of AMERICA** is a commentary on the modern condition: with stark realism, the struggles of the common man... and with a little sex.

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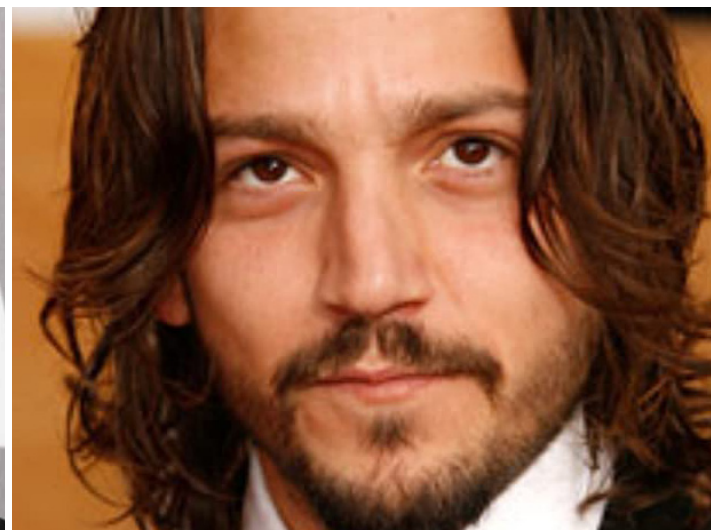
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**“She’s new in town, kept to herself mostly, but we went out hopping a couple of times. A real barlow with plenty of meringue. The kind of flap guys get goofy over.”**

- Secretary, pg. 66

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Jake “Spanky” Vargas**

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Early 30s, single, former Venice Police Chief hand picked by Abbot Kinney and forced into early retirement by city’s merger with Los Angeles.

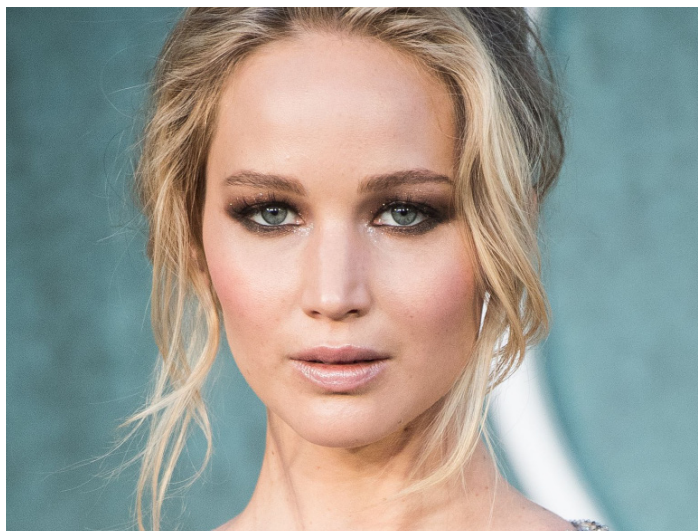
His police career stalled by merger and racism in the LAPD, Vargas becomes a Private Detective.

Orphaned as a child and raised by Abbot Kinney, Vargas was a precocious kid- a quick learner and very smart, earning the nickname “Spanky”. He’s street smart, not afraid to get his hands dirty – or bloodied – and can easily slide between the worlds of the have’s and have not’s.

He struggles between the optimism, idealism and high moral standards his mentor Abbot Kinney espoused and the reality of life on the street. A pensive man.

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Mildred Johnson**

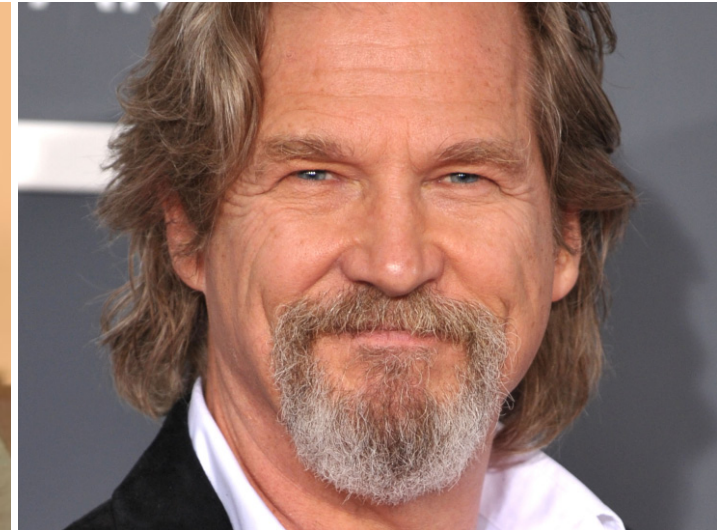
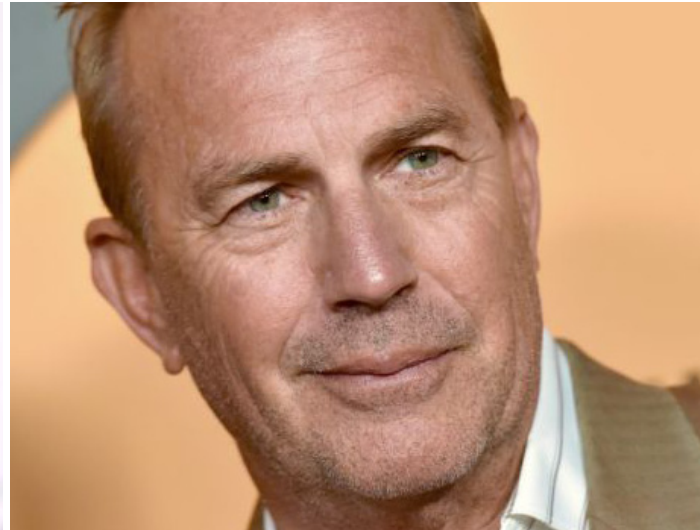
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Early 30s, single, co-founding member of the Temple Of Angels church. While her sister is the “voice” of the church, Mildred is the brains behind the radio ministry’s success. She’s a savvy businesswoman in an era dominated by men that frown on such things.

She’s best defined as pulchritudinous: a difficult, hard word to describe beauty. Uncomfortable with the social norms defining femininity, she’s savvy enough to use those norms to her advantage. She’s shrewd, calculating and formidable.

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Abbot Kinney**

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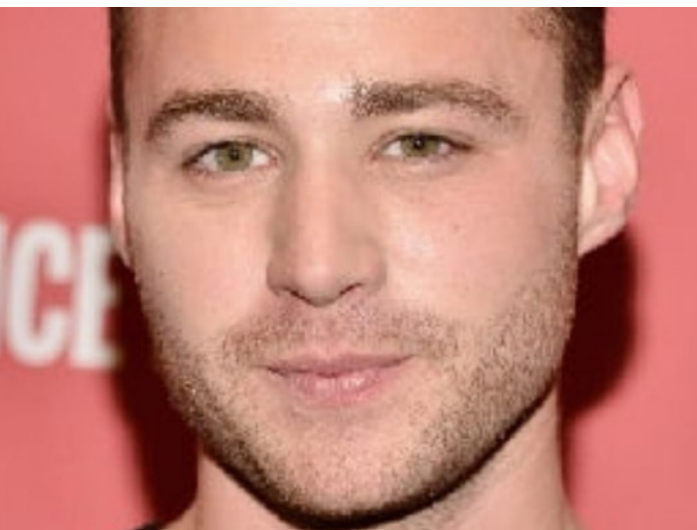
50s-60s, wealthy, refined and world traveled, Abbot hails from old East Coast money and has been raised at the finest boarding schools of the day. He epitomizes the rugged Yankee idealism of the day.

He is American manifest destiny personified, building the American west in his own image; that work hard, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, ethos mixed with the Puritan sense of responsibility and fairness towards one's fellow man.

Abbot is a man of vision as well as a man of action. While he's inherited his fortune, he fancies himself a self made man, using that fortune to build a fantastic city by the sea to rival it's cultural namesake in Europe.

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Tony “The Hat” Cornero**

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Early 30s, mobster and bootlegger, Tony the Hat is a self made man. Uneducated and street smart, he was orphaned when his father was shot during a card game and his mother died of syphilis. He is a survivor.

He’s made a fortune bootlegging Canadian whiskey to upscale hotels and nightclubs and trafficking Chinese laborers and prostitutes.

He is a ruthless and brutal mobster that fancies himself part of the Hollywood elite. He craves legitimacy.

He is a depraved wolf in the finest imported Italian silk money can buy.

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Irving Tabor**

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Early 30s, married, Irving is a decent, hardworking and caring family man. He was a trusted confidant and friend of Abbot Kinney's.

Disillusioned and frustrated by racism and double standards, he is angry and saddened by a world that is far from Kinney's ideals. He helped Kinney build Venice, but is forced to literally live on the other side of the tracks, just outside of Venice in Oakwood.

He is pragmatic, entrepreneurial and down-to-earth. He is also a cautious and cynical realist.

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Arthur Reese**

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50s, flamboyant and a bit of a rascal, Arthur is a proud Cajun, with the map of New Orleans seared in his soul.

A natural showman, he's breezed through life and managed to make himself a fortune along the way.

His morals are dubious, his credentials impeccable, and his charm irresistible.

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## MAIN CHARACTERS



### **Aimee McPherson**

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Early 20s, she's "the most famous voice in America." She's the co-founder of the Temple of Angels Church. She's traveled the world, been seduced and abandoned one time too many.

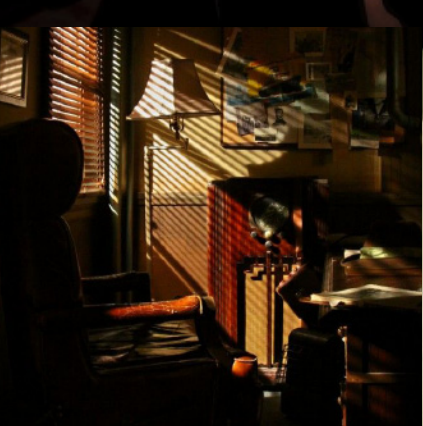
Aimee is a passionate, charismatic woman, easily enticed by the allure of fame, power and wealth. She is brash and heedless, an impetuous creature of the moment.

There was a time she fervently believed the gospels. But fighting the injustice of the world has taken its toll.

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**Style: California Noir**





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**Style: California Noir**

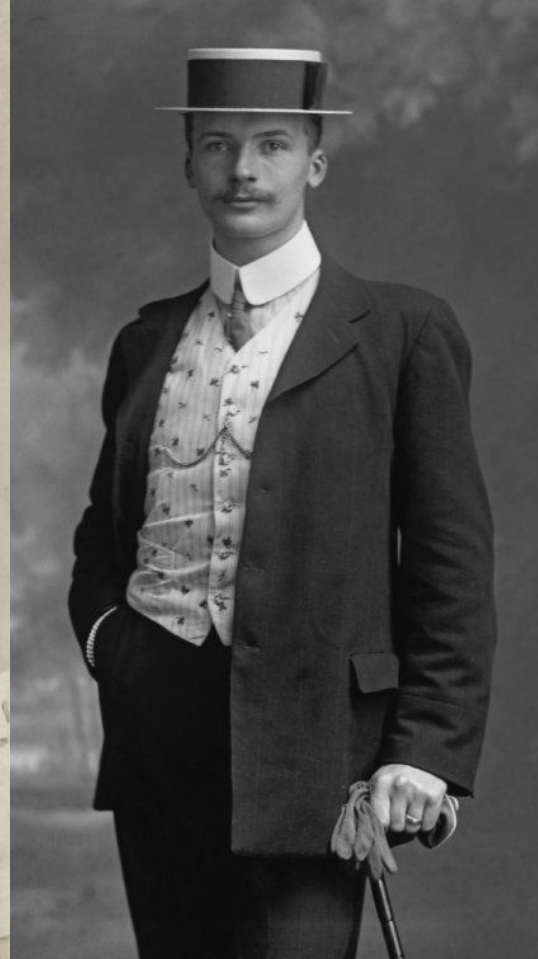
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**Reference: 1905 Venice**



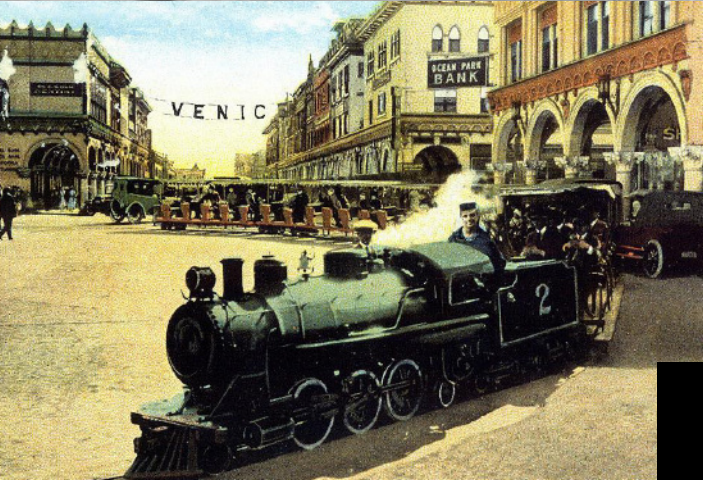
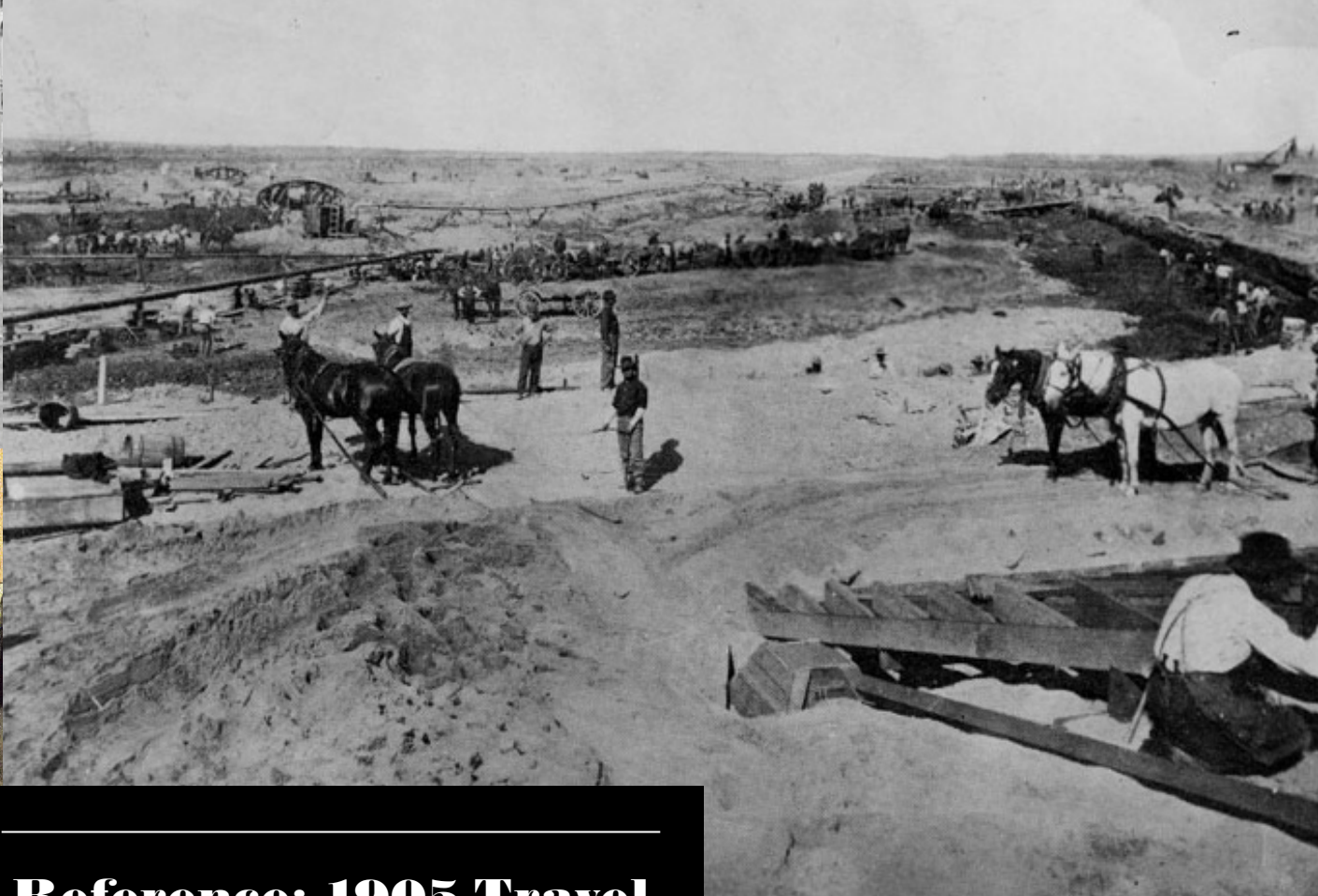


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**Reference: 1905 Fashion**

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**Reference: 1905 Travel**





**Reference: 1926 Venice**





**Reference: 1926 Fashion**







**Reference: 1926 Travel**



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**“Ain’t America grand! Abbot Kinney made his fortune  
draining the swamps, I make mine filling ‘em in.”**

- Tony “The Hat” Cornero, pg. 76

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## **Bryan Grill**

TWO TIME OSCAR NOMINEE | PRODUCER & VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR

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**“This is a passion project for me. It’s one of those stories that just has to be told.”**

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Bryan Grill has over 28 years experience in the entertainment industry, working in visual effects with the biggest directors in Hollywood including Clint Eastwood, Ron Howard, Roland Emmerich, Joe and Tony Russo and James Cameron.

Bryan’s work has been seen on a long string of the biggest box office hits in history. His credits include **BLACK PANTHER, THE AVENGERS, IRON MAN 3, CAPTAIN AMERICA: WINTER SOLDIER** (his 2<sup>nd</sup> Oscar nomination), **LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA, FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS, INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE, HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS, APOLLO 13, HEREAFTER** (his 1<sup>st</sup> Oscar nomination), **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD’S END** and **TITANIC**.

Bryan is an active member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and also a member of the Visual Effects Society where he is an Executive Member.

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## **Michael Graf**

EMMY WINNER | PRODUCER & SCREENWRITER

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**“The first lions of Hollywood were all drawn to Venice of America: Charlie Chaplin, Hal Roach, Orson Welles... This story celebrates that allure—Abbot Kinney’s ‘fantasy by the sea’— with a touch of sexy noir.”**

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Emmy Award winner Michael Graf has been making waves around the world with his recent screenplays, **THE LAST INDIAN WAR** and **THROWING HAMMERS**, winning awards and top honors at festivals in Paris, Park City, Los Angeles, New York, Nassau and Toronto.

Michael is also a working member of the DGA, served on the board of IFP Chicago and lives on a small farm with his artist wife Linda Massey, a miniature horse, and three Jack Russell terriers.

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**“I like you Spanky. Let me give you a word of advice. Enjoy your retirement. Leave the crime to the boys in Los Angeles and go enjoy today’s sunset... This here life only comes around but once and you never know which sunset will be your last.”**

- Arthur Reese, pg. 29

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## **For More Information, Please Contact**

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