

Alex Thompson, director Mighty Engine, producer

Series & Story Introduction

SEX CRIME PANIC is a **true-crime epic**. It's a rich **ensemble drama** with the psychological terror of **horror**, the racing heart of a **love story**, and the ticking clock of a Hitchcockian **thriller**.

It offers "prestige" television at its most binge-worthy.

In the summer of 1954, with the **Army McCarthy hearings** and reports of the mass **purging of homosexuals** from government service on every radio, the good citizens of Sioux City take comfort in their **quaint river town**'s distance from the **moral perils** embroiling America's coasts.

Then **8 year-old** Jimmy Bremmers **disappears** from his front yard and they begin to question just how **safe** they really are.



Our story follows:

Duane Wheeler (28), beloved (and closeted) hairdresser who begins a romance with the hot-blooded war vet **Doug Thorson** (25) just as paranoia descends on the town

Ernie Triplett (50), an eccentric vagrant and music teacher whose outsider status marks him as suspicious to the local community

Clayton "Cool Papa" Hayes (35), star player with the Sioux City Ghosts, an all-Black softball team, who risks losing family and career if his secret is discovered

Detective **Harry Gibbons** (45), former boxer and good-old-boy whose determination to secure Sioux City's and his own family's safety drives him insane.





When **Jimmy Bremmer**'s body is found, and then 2-year-old **Donna Sue** is taken, our five principles and a rich array of supporting characters become tangled in a complex web of **conspiracies, lies, and moral crusades**.

The story of this close-knit community turning on its own **shines a light** on a dark, unknown chapter in American history.

The events of Sioux City's **Sex Crime Panic** spans several years, taking our heroes from the tree-lined streets of Sioux City to the medieval-like fortresses of a state penitentiary and the state mental hospital where they fight for their survival. When at last they gain their freedoms, our heroes will be changed men forced to build new lives in a rapidly changing world.

The series may fit a limited format but would easily pack **several seasons** of **character-driven**, **heart-pumping drama**.







Duane Wheeler & Doug Thorson

Duane (28) is a well-loved local: witty and soft-spoken, he's a devout Catholic who stays close to his middle-class family. His choice to become a hairdresser causes a stir but he seems content to live in the "glass closet" it affords him. Beneath his easy demeanor lies profound loneliness, and his fear of bringing shame onto his family makes him terrified to stand up against the injustices he witnesses.

When Duane meets Doug skinny-dipping in the Missouri River, he's immediately smitten but wary of tangling with this "bad boy."

Doug (25) is a hotheaded Korean War vet, new to town, who relishes living life on the edge. He's a drinker and carouser with an "out" swagger Duane couldn't dream of, seeking out the the hidden spots where gay men find each other in 50's lowa. Raised in rural poverty on an lowa mink farm, his bravado masks an intense social anxiety and simmering rage.

Duane & Doug (cont'd)

In spite of their differences - but likely because of them - they fall quickly in love and set out to find some semblance of normal.

Then young Jimmy Bremmers is found murdered. Duane and Doug watch uneasily as the town begin to panic with news reports suggesting Jimmy was molested and that a homosexual murderer is on the loose.

When the vagrant Ernie Triplett is implicated, Doug and Duane sneak in to observe Ernie's trial. They are outraged by the railroading Ernie receives for his transgressive sexuality but selfishly relieved that Ernie's conviction soothe the town's nerves.

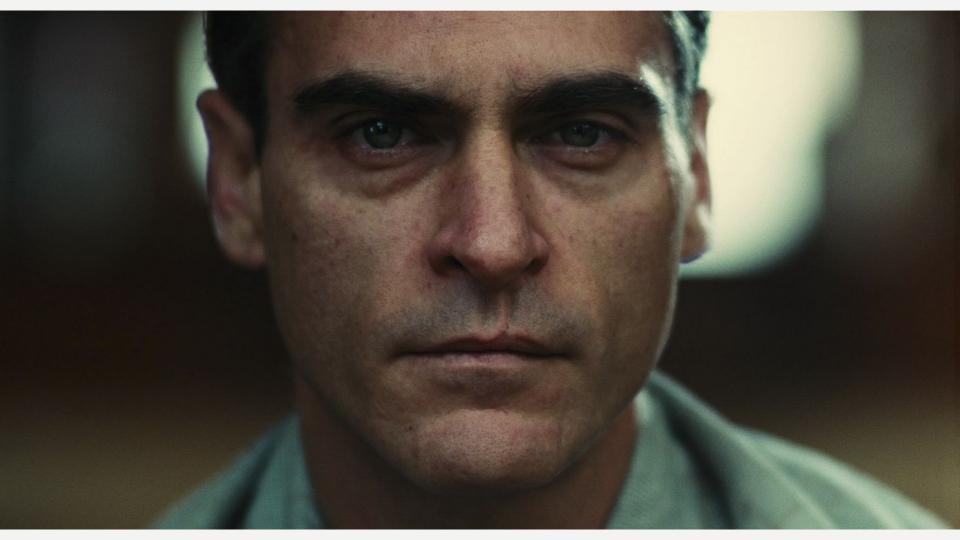
Then Donna Sue Davis is taken and the panic ignites in a firestorm. The anxiety triggers Duane and Doug's first big fight and Doug storms off on a mission to get drunk and pick up a stranger at the Warrior Hotel bar.

Duane & Doug (cont'd)

That stranger turns out to be the undercover officer Dick Burke, who that night kicks off a citywide round up of homosexuals. Doug is arrested along with dozens of others. They're charged with conspiracy to commit a felony and forced to name names. Duane is brought in the next morning but Doug swears he didn't give him up.

A new law is enacted to quench the town's thirst for justice and the men are charged as "Sexual Psychopaths" who **might** prey on children. Doug, Duane and the others are locked up at the Mt. Pleasant Hospital for the Insane until declared "cured." The two young lovers are put through excruciating "treatments" and Duane has a nervous breakdown before they are finally released eight months later.

They try to return home but their families and town want nothing to do with them. They decide to move to California; they've heard its kinder there to their kind. With Doug's background in mink farming, they start an exotic animals farm serving the movie industry.



Ernie Triplett (50)

Ernie is a restless spirit, riding the rails from town to town. He's a decent musician but an even better spinner of tall tales. He arrives in Sioux City the summer of '54 and cons a music store owner into buying him a car from which to sell music lessons to the town's children.

When Jimmy disappears, he becomes the prime suspect. He takes up residence at the police station, happy to amuse the squad with conflicting alibis and sordid details of his past as a sex worker. Without hard evidence to hold him, Detective Gibbons has Ernie locked away in a nearby asylum and fed an LSD-benzedrine mixture to force a taped confession.

Ernie's trial is a travesty of justice. He is given a twice-disbarred drunk to argue his innocence against police testimonies full of lies and homosexual innuendo. After sentencing him to life in prison, one juror in the real-life trial said: "a man who admits to listening to Liberace on the radio is capable of anything."

Ernie Triplett (cont'd)

Ernie begins serving his life term in the impregnable fortress of Fort Dodge Penitentiary for violent criminals. Assumed to be a child-molesting killer, Ernie must fend off attacks from prisoners and guards alike, employing every survival trick he's learned on the road. In the end, it's his charm as a storyteller and guitar strummer that wins them over.

Ernie never stops believing his innocence will one day be proven. He writes letter after letter appealing for his release and each appeal is soundly rejected. For seventeen years.

Then, in 1973, a college law class receives a letter from Ernie. They take his case as a class project and discover proof of the drug-induced confession. Ernie finally walks free!

He rents a house near the college and ends his days giving guitar lessons on the front porch.



Clayton "Cool Papa" Hayes

Clayton (35) is the all-star pitcher with the Sioux City Ghosts, a nationally-touring all-Black fastpitch softball team whose athletic comedy is comparable to basketball's Harlem Globetrotters. He's Jimmy Bremmers' favorite player; Duane's dad won't miss the team's hometown games. But having come of age before baseball's integration, Clayton has begun to resent playing the clown in a still-segregated team for mostly white spectators.

He and his wife **Doreen,** a public school teacher, are looked up to in the town's small Black community with their two precocious young daughters. But Clayton is hiding a secret from them and it is killing him, the ulcers and binge drinking exacting a toll. He cruises the stockyards by the river for male hustlers from the Black and immigrant communities. These brief moments are the only times he feels anything approaching happiness. He knows he could lose everything if he's discovered but the pull is too great.

Clayton "Cool Papa" Hayes

Clayton hears the news of Jimmy's disappearance and heads up efforts to get volunteers from the Black community for the search. He hopes to keep the all-white police squad from harassing the usual suspects (i.e., Black men) just to make the white citizens think they're doing their jobs.

He breathes relief when Ernie is charged, but soon Donna Sue's murder unleashes a storm of paranoia that puts him directly in its path. A hustler from the stockyards is caught up in the round up of homosexuals and police show up at Clayton's home Sunday morning just as his family is leaving for church.

Clayton is processed with the others and sent to Mt Pleasant to be "cured." He fervently denies his culpability but Doreen knows the truth. She's always known. Together, they forge a new kind of relationship and a partnership to raise the girls.



Detective Harry Gibbons

Harry (45) is a former boxer with the family connections to give him lifetime tenure as Chief of Detectives. He showboats around town in flashy suits and unabashedly roughs up suspects, his pride blinding him from the fact he's woefully lacking in investigative prowess. Harry's also a devoted family man who attends church faithfully, his large brood and quiet wife filling the pew directly behind Duane's family at Sunday mass.

When Jimmy disappears, Harry's fears for his own children make him stumble every step of the investigation, pinning the guilt too quickly to the vagrant Ernie. As every other lead vanishes, he grows desperate to get a confession from Ernie and turns to extra-legal means to extract one.

Once Ernie is sent to prison and another child turns up murdered, Harry realizes he is in way over his head. He orders a mass round up of homosexuals to calm the public hysteria and spends the next several years chasing phantoms that eventually unravel his mind.



Roy and Jackie Yamahiro (late 20s-30s)

Roy and Jackie Yamahiro, new internists at Mt Pleasant Hospital for the Insane placed in charge of the Sexual Psychopath Ward. Roy was a victim of the Japanese internment camps during World War II. He and Jackie have faced incredible opposition to their interracial relationship and help the men understand that it's not they who are broken, but society.



Mary Davis (20s)

Mary loves showing off her daughter Donna Sue as "the darling of the neighborhood." When Donna Sue is taken, Mary's guilt consumes her.

Doreen Hayes (30s)

Doreen is a teacher and mother, married to closeted ballplayer Clayton Hayes. When Clayton is "outed' and taken to the asylum, Doreen must contend with the fallout.



Mike O'Brien (31)

County Attorney O'Brien Is an ambitious attorney gunning for promotion who covers up the coercion behind Ernie's confession and doctors the arresting documents of the gay men to justify their asylum confinement.

Dick Burke (30)

Police Officer Dick Burke heads up the sting operation to roundup gay men through sexual entrapment. A vain, handsome man, he relishes toying with Doug and even lets him take him home before arresting him.







Scott Bradley

Scott Bradley (writer/producer) is an award-winning playwright and recent grad of lowa Playwrights Workshop. His acclaimed autobiographical play *Packing* premiered in in 2019 and streamed to U.S. audiences in 2020. His musicals *Alien Queen, Carpenters Halloween,* and *We Three Lizas* have achieved cult status in Chicago with multi-year productions and national press.

I read the book Sex-Crime Panic and knew it was **a story the world needed to see right now** as we struggle through an era with too many dangerous parallels to 1950s America: deepening paranoia, scapegoating of 'others' fueled by propaganda, and a media-frenzy fanning our cultural divide.

Scott Bradley

I also know this is **a story I was made to tell**. I grew up in central- western lowa and I know every one of these characters. I know **their voices, their fears, their pride**. I knew a Duane and Doug, a young couple so deeply closeted because they'd lose their jobs in smalltown lowa if they were found out. I knew an Ernest Triplett that played banjo outside his shanty by the river. I have experienced **the sadism of cops** who dehumanize and terrorize queer folk. I've experienced the traumatizing **conversion therapy** LGBT+ teens are still subjected to. I know what it feels like to be rejected from home and family.

As a writer and producer, I'm committed to ensuring that LGBT+ narratives are included in **the American story**.

Alex Thompson

Alex Thompson - **(director/producer)** is a director and writer whose first feature, Saint Frances, won the Audience Award and the Special Jury Prize for Breakthrough Voice at the 2019 SXSW Film Festival.

There are plenty of projects that try to make drama out of our nation's tragedies. We're attracted to stories that an easy coat of camp and melodrama feels natural on. Afterward, we have a sense we now know better.

What Sex Crime Panic has that I want to preserve with all my might is simply its **truth**. Its truth is **undeniably cinematic**, in its very bones, to its very core. It doesn't require anything to launch it into the dramatic. What it deserves is a platform that's as **grounded, cinematic** and **intimate** as the history.

Alex Thompson

I think of **The Wire**; of **Lovecraft Country**; of **Mindhunter**. Worlds I stepped away from feeling I knew them, not more simply, not more easily, but complexly and - again - intimately. Characters stayed with me and humanized worlds of history, communities of "others", as well as unbelievable heroes and unmistakably modern villains.

This is the promise of a series based on **Sex Crime Panic**: a filmmaking **event** that takes every strength from its source material, and the inspiration and grounded sensibilities not of network television but of the greatest storytelling available to tell what is, at its core, a tragic odyssey - but an odyssey nonetheless, and something of a scale and intimacy we have not seen in a long time.

