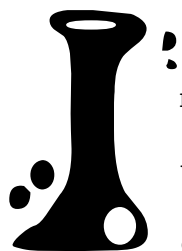


LOST:FAITH

Episode One
Written By
Wayne Allen Sallee

Executive Producers
Jon Lachonis
Sidney Williams

(F)an-fiction 2005



I know one thing, and can only guess on another. I am a murderer, this is certain, but I do not know if the world is at war; I may never know. There are sixteen of us altogether. The other fifteen are killers as well. But we are not prison escapees, or criminals of any conventional sect; we were passengers on a plane, Pacific Blue Flight 442. We are on a beautiful stretch of beach, but if you look at the clear waters, carry-on luggage and plastic food trays slowly float towards the shoreline. As do the splayed bodies of those of us who did not survive the impact. The plane itself broke apart like a reverse-Titanic and sank very quickly.

The entire plane sank with the co-pilot and seven other passengers bound tightly to their seats. We let them struggle, and then we stood on the beach as the plane went under knowing that they were drowning. The fuselage resembled a candy bar cracked in half.

And here I stand with my fellow murderers. Bodies floating closer in the shallow water, some in business suits, several in shorts and tropical shirts. One floats with his pants around his ankles; a guy taking a final crap the worst way imaginable; short of taking a last dump before the electric chair. Some of those who did not survive impact were just bystanders to what occurred on the plane, afraid or uncertain to act.

The electric chair. Lethal injection. Is that in my future, even though I, too, stood by when the everyone on board the plane went ballistic with the news? I have to take my gaze away from the bodies floating to shore, an obscene water slide, wrists and hands wearing watches or twined bracelets and red nail polish, making limp waves.

I turn and look at the others, thinking that each of us must realize what we have done. There's that Brennan fellow, kneeling as if in prayer. Southern guy, not rich from oil. He's pulling in the bodies, and Tava Benevides, the flight attendant at the rear of the plane, starts to assist him. Her high heels are gone and Brennan, Jase is his first name, seems like a giant next to her every time they stand to wipe sand and blood off their clothes. I know most of these guys' histories, the plane was delayed in Bali because of landing gear problems, so most of us were in the lounge, had a few drinks, some maybe too many.

A brooding guy who only said his name was Joe is sitting on a rock, holding some kind of black cloth in his hands. The way he stares at it, it's like he's looking at a Christmas gift he never expected to receive. Joe took no part in the judge, jury, and executioner part of our flight's final minutes. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure where he was when it all went down; not that my memories are perfectly sorted out, yet.

Others wander, dazed, baffled at their fate. Some survey the beach, the trees, checking for fruit. Jason McBride, a Denver stockbroker who by sheer chance handled the flight attendant's portfolio. Marty Mundt, I think he works at a particle accelerator plant in Illinois. A couple on their honeymoon, Al and Jill Svoboda, sit with their hands clasped and smile at me. I nod back, trying to look reassuring. And me, James Storment, a writer whose career peaked a decade ago. The only thing I'm reassured about is that my Uniball pen and Salvador Dali notepad stayed dry inside my sport jacket pocket. My paperback copy of John Ball's IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT is out in the water somewhere.

I realize that rectangular bottles of Fiji water are strewn on the beach, several people are setting them upright to stop spillage. I grab a bottle, wishing it were vodka, Lite beer, anything even vaguely alcoholic. Swallowed it in one gulp, recalling what some of us did, while others watched.

As we all became murderers.

Murderers. How will we be judged when balanced against the planes that leveled the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Christ, I wonder if McBride dealt with anybody in Manhattan.

My memories of the flight's last hour are strangely jumbled, like fast forwarding a film on DVD; blurs for the most part, crazy jumps in context and colors, then the occasional crystal clear frame. My personal freeze frame is that of the youngest of the Arabs, eighteen years old tops, wide-eyed with no understanding as Everson, Greeson, and Trexler bound the bodies together. Tightly, painfully. They could not understand what the CNN newscasters were repeating the carnage of this day. They could see the second plane crashing into the second tower over and over and the knowledge that they were the enemy might've sunk in.

The pilot announced that our flight was being diverted; a fourth plane had crashed near Pittsburgh, though it had been on a course that ultimately would have brought it to Washington DC. Calmly, the pilot said that no flights would be allowed to enter US air space, and we were being diverted to New Zealand.

Everything was fine. For awhile. Two fellows behind me, Herb Kugel and Jason Quinn, retired Canadian intelligence, explained that there was Auckland or Christchurch were likely closer than Vancouver. Tava brought us drinks. Most flight attendants were beautiful, but Tava had that old time movie star quality, like she could have had the roles Myra Corday or Gloria Talbott had in the 1950s. A smile men would fight and kill

over. As I watched her walk down the aisle, I imagined Santo & Johnny's "Sleepwalk" playing in my head.

And then all hell broke loose. Somehow someone found out the co-pilot was an Arab. I saw him when I boarded, and I know Egyptians from my writings. A group of idiot patriotic Americans made the assumption that the plane was actually pointed at Pearl Harbor or downtown Los Angeles, the group psychosis not realizing there wasn't enough fuel to reach the mainland.

And so some of us watched. I tried to stop the group binding the Arab family together in their seats, but I was knocked backwards and I still feel the welt on my head. The group used belts and ties, anything from the overhead luggage bin including blankets. One bullet-shaped man welded a fire extinguisher,; he cracked the eldest Arab's head as he tried to speak in confused protest. The others fell silent from that point on.

Fire extinguisher guy went into the cockpit and confronted the co-pilot. A fight ensued and the plane veered to the right, then left, leveling off. Several men dragged the co-pilot down an aisle and tied him spread eagled to the seats.

I felt sick and wanted to throw up. I watched Tava weep, her tears like a painting against her red lips. Then I thought of the red fireball of the second tower and CNN reporting that

people were holding hands as they jumped to their deaths from a quarter of a mile in the air to avoid burning alive.

I don't know if it was because the pilot needed another navigator, but we lost attitude quickly, the oxygen masks falling like in any of the bad AIRPORT movies. Well, the original was good, but that's beside the point. The pilot intercommed to brace for a water landing. We did. Except for those that had been tied up like kidnapping victims.

The plane skidded across the water, split in half, and the results are all around me. But there is one thing. Any of us could have saved the bound Arab family. But we didn't. We all watched the tail section sink, though we couldn't see the still-living Arabs. Trexler had climbed over them to flop into the water, and he said they just stared at him.

And here we are. I, James Storrent, am a murderer.

As are my companions, however long we are stranded. If a war has not started today. Tuesday, September 11, 2001.



Photo By Dan Szotak (www.danszotak.com)

Wayne Allen Sallee, a Chicago native, has been professionally published since 1986. He is a five time finalist for the Bram Stoker award and has over 200 stories in markets ranging from WRITER'S DIGEST, PENTHOUSE, CEMETERY DANCE, GRUE, LOVE IN VEIN, SEED OF FEAR and NIGHTMARES ON ELM STREET. His work has been reprinted in the UK, as well as in Spanish, German, French, Italian and Danish. Sallee has a border collie and no social life to speak of. His most recent story, "Mitch," in the form of a podcast, can be found at www.TwilightTales.com