



SERLING

SERIES CONCEPT BY DANIEL KNAUF



SUBMITTED FOR YOUR APPROVAL...

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SERLING

Series concept by Daniel Knauf

LOGLINE:

Dramatic/Thriller/Speculative One-Hour Series. As a young WWII soldier, ROD SERLING finds himself ensnared in the chimerical purgatory that later served as the inspiration for his seminal series "THE TWILIGHT ZONE."

SERIES CONCEPT

"I think that ideas exist outside of ourselves. I think somewhere, we're all connected off in some very abstract land. But somewhere between there and here ideas exist."

- David Lynch

Every accomplished artist is inevitably asked the same question: *Where do you get ideas?* Though philosophers, psychiatrists, neurologists and scholars have long striven to solve the mystery of the source of creative inspiration, few do so with any degree of satisfaction.

Even artists themselves are unable to articulate the genesis of ideas in anything but the vaguest of terms. Though the pictures we paint, the stories we write, the performances we deliver and the music we compose are profoundly influenced by our skill, our subjective aesthetic instincts and life-experiences, those are but filters through which inspiration passes.

The source of the creation—the *true* wellspring—is as much an enigma to the artist as it is to the audience. All we know is that at certain points within the process, ideas occur, choices are made, and an original creation is the result.



Rod Serling's body of work as a dramatist is singular for its prolificacy, breadth and originality. From his first triumph of PATTERNS for Playhouse 90 through other exquisitely wrought features like REQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT, THE COMEDIAN, SEVEN DAYS IN MAY and PLANET OF THE APES, to signature series such as THE TWILIGHT ZONE and NIGHT GALLERY, Serling not only delivered consistently thrilling narrative entertainment, but fearlessly tackled many controversial themes that still resonate today.

In many ways, with THE TWILIGHT ZONE, Rod Serling invented television drama—not only the bones of the format, but the breathtaking potential of the medium; filmed entertainment that, while unable to deliver the scale of a theatrical feature, compensates for its limitations via a unique brand of intimacy with the viewer—grounded, organic storytelling, archetypal characters, universal themes.

SERLING the series is to THE TWILIGHT ZONE what Hemingway's experiences as an ambulance driver in the Spanish Civil War was to FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS—the raw, unformed alloy that was, years later, molded and hammered in the storyteller's forge.

Stories will be set in the same prosaic milieus presented in Serling's body of work and offer Easter eggs such as key props and devices that, decades later, informed his art.

They will focus on the themes that inspired Serling: alienation, societal injustice, bigotry, redemption, the plight of the outcast, the too often cruel and ruthless abandonment of the weak, the poor, the elderly; the inexorable struggle for dignity in an age in which human devastation is merely abstract collateral damage in the ruthless quest for profit; a courageous, unblinking exploration of the human condition.

Most of all, SERLING is a speculative excavation of one artist's story-well; an attempt to answer the unanswerable question: *Where does the artist get ideas?*



SUBMITTED FOR YOUR APPROVAL...

Meet Private RODMAN (ROD) EDWARD SERLING, a scrappy, idealistic Jewish kid just shy of his twentieth birthday, 5'4" tall, 110 pounds soaking wet, and possibly the U.S. Army's unlikeliest hero.

On a nameless Pacific atoll under bombardment by a Japanese destroyer, a shell-burst has literally blown Sterling out of this temporal reality into a great nowhere, beyond life, just shy of death, a purgatory known euphemistically among his comrades as The Zone.

**SERIES FORMAT**

Stories are conveyed in multi-episode “packets,” each packet self-contained, delivering a full traditional three-act closed plot. The form will follow function depending on the complexity and scope of the proposed narrative. Most packets will average 3 episodes, the final installment of each teeing up the next, though some may run 4 episodes, others 2. Occasionally, we may be able to deliver a full, satisfying story in a single-episode one-off.

Our protagonist is ROD SERLING. He and the other supporting/recurring characters with whom he interacts have one thing in common: the final memory each has before entering The Zone is the end-stage of a life-threatening illness, accident or violent injury.

They are all imprisoned inside the transition point between life and death.

Whether that state takes the form of a lingering coma or the split second before a bullet pierces the skull makes no difference. Time works strangely inside The Zone—a single heartbeat can last an eternity; a decade, the blink of an eye.

The Zone is a pitiless arena in which Serling and the other characters are tested and judged, presented with a core conflict that challenges their greatest flaws and vulnerabilities; a last chance for redemption or a crucible for damnation. Serling and other Travelers will be subjected to extreme circumstances that will calculate their measure as human beings: weak or strong, selfless or generous, noble or craven, virtuous or corrupt, brave or cowardly.

In the Zone, the truth always bears out and justice is swift and merciless.

Everyone within the Zone has unfinished business back on Earth. Despite this, upon the conclusion of their journeys, most move on to eternity—whether stepping into a vortex of divine light or seized by shrieking darkness and dragged into the abyss.

However, a chosen few very lucky, very determined souls will return to their corporeal vessels to continue their lives on Earth.



THE META

Over the life of the series, Serling is visited by visions of his future—meeting and falling in love with his wife, CAROL, the births of his two beloved daughters, JODY and ANNE, the triumphs and frustrations of his career as an artist, concrete moments of a life un-lived.

Serling becomes determined to return to his body—no matter how severe and crippling the wounds inflicted upon it, no matter how much agony he must suffer. Like Odysseus, he is compelled to return home to his family—a beautiful, intelligent, playful woman he has yet to meet; two daughters he has yet to father. In Serling’s case, however, his compulsion is driven not by his past, but his future.

The stakes couldn’t be higher: years yet to be unfurled, an incalculable measure of moments—sublime, banal, precious—all of which Serling will never experience if he cannot break free of a prison that exists in the Zone, a desolate, half-lit badlands between life and death.



THE WORLD OF SERLING

SETTINGS

SERLING sets its tales in the same paradigmatic locations that inspired the most memorable stories in Rod Serling’s voluminous body of work: iconic small towns, barren extraterrestrial wastelands, suburbs, Nazi death camps, executive penthouses, storm-battered airliners, studio backlots, boxing arenas, mean streets, decrepit mansions, ghost towns, pool halls and flophouses.

CONSTRUCTS

Within each story package, Serling is thrust into a “construct.” For each, the normative rules, physics, environment and situation is consistent and naturalistic.

For instance, if Serling finds himself on a 1940s Alabama State Prison chain-gang, the environment, laws, cultural norms and events that unfold within that construct are in complete accordance with the reality of that specific milieu at that point in history.



Serling and most his fellow Travelers are “fish out of water.” They must adapt to the construct and act within it, according to its rules—in effect, a very high-stakes form of Live Action Role Playing. A Traveler who can’t adapt, who acts out and publicly questions the

“reality” of the construct will be treated the same way they would in any society: as a lunatic and subject to punishment, re-education, or an indefinite term of imprisonment.



In some cases, the construct is so close to a given Traveler’s real life that he or she is completely unaware that they are even in The Zone. Details of their former lives are duplicated. Locals and Influencers may even be replicants of close friends or family members. These constructs are especially cruel and severely test the Traveler’s sanity.

CHARACTERS

ROD SERLING: 19 years old. A small-town boy with big dreams. Charismatic, creative, prodigiously intelligent and loquacious, Serling is a natural-born storyteller with strong leadership abilities. As a boy, he devoured pulp-fiction, often acting scenes in them out to the amusement of his family. Idealistic to a tee—sometimes dismissed as a dreamer—Rod has a finely tuned moral compass and cannot abide by bigotry and injustice.

Having recently completed the rigors of paratrooper training, a former amateur boxer, Serling is in outstanding physical condition. Unlike most raconteurs who are “all talk,” he’s a scrapper who won’t back down from a fight should his words fail him. He demonstrates immense courage, doesn’t suffer fools and is unwilling to submit to bully-tactics.

This is not the public Serling we all know—the unflappable, martini-dry, sophisticated “Voice” who years later introduced the Twilight Zone—but the private Serling: the friend, the charismatic young man on the cusp of a bright future.

Most of all, this man loves to laugh. Clever, possessing a quick wit which often careens into the brazenly goofy, he’s playful, feckless and quick with a joke.

Though undeniably mature and complex having witnessed more than his share of horrors during his military service, Serling



demonstrates a marked openness with children, sharing their indefatigable curiosity with their surroundings and their willingness to play. He also adores dogs, and won’t hesitate to make a spectacle of himself dropping on all fours to romp with one.

The characters Serling meets within the constructs fall into one of three categories: Travelers, Locals and Influencers.

TRAVELERS: The other mortal humans with whom Serling interacts within the constructs, individuals from all walks of life—gamblers, executives, doctors, housewives, criminals, lawyers, hustlers, artists, soldiers—all of whom, like him, have suffered a fatal illness or trauma and are trapped between life and death.

Time is fluid in The Zone, so Humans ensnared in it could be from the distant past or the far-flung future. Most, however, hail from eras approximating the 20th – 21st Century.

Each arrives in the ethereal proving-ground of The Zone with conflicts to be resolved, failures to be reconciled and sins for which they must be punished or forgiven before they can move on to the next plane or resume their mortal lives.

Travelers are the ensemble of supporting characters within the constructs and may recur in multiple story packets.

LOCALS: The most numerous of the entities that populate The Zone, Locals are individuals who are emotionally and intellectually utterly invested in the reality of their given construct— analogous to the strangers we may encounter in a dream. They serve as the drones who support the veracity of the reality-construct: clerks, police, pedestrians, maintenance workers, waiters, mobs and onlookers.

Locals engage in a form of willful blindness, dream creatures who never question the veracity of their circumstances and regard anyone who does as “suspect.” After all, isn’t the very definition of insanity the unwillingness or inability to accept reality?

Locals cannot be trusted by Travelers. Like most people, they fear outcasts, non-conformists and others who “don’t fit in.” Interactions with Locals, therefore, are often circular and maddeningly frustrating. If pressed, they can become hostile or menacing.

VENDOR

Eve’nin, Mr. Serling. Care for a frosty glass of lemonade?

SERLING

What is this place?

VENDOR

Why, this here’s Willoughby, friendliest little town in the State.

SERLING

What State?

The Vendor’s eyes go briefly flat with suspicion

VENDOR

Can’t say, Mr. Serling. Sure ya don’t fancy a frosty glass of lemonade?

Most are harmless, though if rallied by an Influencer into a mob or posse, they can be lethal. Using deadly force against a Local—even in self-defense—must be avoided, as it is regarded as a serious violation of the construct’s rules and will be treated as an assault or murder.

INFLUENCERS: Sentient beings possessing full awareness of the function and parameters of the Reality Constructs as well as every aspect of the Travelers’ lives—their victories, their failures, their darkest secrets, their greatest fears, their moral strengths and weaknesses.

Most Influencers appear human, often masquerading as Travelers and discreetly embedding themselves among them.

Influencers possess powers to alter the reality constructs, manipulating time by rewinding, fast-forwarding or bringing it to a halt, telepathically uploading intel or altering Rules of Engagement to the Locals. Influencers can be killed, but it is extraordinarily difficult as they are imbued with superhuman strength and speed.

If the Zone is an experiment, Influencers are the scientists running it; if Purgatory, they are the angels and demons inhabiting it.

Existential creatures, Influencers are unburdened by the moral constraints of humans. Sometimes benevolent, sometimes brutally sadistic, they serve only one master: the integrity of the construct.

PILOT PACKET 1 - WILLOUGHBY

EPISODE 1.01



Our pilot speculates the inspiration of Serling's favorite episode of *The Twilight Zone*, *A STOP AT WILLOUGHBY* as well as echoing the paranoid, small-town elements explored in *WHERE IS EVERYBODY* and *WALKING DISTANCE*.

Open in the South Pacific. A beachhead is being obliterated under withering fire from a Japanese destroyer. 19 year old technician-fourth-grade Private Rodman Serling, 22nd Army Airborne Cav, squats in a foxhole with TWO OTHER SOLDIERS. A third G.I. jumps in.

SERLING

Janowski. Joe...?

JANOWSKI

Jonah.

SERLING

Yeah. Sorry. I thought they cycled you out. Or you bought it... mostly, you bought it.

JANOWSKI

Nope. I just ended up in a sling in Bethesda. Spent a couple months in the Zone--

SERLING

The what?

JANOWSKI

The Zone. Ya know. Just this place ya go when you're neither alive nor dead. Betwixt and between as they say...

(A twitchy smile)

Here, hang onto this for me.

Janowski proceeds to strip himself of every weapon: his .45, his daddy's favorite skinning knife, spare ammo. He hands each to a dazed Serling. He then tells him, "I'll be in Willoughby."

An odd smile clashing with the manic terror in his eyes, Janowski climbs out of the foxhole and walks directly into the line of fire. Serling bolts after him, his buddies restraining him. Suddenly, a shell explodes at close range and we SLAM TO BLACK.

The BEEP of an EKG. Serling regains consciousness. SERLING'S POV: Focus on an attractive young woman, gazing down at us. The assumption is that he has been hospitalized for the wounds sustained in the last scene, but as the drama unfolds, we notice this is not a military hospital, but a VIP-class private hospital suite at Cedar-Sinai.

"Are you awake?" She asks. *"Can you hear me? Dad? Dad?"*

REVERSE and we see Serling's face for the first time. Age 50. Frail from a congenital heart condition. He blinks, recognizing her, and gasps *"Yes, Pop."*



Then the EEG FLATLINES and, now attired in civvies—dungarees and a short-sleeve shirt—Serling stands on a dusty road. He follows the faint sound of a brass band. Independence Day is being celebrated in the quaint, verdant square of a small town, WILLOUGHBY, “Where a man lives his life by its full measure.”

Picture perfect. Everyone is friendly, welcoming, greeting Serling by name as if they’ve known him for years.

He’s directed by a Local to the Willoughby Bed and Board, a charming hotel run by an ostensively sweet, matronly woman named BELLA. A teenage boy, DONNY, helps her and sweeps up around the place. Like other Locals, Bella and Donny are friendly, but it doesn't take more than a brief exchange to run through their limited conversational repertoire.

Eager to get to the bottom of his sudden and mysterious dislocation from the heat of battle into this quaint American small town, Serling ventures out to explore. He hears a HIDEOUS CHITTERING SHRIEK, then a commotion—a young black man, ETHAN, 20s, is chased by a police SUV and several Locals. Ethan ducks down an alley and hides. Serling misdirects the pursuers; finds Ethan and coaxes him out.

Like Serling, Ethan is confused. What is this place? Where are they? They jimmy a door and find that the quaint, clapboard building is a hollow shell.

Though Willoughby contains spaces that are functional—merchant’s shops, homes, a boarding house—most of the town’s structures are no more substantial than those on a studio backlot. Serling tells Ethan his final memories before coming to in Willoughby—the island, the shelling, Janowski, the explosion. He asks Ethan what he last remembers.

As Ethan recounts his story we FLASHBACK TO a gay dance club in Detroit. Two shooters in black camo enter and open fire with AK47s. One points his weapon directly at Ethan. SLAM BACK TO: Willoughby, Ethan concluding his tale, “Then... Willoughby.”

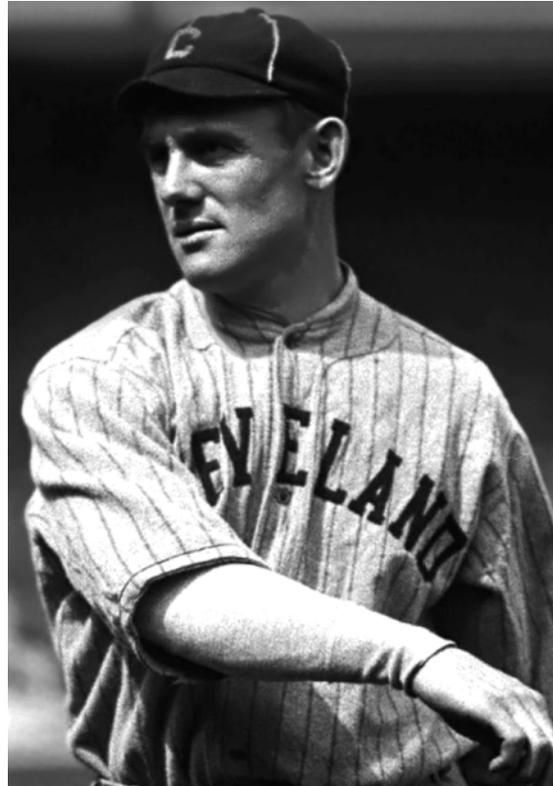
Serling recalls Janowski's words, *"This place you go when you're neither alive nor dead. Betwixt and between."* That's where they must be! The Zone! And if Janowski is right about the rest, somewhere, Serling and Ethan are *still alive*, perhaps in comas...

Then Serling remembers Janowski's final cryptic farewell: *"I'll find you in Willoughby."*

Fuck! They're not alone!

Janowski is here!

Serling and Ethan venture out to search for his erstwhile brother-in-arms. Though their search is fruitless, they're welcome by the Locals as if they've always lived there. Both know there's something very wrong with these people. They seem to be scripted, says Serling. "No," replies Ethan, *"they're like Siri."* Serling, a man of the 1940's, has no idea what Ethan's talking about. Ethan patiently explains the reality of AI in his time. *"These can't be real people. There's something that doesn't feel... right about them."* Nevertheless, they reason that there must be others like them; not just Janowski, but people like themselves—*real* people—who are displaced "betwixt and between." They decide to seek them out.



The next day, they spot a man in the public square. Dazed, disoriented, wearing a Cleveland Indians uniform. They approach him. His name is RAY CHAPMAN. He's agitated, combative, drawing attention. Before Serling and Ethan can calm him down, Chapman flips out, starts walking up to locals, aggressively telling them they're not "real," demanding to know where he is. Finally, a young woman points at Chapman, jacks open her mouth and cuts a PIERCING, CHITTERING SHRIEK. As Serling and Ethan look on in helpless terror, Sheriffs and locals close in, grab Chapman, restrain him, drag him into an ambulance and take him away.

EPISODE 1.02

A few days have passed. Ethan has taken a room near Serling's at the Willoughby Bed and Board. Still shaken by Chapman's capture, Serling and Ethan realize their best tactic is to pretend they see nothing odd about the town and keep a low profile. They discreetly resume their search for Janowski and any other fellow Travelers.

Dispirited, Serling lies down and nods off. He finds himself in the campus quad of Antioch College, where he sees an impish brunette, the center of attention as she chats with friends. Their passing eyes briefly meet. Serling works up his nerve, approaches the group. One or two greet him. The girl introduces herself: CAROL KRAMER. Suddenly, we SLAM BACK TO:

Serling awakens with a start at a knock at the door. It's Ethan.

ETHAN: *There's a woman downstairs. I think she's one of us.*

Serling and Ethan go down to find Bella serving dinner to a young woman, FRANCINE. Like them, she's brand new in town. She's confused, disoriented, increasingly panicked. She remembers she was in the hospital, yes. She was... was... SLAM OUT on the HICCUPPING WAIL OF A NEWBORN.

FLASHBACK: Francine is in the hospital delivery room. Her child has just been born. One of the NURSES looks alarmed. *"Doctor... doctor! The patient's bleeding!"*

SLAM BACK TO: Scene. Francine begins freaking out. Asking questions. *"Where am I? Who are you people?!"* Bella wonders aloud whether she should call "the authorities." Serling quickly calms Francine down.

Later, upstairs, they meet in private. Serling tells Francine what they know. They are imprisoned in this spiritual waypoint known as the Zone, but now they are three, looking for answers, searching for Janowski.

They hear a calliope outside; a carnival in the square. The whole town is there. They split up to search. The three go out and to their horror find Chapman working as a groundskeeper. But when they attempt to engage him, they discover that he has been processed into a Local. Is this their fate in The Zone? To be robbed of their consciousness and



enslaved? They retreat, shaken, when Serling spots Janowski. He, Ethan and Francine give chase, but lose him.

Later, in Serling's room, they are discovered conspiring by Bella. Before she can raise the alarm, Ethan hits her in the head with a heavy ashtray. The effect is the same as striking Plasticine clay; her head is grotesquely deformed, dented, oozing a viscous black liquid and we confirm what we have suspected: all the "locals" in Willoughby are not human. Bella attacks Ethan and they all struggle to subdue her. Donny stumbles upon them; SHRIEKS the disturbing alarm and they flee.

Serling, Ethan and Francine run through the darkened carnival in the town square, rendered by shadows into an ominous rats-maze, pursued by the sheriff and locals until they're cornered.

At the last possible moment, a GUNSHOT!

The Willoughby sheriff collapses, bleeding black fluid from a shot to the head. A van roars up, Janowski behind the wheel, Colt in hand, two women in the back.



JANOWSKI: *Get in, now!*

They race off, soon outdistancing their CAPERING pursuers.

EPISODE 1.03

Lazing in a hammock up at a lake cottage, open book face down, ashtray on his chest as he smokes, Serling watches two young girls play on a dock. A TELEPHONE RINGS inside the cottage. Carol calls out his name twice then SLAM TO:

Serling awakens in Janowski's safe house, an abandoned barn he, Ethan and Francine share with Janowski, a woman, HELEN, and TWO OTHER TRAVELERS. They learn from the others that the town is a trap; the roads and railway tracks out of town all turn back on themselves.

The only possible way out: on a freight train that transports personnel and supplies to Willoughby once a month. It must come from somewhere—maybe far away. If it's not a means of escape, perhaps, but at least they'll find out what the Hell is going on. The train is due to arrive two nights from now.

They agree to keep low profiles. They'll need to separate, steal into town and scrounge the necessary food, water, and anything else they'll require for their journey. Meanwhile, Helen will take advantage of her position as a teller at the Merchants Trust to embezzle some cash. They'll meet up again under the water tower near the tracks on the town's outskirts. When the freight train arrives, they'll jump it.

While selecting goods in town, Francine tells Serling that she needs to get back; her baby needs her. She can't leave him with her husband, Peter. He's hopeless; he won't know where to start.

Meanwhile, at the Merchants Trust, Helen is caught stealing the cash and arrested. When Janowski learns of the setback, he's distraught and paranoid. How did they know she took the money? On that day of all days. It tests the trust between the original group and the three newcomers. Janowski pulls his Colt.

JANOWSKI: *Okay, which one of you is one of them?*

Janowski tosses them a hunting knife, orders each to cut themselves to "*see what comes out.*" First Serling. Blood. Then Francine. Blood. Then Ethan. He squeamishly hesitates, then pulls the blade away. He can't do it. Janowski raises the gun. Serling seizes the knife from Ethan and slashes his palm. He looks wide-eyed at the cut.

JANOWSKI: *See? I told you!*

Janowski raises his pistol to shoot as Serling brandishes Ethan's hand. *Bright red blood flows from the cut.*

SERLING: *You're wrong, Janowski! You're wrong! He's one of us. We're all one of us!"*



Serling convinces him that it must have just been a bad break; an unfortunate coincidence. Janowski sees the desperate expressions on the others' faces. He realizes that Serling is right and lowers the gun, shaken by the near disaster. They agree to proceed with their plan. They'll wait. As soon as it's dark, they'll head out to the water tower. It's going to be a long night; they best rest up.

In a private moment, Serling finally shares his unsettling visions with Francine:

SERLING

The people I see are strangers, but...

FRANCINE

What?

SERLING

I know them. I know them in my bones--to the marrow of my bones. It's as if I'm remembering... something.

FRANCINE

Something you've forgotten?

SERLING

No. The future. I'm remembering the future.

Later that night, at the water tower, they're nervously awaiting the train's arrival when they hear the crunching of stealthily approaching tires over the gravel. Suddenly, BLINDING HEADLIGHTS. It's a trap! They've been betrayed. They're surrounded by three police cruisers. Before Janowski can pull his pistol, Ethan wrestles it away and puts a bullet through Janowski's skull. The others are stunned.



ETHAN: *They're not stupid.* (Nods toward the approaching sheriffs) *You think these others are the best they can do?*

Serling stealthily grips a sharp rock behind his back.

SERLING: *Who are they?*

ETHAN: *Who, indeed.* (To the others) *No. I'm the best they can do. I'm smart. I can pass for one of you. I can even bleed. And I can make sure you people don't get up to any of your tricks—*

Serling strikes Ethan a staggering blow with the rock. He staggers, drops the pistol. Serling picks it up, grabs Francine's hand and runs. Ethan straightens, his jaw jacks unnaturally wide and he cuts the now-familiar blood-chilling INHUMAN.CHITTERING

SHRIEK.

The COPS seize the others, Ethan in hot pursuit of Serling and Francine, firing at them with the Colt. The freight train is bearing down. Serling crosses the tracks but Ethan leaps and tackles Francine, *who falls into the path of the train*. Screams! Serling shouts her name, running helplessly up and down the side of the track as the freight train races by and we SLAM TO:

A MATERNITY WARD RECOVERY ROOM. Francine awakens. Her husband, PETER, gazes down at her, worried.

PETER

Francine?

She sees a BAG OF PLASMA on her I.V. Looks up into the concerned eyes of her loving husband.

SERLING

What happened?

PETER

Doctor Jeffers said there was an emergency. You started bleeding. They almost lost you. You needed over five pints...

The NURSE enters carrying Francine's newborn son.

NURSE

I see we're awake.

(Re: the infant)

Somebody is very hungry.

She places the child in Francine's eagerly awaiting arms, and as she cradles the baby to her breast, the shriek of a TRAIN WHISTLE SLAMS US

BACK TO:

Serling sits in an empty boxcar, the freight train hurtling through the night. A SLOW PUSH as he bows his head, exhausted, lost and alone, rocked gently by the uneven tracks. FLASH TO: An intimate moment, gently encouraged by CAROL at a low moment in his career path. Suddenly, he's assaulted by the LOUD CLACKING, SHRILLING BELL and BLINDING LIGHTS of a railway crossing. His eyes snap open and he's...

... JOSTLED AWAKE, seated in a FIRST-CLASS CABIN ON A 787, bumping along through a violent thunderstorm. He notices the contemporary amenities, flat-screen monitors imbedded in the seat-backs, open laptop computers, a kid playing a game on his tablet. Confused, he tugs the sleeve of a passing STEWARDESS.

SERLING

What is this? Where are we?

STEWARDESS

Well, my best guess is we're about 32,000 feet over Tulsa Oklahoma. Can I get you something?

32,000 feet? He shakes his head, pulls out his pack of smokes. The stewardess looks at him, perplexed

STEWARDESS

Sir?

SERLING

(pausing before he lights up)

Yeah?

STEWARDESS

You can't smoke in the aircraft.

SERLING

Oh... yeah. Of course. Of course I can't. Sorry.

A SOFT CHIME. The PILOT'S VOICE sounds OVER THE INTERCOM:

PILOT (O.S.)

We've got a little chop ahead, so I'm turning on the fasten-seatbelt lights. Please remain in your seats. We'll make an announcement as soon as things smooth out.

The Stewardess smiles faintly, turns to Serling.

STEWARDESS

Buckle up. It's going to be a bumpy flight.

Serling reacts and the Jet surges forward, passengers streaking past us and suddenly we are...

OUTSIDE - the 787 slices through HOWLING, SLASHING RAIN. It's heading? Directly toward a CHURNING BANK OF THUNDERHEADS, CHAIN LIGHTNING arcing and crawling across their surface. And deep within the folds of the black clouds, A STRANGE, PULSING GLOW.

OUT

FUTURE STORY PACKETS

1.04 – 1.05: “32,000 FEET OVER TULSA”

Our second story-packet focuses on themes of paranoia, claustrophobia, and the unsettling sense of helplessness one experiences as a passenger on a commercial jet, thematic elements Serling might have later drawn on for episodes of TZ such as TERROR AT 20,000 FEET and THE ODYSSEY OF FLIGHT 33. A Hitchcockian suspense-driven story that unfolds entirely within the passenger cabin of a 747. A paranoid thriller in which Serling notices the other passengers’ interactions are entirely unnatural. Shared glances; murmured conversations across aisles.



Something is very wrong with this flight; disagreement between passengers regarding their flight origination and destination. There seems to be an unwholesome collaboration between the passengers and the crew. Have they been hijacked? Is there a terrorist attack afoot? Or is the situation even more profoundly skewed; is there anything beyond the darkness and impenetrable clouds visible through the windows.

He seeks out fellow Travelers a nervous investment banker, a young female university student and, finally—surprisingly—a STEWARDESS who is much more than she seems; connects with his seatmate, a jazz violinist. She, too, has noticed anomalies. When she inexplicably vanishes, the crew insists there is no record of her; that the seat beside him has been empty for the entire flight.

Serling’s sanity is questioned, and he finds himself under the close scrutiny of a sinister AIR MARSHAL.



1.06 – 1.09: “A PRAYER FOR SISTER LUCY”

A theme that Serling repeatedly explored is the cruel rejection society inflicts on the aged, the infirmed, the “different,” yielding some of his most seminal, profound work, such as PATTERNS, THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER and PLANET OF THE APES.

Serling finds himself in the belly of a plague-ship. People are sick, starving, dying. A growing percentage have resorted to cannibalism. After a horrific voyage, they are steamrolled out of the hold into shark-infested water, waves crashing

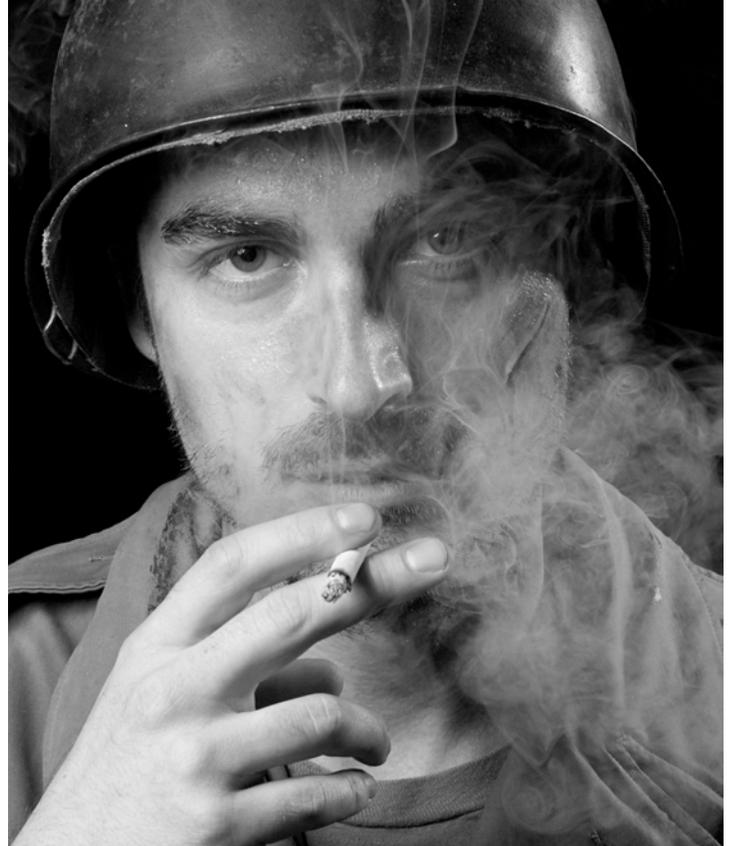
against a rocky shore. Those that survive the ordeal find themselves marooned on an island colony of individuals suffering from a protracted, disfiguring and ultimately fatal disease.

Meanwhile, on the other side of an impenetrable wall, stands a bunker-like edifice. In the dead of night, anesthetic gas is injected into the squalid patient dormitories, and figures dressed in bio-hazard suits collect their “specimens.”

Serling is determined to unravel the mystery of the colony, but in the meantime, is forced to play Yojimbo inside a violently stratified society comprised of people who have less than a year to live. Two factions have formed on either side of the social spectrum: NED COSTER, a former small-town insurance agent who has built a criminal empire by debasing the hopeless, and SISTER LUCY, a Catholic nun who has made the ultimate sacrifice to lend comfort to them. But things are never what they seem in The Zone, and Serling learns an important lesson about the nature of Influencers.

1.10 – 1.12 – “A BIRD IN THE HAND”

Serling’s most disturbing work cut to the themes of ego, identity and the danger of nonconformity. This construct portends some of his darkest work such as THE



PASSERSBY, AND WHEN THE SKY WAS OPENED and MIRROR IMAGE.

Serling awakens in an Army hospital. He's been cycled out due to the wounds sustained at the top of the season. He returns home to find his mother and father waiting for him. *But Serling's father died less than a week before he was wounded.*

Serling discovers more anomalies, leading him to suspect he is in a different time-line. He meets other members of his Army Unit who have also noted subtle-but-marked differences. Meanwhile, he searches for Carol Kramer, the woman his visions have led him to believe will be his wife, only to discover she died in a tragic auto accident six years previously.

The story culminates in a Hobson's choice between a world in which his beloved father is alive, and one in which the love of his life, Carol, and their two daughters, yet unborn, will never be.

SUBSEQUENT SEASONS

Story packets continue, Serling and other Travelers subjected to tests in various constructs while exploring the strange geography of the Zone to understand the limits of their prison, the nature of the entity that created it and, most importantly, to somehow escape its bonds. Each trial unveils another puzzle piece in the Odyssean meta story of Serling's visions of his destiny as an artist, husband and father.

Stories will be original or drawn from acquired IP, celebrating the legacy of Rod Serling and capturing the essence of his amazing contribution to contemporary drama.

SERIES CONCLUSION

In the final minutes of the Series Finale, Serling regains consciousness in the muddy fox-hole in which we found him in the Pilot Episode. A MEDIC has joined his two comrades, and is treating his shrapnel-wounded knee. After a shot of morphine, and the Medic meets Serling's eyes.

SERLING

How long was I out?

The Medic looks at Serling's two buddies. One shrugs.

SERLING

Just a minute, Rod. Maybe two?

MEDIC

You're gonna be okay, Soldier.

Only Serling knows the full import of these words. He blinks back a tear, averts his eyes, face illuminated by the flicker of TRACER FIRE overhead; the trace of a relieved smile on his lips.

SERLING

Yeah. I know. I know...

SUMMARY

SERLING offers the novelty and freshness of a traditional anthology while incorporating the audience-friendly elements of a continuing protagonist and an ensemble cast in recurring roles. Its novel story-packet format allows the stories to “breathe” over multiple episodes, not only offering the advantage of customary multi-episodic deals with actors, but mitigating costs for locations and builds.

The potential for a long-running series is enhanced by the hard reboots entailed in each story-packet, the virtually unlimited storytelling potential of the format as well as the current availability of literally hundreds of extant award-winning novellas and works of short fiction and other IP on the market by such seminal TZ writers as Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson.





u n m o v i e s

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