

The Twilight Zone*

by John Farrow

NARRATOR: Members of the United States Olympic Team are reading, watching a movie or trying to get some sleep. They are heading to the 2004 Summer Games in Athens, Greece, riding on a jet airliner en route from New York and flying at 35,000 feet atop a heavy layer of clouds that obscures the earth below.

It has been an uneventful flight thus far. They are flying on auto-pilot and those in the cockpit are chatting about the festivities planned for their arrival at the city's new Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport.

Many of the athletes on board have worked their entire young lives for just this trip and the honor of representing their country in the birthplace of the Olympic Games. The pilots and navigator in the cockpit have likewise been specially selected based on their skill and training to transport those on board to their destination.

But what they don't know is that, through no fault of their own, they are about to embark on the voyage of their lives into an uncharted wilderness for which no amount of training or experience could possibly have prepared them. The problem is simply that the plane is going too fast and nothing within the realm of knowledge or logic can explain its present course - straight towards the Twilight Zone.

[FADE TO COCKPIT. CAPTAIN AND CO-PILOT STARE AT CONTROL PANEL, CONCERN ON THEIR FACES]

CAPTAIN: That's some tail wind we've got. I've never seen anything like it. Smooth as glass, though.

CO-PILOT: Captain, we're already well past the design speed for this bird. We probably ought to bring her down a bit and get back to a normal cruising speed.

I'll call the tower and tell'em we're going to be quite a bit early. [PAUSE] I can't get a signal anywhere. It's like there's nobody out there!

[AIRPLANE DESCENDS ROUGHLY THROUGH CLOUDS, THEN LEVELS OFF]

NAVIGATOR: Let's see, we should be coming up on the edge of the city right about . . . [PAUSE] Oh, my God! Captain, look out there!

CAPTAIN: [LOOKING OUT COCKPIT WINDOW] Smoke. Smoke from cooking fires. And no cars.

CO-PILOT: Sir, the Acropolis! That isn't the Parthenon!

CAPTAIN: [SURVEYING THE SCENE BELOW] No, it's not.

NAVIGATOR: Sir, over there. [GESTURING] On the road. Do you see him?

CAPTAIN: [QUIETLY] I see him. [SWITCHES ON THE INTERCOM] Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain. If you've been looking out the window, you're probably wondering where we are and what is going on. Frankly, so are we. What you see below is not the modern Athens of tall buildings and four million people, but Athens in another time.

The hill in the center of the city is the Acropolis, but that isn't the Parthenon on its summit. That is the smaller Temple of Athena, built about 530 BC. The Parthenon that we know from travel brochures won't be built for almost a hundred years.

You can see a road heading to the northeast and if you look real hard, there appears to be a single runner nearing the city. That road leads to the Plains of Marathon, meaning that the runner would be Pheidippides, coming to announce that the Athenians have won a great victory over the Persians. Ladies and gentlemen, we seem to have gone back in time to 490 BC.

All we can do is go up again to try and catch that tail wind again and hope it brings us back to the present.

NARRATOR: They are successful in finding the tremendous winds again, but on descending once more, they are confused by the absence of radar signals they had expected.

CO-PILOT: Come in, Athens. Do you read me? Come in, Athens. [EXCITED] I got something, sir! You had better talk to him, though. It's scratchy and I can barely understand him.

CAPTAIN: [RELIEVED] Hello, Athens, it's good to hear from you. This is USOC-1 bringing the United States Olympic Team to this year's Summer Games in your fair city. Request clearance to land and radar coordinates. Over.

[GROWS QUIET AS HE LISTENS TO THE TOWER]

CO-PILOT: Problem, sir?

CAPTAIN: [STARES OUT WINDOW INTO THE DISTANCE, THEN SAYS QUIETLY] He doesn't know anything about us, has no radar and claims the Olympics aren't being held in Athens this year.

CO-PILOT: What?

CAPTAIN: [PAUSE] He also wished Jesse Owens good luck in Berlin. [FADE TO NARRATOR]

NARRATOR: The year is 1936. They had not come back in time far enough.

A modern jet airliner, en route from New York and carrying the United States Olympic Team to the 2004 Summer Games in Athens, has traveled back in time on an otherwise uneventful afternoon but is now reported overdue and missing. Soon, search parties will be dispatched on land, air and sea - anguished human beings fearful of what they will find.

And if at some moment this summer you hear the sound of jet engines flying well above the clouds, engines that sound searching and lost, perhaps even a bit desperate, call 911, shoot up a flare - do something. That would be the United States Olympic Team trying to get home - from the Twilight Zone.

* Loosely based on "The Odyssey of Flight 33," by Rod Serling (The Twilight Zone, February 24, 1961).