

Just Another Flight

by Mike Paolucci

Karen and Joy were the flight attendants on a JFK to Heathrow flight. They were in the forward galley, just behind the cockpit, preparing beverages and snacks for the passengers.

"I'm getting too old for these long haul flights," said Joy. Karen glanced up and smiled in response. "But London is home for me," Joy continued, "and I have the next two days off."

"That'll be nice," said Karen. "And you're right about these trans-Atlantic flights: they're a lot of work. Well, at least the bean-counters at head office will be happy about a full flight."

"What do you mean: 'a full flight'?" asked Joy.

"I mean this is a full flight; every seat is taken."

"No, it's not," said Joy. "I was just looking at the passenger manifest a couple of minutes ago and we have one empty seat."

"Well, I just did a walk-through of the cabin and every seat is filled" said Karen. She put down the coffee pot and stared at Joy. Joy stopped what she was doing and looked up at Karen. Without a word, Joy handed the passenger manifest to Karen.

"You're right," said Karen, "there's supposed to be an empty seat in row 13. Seat D."

"I'd better check this out," said Joy. "Let's hope this is not what I think it is." The two women looked at each other in silence, neither of them wanting to contemplate the security breach that was an undocumented passenger.

Joy stepped out of the galley and began walking down the aisle. When she got to row 8 she could see that there was indeed a passenger in 13D. He was wearing a dark hoodie with the hood pulled down over his face. When she got to row 10 she notice what looked like a cane on the floor, sticking out from row 13 into the aisle. At row 12 she stopped and spoke to the passenger.

"Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to take your cane out of the aisle. Federal regulations prohibit anything in the aisle during takeoff, landing, or while in flight."

The passenger leaned forward and then sat up again, bringing the cane upright as he did so. Except it wasn't a cane. It was more like a staff, about five feet high with a curved three foot sickle at the top that tapered to a sharp point.

"I'm sorry, sir, but you're not allowed to bring something like that on-board an aircraft. I'm

going to have to ask you to give that to me."

The intercom clicked on and a voice said, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. You'll notice I've turned on the fasten seat belt sign. We're coming up on some unexpected turbulence. Please return to your seats and fasten your seat belts. We'll try to get through this as quickly as possible and on to our final destination. Thank you for flying with us and have a pleasant day."

Joy turned her attention back to the passenger. She was about to ask to see his boarding pass when she noticed the hand that was holding the staff. It was a hand without flesh; consisting of bleached-white bones. The passenger raised his head to meet her gaze, and from under the cowl she saw not a face but a human skull. The jaw opened slowly and silently. She raised a hand to cover her mouth, but it did not stifle the scream that reverberated through the cabin.