



## AFTERMATH OF SEPT. 11: EMOTIONS, NOT EXPLOSIONS. (LIVING)

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TV stories about Osama bin Laden were planned before the events of Sept. 11 changed the way we looked at the world.

A crossover plot among the three New York-based "Law & Order" series would have involved a fictional bioterrorism threat from bin Laden, but the story was written before the Sept. 11 attacks, said Vincent D'Onofrio, who stars as Detective Bobby Goren on NBC's "Law & Order: Criminal Intent." After the Sept. 11 attacks, executive producers Dick Wolf and Rene Balcer dropped the story.

But one by one, network dramas are approaching the subject of Sept. 11.

CBS courtroom drama series "The Guardian" will address the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The Dec. 11 episode is about a restaurateur whose business was vandalized as part of an apparent hate crime.

Producers have shown an effort to be sensitive. Before Sept. 11, I saw the pilot episode of "24," the new Fox series that moves in real time. The episode's jet explosion was edited out when the story aired after Sept. 11. The explosion was implied.

Still, violence continues on TV and in the movies.

"I read that the week after the terrorist attack, video sales of terrorist-related movies were up," said Carlos Bernard, who stars as Tony Almeida, one of the CIA agents on "24." "People want to see the good guys win. This show ('24') is all about that. It's about good vs. evil."

Bernard said "24" isn't really about terrorists. The series is mainly about the efforts to protect a presidential candidate (Dennis Haysbert as Sen. David Palmer) from an assassination attempt.

(Still, that's a form of terrorism.)

So far, the few TV shows focusing on Sept. 11 have chosen sensitivity over sensationalism, which is hopefully a lasting trend, but the temptation to exploit the tragedy will grow greater as time passes.

Eventually, maybe two or three years from now, someone somewhere will get the nerve to film "Sept. 11: The Movie." I hope I'm wrong.

Right now, the focus is on emotions and issues and, thankfully, not explosions. In Santa Monica, CBS' "Family Law" filmed an episode dealing with an Arab-American defendant suspected of working with a terrorist.

"Are we too trusting? Are we too prejudiced?" said Chris McDonald, who stars as Rex, the blunt lawyer who brings in the money for the drama's law firm. "They rake all the sides of the issue," he said in a phone interview.

The episode, which aired Nov. 12, did an effective, straightforward job of showing the genuine fear and pain felt by victims of prejudice.

NBC's New York-based drama "Third Watch" took the plunge and mentioned Sept. 11 in two episodes about the emotions of firefighters and police officers.

"Third Watch" avoided showing the actual attack. "The West Wing" didn't mention Sept. 11 at all, but covered terrorism in its "Isaac and Ishmael" story, which amounted to a lecture before students touring the White House. McDonald praised "The Third Watch." "'The West Wing' wasn't as successful; it got preachy."

I was talking to D'Onofrio of "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" on the morning of the Nov. 12 American Airlines crash in New York, which has been seen more as an accident than sabotage. The star's voice was quiet.

"It's a very tough time in New York," D'Onofrio said. "We just had another plane crash; several people in the neighborhood died."

D'Onofrio, meanwhile, continues to use his celebrity status to help efforts for Sept. 11 relief funds. "I can't watch an extremely violent program right now," D'Onofrio said.

"That's true of most of my friends, especially those who read a lot. They are more interested in stories than explosions."

D'Onofrio said he wouldn't act in a story about Sept. 11 and that's he not interested in acting in other crossover plots with the other "L & O" series.

"If they wanted to do it again, that would be fine, but not with me.

"My nervous system is not quite calmed down from the attack to be entertained," he said. "I'd rather not associate what's going on in New York and the world with my job. I'm as nervous as everyone else and hopeful this all will end soon."

The events of Sept. 11 have affected movies as well as television. D'Onofrio isn't sure about "Impostor," an upcoming action movie in which he stars. "It's a bit tough for me to watch," he said. "It's a genre that's a bit too close for comfort."

#### CAPTION(S):

Photo

Vincent D'Onofrio, who stars as Detective Bobby Goren on NBC's "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," is among those who have used their celebrity status to help efforts for Sept. 11 relief funds.

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