

# SALVAGE

*Salvage* is a one-hour, character-driven drama set within the CIA's proxy wars throughout the Americas and the Caribbean in the 1980s. Inspired by true events, the show tells the story of Ben and Patrick Lawson, marine salvage operators, who stumbled over a mysterious DC-3 during a routine search and rescue mission in the Bahamas. Diving down on a single breath, the brothers discovered a cargo hold full of cocaine and a cockpit empty except for a briefcase. They ignored the drugs but took the case, hoping it contained documents essential to filing a valid salvage claim. Instead, they found \$900,000 and sensitive CIA intelligence inside. As the brothers dig deeper into the mysterious wreck, they find themselves at the centre of a clandestine operation with ties to Washington D.C., Managua, Havana, Panama, Nassau, Medellin and Miami. Their simplistic, paradisaical, off-the-grid existence was soon to become the epicentre of a war whose tentacles reached into both the darkest gutters of the drug world and the highest corridors of American power. It's *Narcos* meets *Breaking Bad*; *Charlie Wilson's War* meets *Kill The Messenger*.

As the brothers go about their daily life, they slowly become the focus of a mysterious Colombian businessman developing a neighbouring island, Norman's Cay, into a tourist resort. So begins their relationship with Carlos Lehder, later dubbed "The Henry Ford of Cocaine" by Florida D.A. Robert Merkle at his 1987 trial. Lehder wasn't developing a resort at all - he was building the world's first industrial scale cocaine distribution facility just 56 miles from the Florida coast. Over the next four years, Norman's Cay would become the Medellin Cartel's Caribbean headquarters and the epicenter of the criminal underworld. Lehder's wealth grew into the billions as three hundred kilos of cocaine arrived on the island every day. Having paid off the Bahamian government, he operated with virtual impunity - throwing lavish parties and parading his power like a king. But as he and his associates grew wealthier, they also grew more paranoid. What happens when an entire island is addicted to pure cocaine? Originally hired just to salvage the lost DC-3, Ben and Patrick soon became Lehder's trusted mechanics. Their on-the-job salvage skills proved essential to running an off-the-grid drug business. At first, the shoe boxes of cash they carried home each night helped rebuild their lives. But as Lehder's ego increasingly oscillated between hedonism and militarism, it was obvious that they'd have to salvage more than just broken boats: they'd have to salvage themselves.

As Ben and Patrick devise a legal exit strategy, they are approached by Karen Rahming, an African American CIA officer, hunting for that missing briefcase. Karen offers them a deal: provide meaningful intelligence on Lehder's operation in return for immunity from U.S. prosecution. What the brothers uncover next exposes the fallacy at the heart of Reagan's *War on Drugs*, validates claims of CIA-sponsored drug running and sheds new light on Oliver North's illegal arms pipeline to the Contras. Lehder's operation connected Gen. Noriega in Panama (who laundered the Cartel's money), the CIA (who paid Noriega to push their agenda in the Americas) and Oliver North (who turned a blind eye to Contra drug running through the Bahamas). In fact, Lehder was the chief prosecution witness during Noriega's 1992 conviction on racketeering, narcotics and money laundering charges and claims the Cartel donated funds to the Contra war effort. By telling his story through the eyes of the blue collar, hard-working Lawson family, *Salvage* aims to illuminate the butterfly effect of everyday life: how decisions taken in the corridors of power always affect the lives of ordinary people living many miles away.

*Salvage* is the product of 4 years of investigative research by Christian Barby, a former journalist with *The Economist*, *The Times of London* and *NPR*, and David Mitchell, a marine salvage operator in The Bahamas. All of our characters are based on real people - people with stories that have never been documented or captured on screen before. From 1978-84, the out-islands of The Bahamas were a sunny place for shady people. A world where government corruption bled into society-at-large and everyone had a price. In an archipelago of seven hundred islands, people use seaplanes like cars, hunt for their food beneath coral ledges and rely on rainwater. *Salvage* is set in this analogue wild west - an era before technology and surveillance infiltrated our lives. There's a romance to this time but there's also a danger: when you drop off the grid, things can go missing.