

## THE DEAD ZONE

### “Descent”

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It's been a tough time for our man. He's had to deal with an unexpected event that's changed his life, and promises to change it more. He's been forced to share the woman he loves with another guy, and share his son as well. And while he's been understanding with Sarah and respectful of his rival, there are limits, and he's reached his.

And no, we're not talking about Johnny Smith; we're talking about Walt Bannerman.

Walt's the corner of our romantic triangle that we know the least about. But we're going to learn more about our resident strong, silent type; his past with Sarah; and the future they both may share with Johnny in the course of two episodes in which the tense physical stakes are matched by the emotional ones.

In this first episode, Walt and Johnny embark on a risky descent into an abandoned mine to rescue four lost teens. Only the mine seems determined to kill them both, almost as if it holds a grudge against Johnny and anyone foolish or brave enough to stand beside him. The reason seems to be tied to Johnny's past, and a family mining fortune that was earned at a painful human cost. The story of the rescue will stand alone and be complete by the end of the hour.

However, Walt will be seriously injured – and as the second episode begins, he is in a coma.

No one had the ability to bring Johnny out of his coma for six years. But maybe Johnny's powers will allow him to reach into Walt's mind to lead his comatose rival back to consciousness.

Rest assured these won't be “Walt” stories; Johnny will be front and center, as a hero should be. But as he comes closer to understanding the true nature of the threat of Armageddon, he's going to learn that he can't stand alone. He'll need his friends. And that includes a good man he may not think of as a friend. At least not yet.

This document addresses the first hour.

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Sarah's face fills the screen as she cries quietly in the dark. Walt leans into frame and squeezes her shoulder reassuringly. But it's no use, the tears keep coming. So he reaches past her – for the bag of popcorn on her lap. They're at the movies, a subtitled foreign weepy.

Walt's not particularly engaged but then he's not here for himself. As some doleful Swedish dialogue echoes off-camera, he sneaks another glance at the still-tearful Sarah, then sighs and

quietly munches his popcorn.

The movie over, Walt and Sarah walk home through quiet Cleaves Mills. Walt's got a lot on his mind, concerns that have been building for months. The kind of things this normally direct man has trouble voicing. But now, haltingly, he does. Bottom line: he knows their marriage is in trouble, and he also knows the source of that trouble – Johnny Smith and, more importantly, Sarah's feelings for him. She's let her ex-boyfriend cast a shadow over all their lives.

Sarah acts surprised; she's barely seen Johnny for weeks. Which is true: she's deliberately kept her distance, acting the good wife and mother. But this is more because of her shame over the night they spent together than because her feelings toward Johnny have changed, and, although Walt does not know about that night, it's those feelings he picks up on. Whether

s physically in her life or not, Walt feels his presence, and he's tired of sharing his wife with another man. He asks her point blank what she wants: Johnny or him.

“You,” Sarah protests, but somehow her voice doesn't carry the conviction Walt needs to -blown argument, just a couple starting to face up to a very serious problem. A problem they're not going to resolve now, as Walt's beeper chimes. He checks it, and then turns to Sarah. Looks like they're going to have to cut th gets back from this call, they're going to finish this. Off a worried Sarah...

Cut to Johnny at work in his basement “Armageddon command center.” It's now several hours later, the middle of the night. Tattered cardboard file boxes are piled around him as he sifts through old business ledgers, deeds and financial documents, checking them against figures on the big flat screen computer monitor, which displays the latest Faith Heritage financial report. Tonight's subject of study: the finances of the Vera Smith Foundation. In other words: Where's Johnny's money and what's Purdy using it for?

A buzzer sounds. Surprised, Johnny heads upstairs, checks a new video monitor by the front door. It shows Deputy Roscoe pulled up by the locked front gate. “Boss says to pick you up,” he says into the intercom. Johnny says that it’s pretty damn late. Roscoe shrugs indifferently. “Looks like you’re still up, though.” He lights a cig. “Better bundle up; it’s cold t, then Johnny sighs and grabs his pea coat off a hook.

Cut to Johnny and Roscoe rolling up to a small roadside clearing. Walt’s there with a grizzled old guy in hunting clothes, and his two equally grizzled bloodhounds. They’re all clustered around an abandoned car. Walt eyes Johnny coolly – and Johnny might wonder at the attitude vibe he’s picking up tonight from both Walt and his deputy, given that he’s the one who was dragged out of his house – then tersely explains the situation: the car belongs to one of four high school students who’ve been missing since school ended on Friday afternoon. It’s now late Saturday night. There’s been a lot of rain in the past few weeks and the temperature’s dropping like a stone. If the kids are lost in the woods somewhere, they need to find them and fast, and Ernie’s dogs don’t seem to be up to the task. “Ain’t their fault,” Ernie pouts. “They got skunked

Johnny takes it in, doesn’t need to hear more. This is what he does, after all. He touches the car and has a flash of the teens – two couples – laughing as they hike into the woods to drink beer and make out. And now Walt and the cops find themselves following Johnny, the bloodhounds confusedly sniffing at his heels, as he leads the way into the woods following his own “psychic nose.” He touches a broken branch here, a crumpled beer can there, until the group breaks out of the trees onto a ridge overlooking the partly boarded up entrance to an abandoned copper mine. “They went in there?” Walt asks. Johnny nods and says, “Which means they’re in even bigger trouble than you thought.” Walt reacts to his odd tone. Does Johnny know something about this place?

“A bit,” Johnny says. “For example, I own it.” And off that surprising

Cut to early the next morning. An old map of the mine is spread out on the hood of a police cruiser, one of the artifacts from Johnny’s files. A fire truck and ambulance idle in the background, as Johnny and Walt’s group has been augmented by a number of volunteers, including an affable and loquacious local fireman named Randell Collier who heads the county’s volunteer search and rescue team. They’ve all got a difficult task ahead of them. We learn that the Highsmith copper mine belonged to Johnny’s great-grandfather: according to family legend, a scrappy entrepreneur who created the bulk of the Smith family fortune. This particular venture was only marginally profitable, however, and was closed in the 1920s, though the property itself was never sold. With its dark, winding tunnels, the mine has long been an irresistible attraction to adventuresome teens. But it’s also extremely unsafe, full of falls and drops, totally unlit of course. And thanks to recent blasting for a new ski resort on the far side of the mountain, the old tunnels are more unstable than ever. Walt initially refused to let Johnny lead them in past the entrance until Collier’s team got there. Now, as they prepare to go in, more people arrive. Among them are Dana Bright and a Bangor Daily News photographer; the parents of two of the teens; and Reverend Purdy and his Faith Alliance functionaries, who are ready to mediate the latest Johnny “miracle-in-progress.” The teens’ parents immediately besiege Johnny: Are their kids all right? What has he seen so far? Johnny’s gifts are now pretty much beyond question in these parts; which means when Johnny says he *doesn’t* know anything yet, the parents react with disappointment, and even a hint of betrayal (and even in this small incident we can foresee how quickly Johnny’s fame may someday turn against him). Purdy gracefully intervenes, offering comfort to the families while they wait, as well as his confidence that Johnny will indeed find their children.

Dana, meanwhile, has some questions of her own. She's heard about Johnny's connection to the Highsmith mine. If his family owned it, then presumably the Alliance does now. Johnny glances at Purdy "comforting" the scared parents and has a sudden insight: Purdy may be legally liable for any accidents involving the old mine; no wonder he was so quick to arrive. He's covering his own ass, not just promoting Johnny's. Dana reacts as Sarah drives up with a thermos of coffee for Walt. The gang's all here, and there's a moment when uneasy looks ricochet around like balls in a game of bumper pool. Walt breaks the silence, nodding to Johnny: "Let's mount up."

The search team heads into the mine entrance, using flashlights and lanterns to light their way. The mine, with its dank cave-like tunnels supported by crumbling wooden buttresses, proves to be unfamiliar terrain for Collier's men, who have more experience finding lost hikers and pulling injured motorists from roadside ravines. It's tough going for Johnny too, though for different reasons. A shred of cloth torn from one of the kids' jackets gives Johnny a vision of what happened: The two couples were poking about the mine when there was a cave-in that trapped and separated them. One of the girls twisted her ankle badly, and the kids' attempts to find a way out just led them deeper. But at least Johnny knows the rescue team's on the right track.

But when he leans against a tunnel support, pausing to catch his breath, he gets a distracting vision from the much more distant past. Suddenly, the abandoned mine becomes a working mine, as it was in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two lines of bone-weary, begrimed men trudge up from the lower chambers, parting as they pass the rescue team going the other way. At first Johnny's just intrigued by this "documentary vision" a bit of history – until some of the miners turn their heads to shoot him dirty looks as they go by. "Mister Smith," one says sarcastically, tipping his battered helmet. The resentment and even hatred in the eyes of many of

these men is unmistakable, but why is it directed at Johnny?

He has little time to ponder this before he hears someone shouting “Fire in the hole!” Then the tunnel’s rocked by an explosion that almost knocks him off his feet. “You okay?” Walt says, helping to steady him, and Johnny nods. Again, it was just a vision – miners from the past using dynamite to blast a new tunnel – but the sound of the explosion now seems to bleed out of the vision and reverberate in the present-day tunnels. And is it Johnny’s imagination, or do the rock walls seem to shudder a bit, dust and gravel sifting down from between the rotted beams? These visions are distracting, to say the least, and they begin to turn downright menacing, as when Johnny sees a rusted mining cart hurtling toward him – a vision from the past, presumably. But then, seconds later, the same cart again hurtles down the tracks. Only this time everyone sees it, and scatters just in time. It’s almost as if there’s a “Christine” element at work in this mine, and Johnny begins to sense a residue of anger buried in these old stones and timbers: an animus directed at him, though again he doesn’t understand why.

As the search continues, the rescuers face a host of problems. Blocked passageways, collapsing corridors, tunnels filled with water and debris. The mine may not be “alive” or actively malevolent, but it sometimes seems that way. And the dangerous mine and his distracting visions aren’t Johnny’s only worries. There’s also tremendous tension between himself and Walt, a tension aggravated by the claustrophobic environment. Walt needs Johnny for this rescue – he asked for his help, after all – and it’s not as if he suspects that Johnny’s slept with his wife. But he still blames him for coming between himself and Sarah. And Johnny, meanwhile, carries his own burden of guilt, and perhaps even jealousy now that Sarah’s acting as if that one night never happened. All this is unsaid for the moment, but it simmers in the air between them, making it that much harder for Johnny to focus on the task at hand. Finally, though, the team locates one of the two lost couples – the girl with the twisted ankle and her

boyfriend – at the bottom of a small drop. But as Collier and another rescuer clamber down to them, Johnny has a flash of an entire mine shaft collapsing, with dozens of workers trapped inside. The vision is so intense that Johnny thinks for a second that the modern-day mine is collapsing too...

...And this time he's right. The unstable old tunnels *are* giving way. The rescuers and the kids scramble to get clear. But Collier, bringing up the rear, is struck by falling rocks. As the dust clears, Johnny starts to pick himself up, and is hit by another vision: amidst the debris, a miner is cradling the body of co-worker and shouting – seemingly at Johnny – “You killed him! You hear me Smith? You killed him!” The vision fades away, and Johnny crawls toward Collier, checks his pulse, and realizes that this good-natured, blithely courageous man is dead, his neck broken. The Highsmith mine has claimed a victim, clearly not its first.

Cut to the group straggling out of the mine entrance, Walt and another volunteer carrying Collier's body on a plank, the two kids being supported by the other rescuers. They all blink in the bright light – only it's not the sun, it's the flash from a zillion cameras, shutters clicking like a swarm of locusts.

In the few hours the rescuers were underground, the ridge has been transformed into a media circus. News helicopters buzz overhead, while on the ground Dana's been joined by a host of reporters, correspondents and cameramen. All the teens' family members are now on hand, along with relatives and friends. The entire crowd surges toward Johnny, barely restrained by Walt's deputies and Purdy's volunteers, forcing the rescuers to shoulder their way toward the waiting ambulances. The teens are suffering from cold and shock. Collier, of course, is beyond help. Watching the media feeding frenzy, Walt realizes he better call Collier's wife before she learns what's happened from her TV.

Purdy, meanwhile, approaches to congratulate Johnny – as photographers and cameramen

capture the scene – but Johnny brusquely reminds him that there are still two more kids trapped down there. Purdy’s confident Johnny will save them too. “Maybe,” Johnny allows. “If the mine lets me.” Leaving a confused Purdy, Johnny asks Dana to look into the mine’s history. As any good reporter would, she’s already been working on that. But her newspaper are pretty skimpy going back that far. It does look like the mine closed several years after a disastrous cave-in killed a dozen miners. This jibes with Johnny’s earlier vision of a cave-in. But it doesn’t explain the sense of, well, *malevolence* he felt below ground. “What else?” he asks. Dana shrugs. There are a few hints of labor unrest around the time of the cave-in, but the mine ultimately remained non-union. There are, however, plenty of clips about Johnny’s great granddad. Apparently, he was quite the local hero and economic booster, and the mine was just the platform on which he built an industrial fortune.

Johnny takes this in, as the parents of the teen boy he rescued approach, along with their son, to offer their thanks. The boy has something for Johnny – a charm bracelet belonging to the still-missing girl. He’s embarrassed he was seeing her at the same time as his girlfriend – but in case it might help Johnny...

It does. Johnny touches it and has a terrifying vision in which he – seeing through the girl’s eyes – drowns in a flooded mine chamber. It’s a vision of the near future, though how near, Johnny doesn’t know. Without telling the boy or his folks what he’s seen, Johnny goes to  
 ust made the difficult call to Collier’s wife, after which he  
 put in another call to an experienced mine rescue squad from Pennsylvania. They should be there in about five hours. But Johnny says they don’t have the time; the girl, and possibly the other boy as well, may be dead before then. “Are you sure?” Walt asks. And Johnny isn’t there was no “clock” on his drowning vision but nevertheless, that’s his gut feeling. As a cop, Walt can appreciate a good gut feeling, but after Collier’s death, he a



so he'll go with him. But that's it: he's not going to risk anyone else's life. Sarah looks at them both as if they're equally crazy, pleads with them to wait. But Walt is just as stubborn as Johnny, and we even sense that he's *competing* with him, not willing to let him play the hero in front of Sarah yet again.

The pair have an immediate problem, though: how to get back inside now that the main tunnel has collapsed. Johnny's old map provides the answer. Tracing the path of a tunnel that doesn't seem to go anywhere, Johnny has a vision of the engineer who drew it, a vision which reveals that this particular tunnel once led to an alternate entrance that was subsequently covered over. He and Walt find the location, clear away some loose rock, and squirm through the hole they've made. They're back inside.

And now as they proceed back into the mine's depths, using the old map to find their way back to the place where the missing teens were last seen, Johnny is again assaulted by visions from the mine's past – flashes showing angry miners squaring off against shotgun-toting Pinkerton detectives during a rally at the mine entrance. The “labor unrest” Dana's research euphemistically spoke of. This time, the flashes also put Johnny squarely in the shoes of his great-grandfather, pitting him against the miners' leader, a man named Cole. Johnny is disturbed to see his celebrated ancestor unmasked as a self-important bully who's clearly unmoved by Cole's complaints of harsh conditions and low pay. Tensions between the two camps are clearly building toward some sort of confrontation...

Tensions between Walt and Johnny remain unsettled and unspoken but are always present as they advance into the mine. As they work together effectively as a team, helping each

a boy – hears Johnny and Walt's voices and shouts for help. They shove some rocks aside and find the kid huddling in a dead-end tunnel. His flashlight died after he and his girlfriend got separated. He doesn't know where she is, but Johnny's visions now home in on her location: she's trapped at the end of a series of partially flooded tunnels.

But as they start to slog through the first of these chambers, Johnny has another vision

from the mine's past: this time it's a vision of himself as his great grand-dad telling a foreman to assign the union trouble makers to tunnel six, and to have them blast their way into a new vein of ore. The foreman objects: that tunnel hasn't been adequately reinforced yet; dynamite could bring down the whole thing down. But Johnny/grand-dad again turns a deaf ear.

Johnny comes out of the vision as suddenly there's another cave-in. Walt shoves Johnny and the boy clear but it taken down by the falling debris. He's badly hurt, but tells Johnny to go on and find the girl while there's still time. A quiet beat between them and only now do they directly confront the personal issue between them and not for long but Walt knows he may not get out of this alive. In a heart-wrenching scene, Walt tells Johnny that it's tough having your wife in love with another man. She's in love with you, Walt, Jo  
Walt but that doesn't make it any easier. You're not a bad guy, John, says Walt. Take care of her.

With these doubts in mind, Johnny gives Walt's hand a squeeze, tells the boy to stay there with him, then heads out, wading back into the flooded chambers. At a certain point, he has to swim underwater to get from one chamber into the next, and as he surfaces, he finds himself in a tangle of bones – human bones, a miner's helmet still strapped around one eyeless skull. The remains weigh him down – it feels as though they're actively trying to drown him and as he's pulled back underwater, flailing to get free, he has a final vision of what his great grandfather's cavalier and perhaps even deliberate negligence wrought: a cave-in that buried his unionist workers. This is his ancestor's legacy, the reason for the anger still seething in the mine.

Finally, Johnny frees himself and surfaces, gasping for breath. He calls out the missing girl's name. Nothing. And then, suddenly, a tearful shout back from the next chamber. Again he dives underwater, then surfaces next to her. She's amazed that she's been found, clinging gratefully to Johnny's neck. But when he tells her they're going to have to swim underwater to

get back, she's terrified again. Johnny does his best to calm her, then tells her that she has to try, and not just to save her own life, but because there's an injured man back there who needs her help and Johnny's if he's going to survive. "Ready?" he asks her. She nods tearfully. "Then take a deep breath," Johnny says. And as they both slip back underwater...

Cut to the surface, where the scene has grown somber and hushed – the teens' families and reporters waiting anxiously, even Purdy now watching the mine entrance with genuine trepidation, and no one waiting more tensely than Sarah and Dana. Suddenly someone shouts: "They made it!" And Johnny and the two kids emerge, Johnny carrying Walt on his back with support from the kids. Sarah rushes forward, with Dana just a step behind her, as again the flashbulbs pop and the crowd erupts in excitement. And Sarah exchanges just the briefest of looks with Johnny before kneeling beside her husband. Dana hugs Johnny, then Purdy embraces them both, again as cameramen record the scene. "You never cease to amaze me, my boy," he says.

"Well, I'm about to amaze you again, Gene," Johnny replies. And then he announces to the press that the Smith family built this mine and sacrificed men's lives for the sake of profit. He can't make up for that tragedy, but he can at least make sure the mine never claims another life. Purdy's Alliance, using Smith family money, will pay to seal the tunnels forever.

Purdy is briefly stunned – this is a huge financial investment – but with the media watching he has no choice but to roll with it and offer his wholehearted support. But then Sarah shouts Johnny's name, and he turns to see her panicked eyes as paramedics rush Walt toward an ambulance. "We're losing him!" one of them shouts. Of

THE END