

## THE DEAD ZONE

“Ascent”

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When Johnny Smith woke from his six-year coma, he found Walt Bannerman living the life he planned to lead – loving the woman he loved and raising the son he’d dreamed of having with her. If Johnny was not an inherently good man, he would hate Walt. Maybe there’s even a part of him that does. But, now Walt is in a coma and Johnny is the only man alive who can contact him. In order to save him, Johnny will have to psychically walk, not only in Walt’s footsteps -- but in his very shoes -- through a surreal landscape of the mind. This episode could end up being the ultimate male bonding experience ... or it could just kill them both.

This episode will give us a new twist on Johnny’s powers, just as “Netherworld” and “Shaman” did in season one. Johnny and Walt will share a vision space. Don’t fight it. Go along for the ride. After all, who’s to say what’s possible -- and what battles might be fought -- when a good man is hovering between life and death?

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Last week, Johnny Smith and Walt Bannerman saved the day. They faced off against a malevolent mine, rescued four trapped teens and came out alive and even bonded in that special John Wayne men-who’ve-been-to-war-together way. But, there’s a kicker to this happy ending ...

In a quiet hospital room, Walt Bannerman sleeps. It’s a sleep Johnny Smith is all too familiar with. The soothing sleep of the coma. Johnny watches with an uncharacteristic sense of helplessness. Though he never asked for his dubious psychic gift, he’s come to like the ability to help people. But, how can he help Walt?

And then there's Sarah. Dark circles take up residence under her makeup-less eyes. Nervous fingers run through her hair. A woman shouldn't have to deal with this situation once, much less twice. But, call her "Job" and pull up a chair.

Our story starts out simply enough. Sarah asks Johnny to touch Walt. Tell me if he'll be okay. Is he coming back? Is my Walt even still in there? Curious himself, Johnny gives it the old college try. But, when he grasps Walt's arm, he's transported into one of the strangest visions he's ever had. *It's a hellish surreal landscape of flashing images: Walt's childhood memories, his nightmares, his best moments ... and his worst.* Johnny comes out of the chaos with a pounding headache. What the hell was that? Whatever it was, Walt's neurologist is excited. For the split-second when Johnny was touching him, Walt's EEG (brain waves) spiked. It's the first positive sign they've had.

But, Johnny is spooked. He talks it over with Bruce. Touching Walt was a shock, yes, but it was also like slipping on an old comfortable sweater. Hidden somewhere in those swirling images, there was a soothing voice calling out to him. A voice he recognized. Whatever dark world Walt is trapped in, Johnny used to be a resident. The real world is tough, loud, full of pain and betrayal. The coma is peace. No reporters could find him in there. No Purdy. No screaming fans. Johnny is scared by how enticing it is ...

In her office, DR. LAILA BROCK – Walt's attractive 30-something neurologist – talks to Johnny. She and Sarah want Johnny to try again, but he doesn't think he can help. This isn't a missing kid or a lost wedding ring. It's a man who's just ... gone. Down for

the count. Out to lunch. The images he got were like psychic static and no one knows if the station that is Walt's mind is even broadcasting anymore.

To try to convince him, Sarah leads Johnny back to Walt's room, where he is surprised to see twinkling white Christmas lights strung all around and classic Motown playing softly on a boombox. Little Johnny is sitting vigil at Walt's bedside. Sarah explains that Dr. Brock told Johnny, Jr. that any sort of visual or aural stimulation might help a coma patient resurface. It was his idea. Johnny feels like an absolute shit. He nods slowly. Okay.

Johnny Smith touches Walt Bannerman's arm and finds himself thrown back into the maelstrom of Walt's subconscious. *It's Cleaves Mills as interpreted by Salvador Dali.* But, if those flashing bizarre images are the hurricane, he soon finds himself dropped into a calm eye. *Johnny (as Walt) walks down a quiet street talking to Sarah. Johnny sees the wedding ring on his finger, glimpses Walt's reflection in a puddle and realizes that he's walking in Walt's shoes within Walt's memories. This is the scene which opened "Descent". (NOTE: In all of these memories, Johnny will play Walt as he played Tommy in "Enigma").* Walt broaches a tough subject. *"Our marriage is in trouble."* In this scene, Johnny feels the pain and helplessness Walt feels – his marriage is coming apart at the seams thanks to a man he's beginning to genuinely like. *Walt's cell phone rings. Kids are trapped in a mine. Walt heads for the station ... down a dark alley ... and suddenly ...*

Johnny (as Johnny) is standing in a dark spooky corridor within the mine. He looks around in confusion. What the hell is going on? Is this another memory? Slowly, Johnny begins to explore the mine shaft. It looks like our mine from last week, but there are weird discrepancies. Support timbers meet at impossible angles. Around one corner, it rains. Around another, it snows. Voices WHISPER to him from dark corners. Air currents ruffle Johnny's hair. Suddenly, a door CREAKS open further down the corridor and a shaft of LIGHT streams into the mine. Motes of coal dust dance hypnotically in this heavenly ray. Johnny walks toward it as if hypnotized ... and slowly the shaft of light MOVES CLOSER TO HIM. Johnny senses danger ... and so he should. This white light is no heavenly messenger. Nor is it evil. It is simply nothingness. And it will play a major part in our story. The nameless faceless nemesis. It's erasing Walt's memory ... and if Johnny gets in its way, he might find himself erased as well. Johnny runs from the light and escapes into a nearby connecting tunnel and finds himself in ...

*The Bannerman Home. Johnny is Walt again. It's another memory. The kitchen is dark. Sarah sits at the table, crying softly. It's the day Johnny Smith woke up from his coma. No one ever expected this. And, if Sarah thinks her world is rocked by Johnny's Lazarus-like resurrection, it's nothing compared to what Walt feels. Fate's tectonic plates are shifting. This is the first moment, Walt senses there's a quake coming. Walt walks to his patrol car and drives away. "Never going back, huh?" Walt looks over, surprised to see a pleasant-faced elderly man, JOE, in the passenger seat. Walt shrugs.*

*“I don’t know, dad. I can’t even begin to comprehend this. We never thought he’d wake up. He meant so much to Sarah—Means so much to her. And my son ... isn’t mine-- I’ve been raising this man’s son.” Walt suddenly pulls over to the side of the road, overcome with emotion. Joe comforts him, but there’s something eerie about Joe. Johnny (as Walt) looks up and Joe winks at him.*

When Johnny jolts awake in the hospital room, his nose gushes blood. These visions are dangerous and painful. A breathless Johnny tries to explain the landscape of Walt’s coma-bound brain. Johnny asks Sarah about Joe. Sarah tells him that Walt was unusually close to his father, but Joe Bannerman died of brain cancer two years ago. Johnny’s frustrated that he can only be Walt. How do I get him out of this? Dr. Brock points out that Johnny was himself in the mineshaft. What if the mine tunnels represent the pathways between memories? Johnny senses that the shifting world of Walt’s mind defies easy definition. He wonders aloud how this connection between the two men is even possible. Dr. Brock hypothesizes that although he’s unconscious, Walt’s Dead Zone may currently be as active as Johnny’s. You two could conceivably be sharing a vision space. Johnny: So there’s a chance I can get him to see me ... and hear me. Dr. Brock says that’s what they’re all hoping for.

To that end, Johnny will have to descend back into Walt’s mind ... and walk in his shoes again. On this journey, Johnny will realize a few things.

*Walt Bannerman is a good man.* We'll see scenes of Johnny as Walt keeping the peace and saving lives – albeit in a quieter less flashy way than Johnny often does.

*Walt Bannerman loves his family more than anything else in this world.* We'll see scenes of Johnny as Walt living through pivotal moments with Sarah: their meeting and courtship, their wedding and the birth of Johnny, Jr.

*Walt Bannerman is scared to his core by Johnny Smith's re-entry into his family's life.* These scenes are more nebulous and murky. There is a fear that can't be pinned down as shown by Walt's unease on the day Johnny wakes up. And yet there's a mutual respect shown in a scene from the past where Walt goes to the still-comatose Johnny and asks him for permission to marry Sarah.

More importantly, we'll see what this knowledge means to Johnny. He goes through the ultimate empathetic bonding experience with Walt. Johnny has always felt like the third wheel in this love triangle. He'll learn that Walt has always felt the same way – because Johnny loved Sarah first.

But, this story isn't just Johnny at the movies watching a Walt Bannerman film festival. That's just his way in. As all good epic journeys are, this trip will be fraught with danger. In the physical world, Walt's condition deteriorates more quickly than Johnny's ever did. He won't last six days much less six months. And, in turn, Johnny faces greater and greater physical danger. At one point, Johnny comes out of a violent vision ... and

stops breathing. Lovely Dr. Brock will step in to give him CPR, but once he's recovered, she delivers the bad news. She doesn't want him trying again.

But, Johnny feels that he's on the brink of making contact with Walt. With Bruce's help, he sneaks back into the hospital and tries again. He's finally able to bypass the childhood flashes, navigate the subconscious memories and avoid the threat of the white light long enough to make contact with Walt -- the conscious, thinking part of him. The men come face to face in the mineshaft. But, Walt still thinks he's in the mine trying to rescue trapped teens. Johnny has to convince him that he's lying in a bed in a coma. Walt doesn't believe it ... or won't. Johnny realizes that finding Walt is only half the problem. You can lead a horse out of a coma, but you can't make him wake up.

*Johnny and Walt find themselves in the hospital on the day Walt first met Sarah. This scene plays out; Johnny and Walt are both observers. Walt and Sarah meet cute at the malfunctioning soup/cocoa/coffee machine. Walt turns to Sarah in line behind him. Careful, I just got a cup of lentil soup with half and half. Sarah smiles for the first time in weeks. It's obvious that it was love at first sight for Walt, but Sarah was at the hospital to see her sleeping love. She wasn't really in a flirting mood. Still, the tall handsome lawman makes an impression. Johnny turns to Walt: "Why would I be here?" But, Walt isn't fazed, as you often aren't by strange discrepancies in dreams. Walt (in the memory) walks over and sits with his father. Walt: I just met the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.*

*Joe: That girl's carrying baggage. She's been hurt. You don't want to pay the price for what some other jerk did to her. But, Walt isn't listening. Joe sighs.*

Johnny turns to Walt: "Did your father like Sarah?" Walt nods, "He loved her from the first moment." Johnny is confused. Every time he's glimpsed Joe in Walt's memories, the old man is trying to convince Walt that Sarah doesn't love him. Walt comments that maybe his dad is just being the realist; he's smart enough to realize that Sarah would never stop loving Johnny. But, Johnny senses a darker power at work, manipulating these memories.

I don't think that's really your father.

And a soft raspy voice replies, I don't think this fella's really your friend.

Walt and Johnny are both startled to see Joe Bannerman standing beside them. They're all back in the mine shaft. Joe appears as he did the last time Walt saw him, weakened by cancer and wheezing out his words. But, this isn't a memory. It's a call from beyond the grave. Joe's smile is beatific. He tells his son that there's more to life than ... well, life. Death isn't to be feared. It's a relief from pain and anger and – Joe looks to Johnny pointedly – doubt. Doubt about who your wife loves and who your friends really are. Walt looks at Johnny and we see a hint of distrust. Johnny urges Walt not to listen to Joe. But, Walt is under his father's spell. Joe asks Walt why Johnny would come to save him. After all, Johnny wants what Walt has. Who's the imposter here? As Joe puts out his hand and clasps Walt's, a heavenly glow emanates from his body. A



familiar glow. The rasp is gone as Joe's voice takes on an authoritative tone. "Come on with me now. Let's go." And that's the voice that Johnny recognizes. "Those words, that voice. Walt, I've heard this pitch before. I think from when I was in my coma. And it wasn't from your father. Can't you see he's feeding your own fear and insecurity? Sarah loves you. Little Johnny needs you. And you're wandering around here going, 'Aw shucks, nobody loves me.'" Walt feels a spark of anger and tells Johnny to shut up.

And Johnny realizes what it's going to take to wrest Walt away from Joe and out of the coma. Anger. Right about now, Walt doubts Sarah's love too much to use it as a lifeline. And, as if this thought creates a magnetic memory pull, Joe disappears and Johnny and Walt find themselves ...

... in another memory. *Walt and Johnny watch a quiet but telling scene. Walt comes home late on the night Johnny and Sarah made love. Walt arrives to find Sarah gone. He goes to her room and sees her open jewel box ... and notices the missing trinket ring. He thinks he knows where she went ... and Johnny confirms it.*

She was with me.

Walt glares at Johnny, "You son of a bitch." Johnny goads Walt into a fight – sure that his anger is the only thing that will coax him away from the lulling calm of the coma -- and the two men duke it out over Sarah. Mano a mano. This can be the weirdest fight we've ever seen. A tussle worthy of the rowdiest road house taking place in a surreal shifting landscape.

Finally, Sarah's voice interrupts them from an unlikely source – Walt's collar mic. "Walt, honey, please come back. We need you." In the real world, time is running out. Both men are sinking deeper. Their EEGs are both flattening out. Both men realize they can't leave this woman behind. They work together to find a way out through a dangerous tight corridor filled with jagged splintered support beams and choking dust. As they squeeze through, almost suffocating, but ... almost ... out.

And both men wake up in the hospital room, squinting in the bright daylight. There is much rejoicing. Everyone is there. Sarah is in tears. Johnny, Jr. hugs Walt. Bruce helps Johnny recover. Dr. Brock gives Johnny a hero's kiss. Johnny grins; he wasn't expecting such an enthusiastic response. In fact, the doctor wasn't even there when he went in. And it was night. How much time has passed? And then Johnny notices other weird elements. The squeaky wheel on the jello cart is a little too jarring. A spider crawls across the pristine hospital sheet. Johnny sees a doctor pass in the hall ... a doctor who looks just like Walt's father.

Johnny turns to Sarah, who is hugging Walt. His eyes meet hers over Walt's shoulder. And she smiles, but it's not a beautiful Sarah smile. It's a cat-that-ate-the-canary smile. Sarah's mouth opens wide ... and the white LIGHT surges out, enveloping Walt.

Oh shit. They're not out yet.

Johnny reaches out to grab Walt ... and they run for their lives down the hospital corridors ... which MORPH into the mineshaft corridors. They turn a corner to find Joe standing there with a kindly smile. You don't need to go, son. We've got so much to catch up on. He tries to distract Walt, appearing around every turn, enticing him with the subtle joys of rest ... of peace. Johnny: It's not your father, Walt. It never was. Finally, Walt PUNCHES the old man ... and he crumbles to the floor. Suddenly, Joe MORPHS into SARAH, who looks up with a pained expression and a trickle of blood from her mouth. How could you? Walt is horrified, but Johnny grabs his arm and pulls him away. It's not real. It was never Joe. It was never Sarah. Each was simply the face death took to try to entice Walt. But, the faces are gone now. The crumpled figure on the ground melts like a candle, becoming a familiar white light which destroys everything it touches.

Johnny whispers under his breath to Walt. Run.

Johnny and Walt find an airshaft. They look up and see stars – it's a way out. As Johnny reaches out to test the strength of a rickety old elevator chain, they feel a sudden RUMBLING. The rafters start to shake and dust sifts down. Uh-oh. Both men look down the shaft and see ... the WHITE LIGHT in all its ferocious glory. It's a roiling tidal wave of blinding nothingness which eats up everything in its path. As it zooms up the shaft toward them, they hear support timbers CRUNCHING and rocks EXPLODING. The whole place is coming down around their ears. This is it. Their last chance. Both men

grab the suspended chain which ratchets through its rusty gears, lifting them up at a dizzying pace. The white light nips at their heels ...

Johnny and Walt wake up with a simultaneous start in the hospital room. They're both weak and exhausted, but glad to be alive. It's dark. Bruce and Sarah gasp in relief. Johnny looks at Sarah with a hint of worry, but she's just Sarah. Relieved. This time they're really back. Walt hugs Johnny. Dr. Brock rushes in and checks Walt over. In time, he should make a full recovery. Walt remembers nothing of his shared adventure with Johnny. He also can't remember details of his life right before the accident. Dr. Brock says that temporary amnesia is a common side effect of head injury comas, but everything should come back to him eventually. Johnny frowns at that. Everything?

A week later, Walt is released ...

Purdy plays up the "Lazarus" aspect of Johnny's latest miracle ...

Johnny, Jr. has a newfound respect and admiration for weird Mr. Smith ...

Sarah basks in the glow of her reunited family ...

And Johnny and Walt are bonded. But, it's a tenuous bond in the light of day ... and consciousness. The war's over and they've come home to the woman they both love. And, the emergency may have let Johnny and Sarah put their own personal tensions aside for a few days, but now the old tensions wash in just like that pesky white light, threatening to ruin everything.

As Sarah drives Walt home, he suddenly asks, “When did you return the trinket ring to Johnny?” Sarah’s so unprepared for that question, she almost loses control of the car. From the back, little Johnny says, “What ring?” Sarah looks at Walt; does he know? But, his look is enigmatic. Maybe he does. Maybe he doesn’t. Only time will tell.