

THE DEAD ZONE

The Outsider
(fka Wrinkle in Time)

Story by Steve Binder
Revisions by Craig Silverstein
9/5/02

If the apple never fell on Isaac Newton's head, would he still have formulated his Three Laws of Motion? Can you rush inspiration? Johnny is forced to confront these questions when a vision takes him six years into the future to bear witness to a terrifying medical epidemic. Thousands of future lives hang in the balance, and Johnny's only hope lies in the present, with a difficult man who doesn't believe in any future, including his own.

Believe it or not, losing six years of your life to a coma-induced void is not without its benefits. Sure, you miss little things like a presidential election and the birth of your child but you also get the sensation of being skipped a few years into the future, into a world full of new curiosities like mp3s and Viagra. At the same time, the world's been storing up historical milestones for you to experience as if they were brand new.

In Johnny Smith's case, these would be the last two seasons of Seinfeld. Alone in his den, he finishes watching a rerun and we catch our hero doing something rare: laughing out loud. He calls up Bruce to relate the story. Yeah, Johnny, I remember that one. But Bruce knows there are few things that can cause a tortured psychic who carries the fate of the world on his shoulders to smile, so he humors his friend for a minute.

The show is over, commercials are on, and it's late. Johnny tries to turn off the TV, but the remote doesn't work. Johnny lets out the low batteries sigh known to men round the world. He grabs his cane and crosses to the TV. On screen is a commercial featuring a lovely young woman, about 25, talking frankly to the camera. It's not that I

don't like the way I look. It's that I *do* like the way I look, and I want to keep it that way. The commercial is for a new drug called Juvenol[®] that claims to prevent wrinkles. It's a pill, like Propecia, the hair-loss pill, except instead of affecting hormone levels, Juvenol affects cell groupings that lead to wrinkling. It's the latest in prescription gene therapy. And it's coming out next week. Ask your doctor about the little green pill.

Johnny pauses to watch the young woman smile beautifully, and then he reaches out and turns off the TV.

*Along with a shock of static electricity, Johnny is hit with a vision. Like the TV set in *The Siege*, Johnny's TV seems to turn itself back on, crackles and fuzzes as the screen flicks to a segment of *60 Minutes*. The date of the show is June 23rd, 2009. The image is of an infant lying in an incubator, his skin wrinkled from head to toe. The baby looks long dead, except for one thing: he is wailing. The voice-over of the broadcaster continues: For the tiny victims of Juvenol, there is no hope. For the rest of America, there is only one fear: how bad is it going to get? The segment shot pulls back to show rows upon rows of similar incubators, filled with crying babies, all horrifically desiccated.*

Johnny snaps out of the vision, shaken, and looks down at his TV. It stares back at him with a black screen and silence. MAIN TITLES

Johnny enters the chapel at Faith Heritage to catch the tail end of Reverend Purdy's sermon. Purdy notices Johnny in the back of the congregation, and knows something is wrong. Afterwards, in Purdy's office, Johnny lays it all out. He tells Purdy about the vision he had, then fills him in on the rest of what he's found after an hour or two on the Internet. Juvenol is a wonder-treatment developed by Meyer-Schwab, a huge

pharmaceutical company on the level of Eli Lilly. Juvenol received FDA approval for prescription last month. It's going to be shipped to pharmacies all across the country in nine days. Six years later, it will claim the lives of thousands of children born from women who will soon swear by the miraculous medicine.

Gene Purdy has to sit down. He's more than gotten used to Johnny's powers by now, but the scope of Johnny's visions are usually limited to a single person in jeopardy, like Todd Paley or the Kirby child. Sometimes it grows to include many people, like the students at Cathy's steakhouse, but this is something wholly different (remember, Purdy doesn't know about Armageddon). This vision refers to thousands of lives, and the culprit is not a serial killer or drug dealer, but a multi-billion dollar corporation that probably doesn't even know it's done anything wrong. Purdy's tone in this scene is like Denholm Elliot to Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (It's like nothing you've gone after before)

Johnny is fully aware of the dilemma at hand. But he cannot ignore what he has seen, and desperately feels that he must do something about it. That's why he's come here. Johnny needs to move fast, and Purdy has connections. Purdy grows uneasy as Johnny lays out his plan: he wants to handle this quickly and quietly. That means going to Meyer-Schwab, and convincing them to halt the shipment of Juvenol before it's too late. Purdy counsels Johnny: you're talking about major dollar decisions that affect everything from shipping and advertising to corporate image. Johnny counters that a giant class action lawsuit down the road is an even bigger cost. Purdy reels under the impact of this conversation. This is the kind of dilemma that tests a man's faith, and Purdy has to ask himself for the first time, how much do I really believe in Johnny

Smith? His answer to this internal query comes out slowly and indirectly, as he says Faith Heritage doesn't have the kind of connections with corporate America that Johnny thinks they have. Johnny nods, One thing I've learned about you, Gene: If you don't know the people you usually know the people who know the people.

Purdy reluctantly makes some phone calls and gets Johnny an appointment to see someone in legal affairs at Meyer-Schwab (it's the best he could do). Johnny drives to their office in Portland, actually a sprawling office park. As he passes the security gate and heads to the main entrance, *Johnny touches a sculpture, a piece of corporate modern art, and enters a vision where the sculpture is defaced with splattered paint. Johnny looks up to see himself surrounded by PROTESTERS picketing the entrance, holding signs condemning the corporate killers. Some of the signs display blown up photos of grotesque Juvenol Babies. The picketers seem to direct their hate at Johnny, and he feels guilty although he hasn't done anything wrong.* Johnny opens the front door and looks behind him. The protesters are gone. A memory that hasn't happened yet. Johnny enters the giant lobby and comes face to face with the Meyer-Schwab LOGO, which will become a symbol of the faceless Goliath opposite our David. After being forced to wait for nearly an hour, Johnny gets a few minutes with Wendell Hoffman, corporate counsel for Meyer-Schwab. Hoffman, very busy, shuttles Johnny into his office and asks how he knows Garret Carter. Johnny doesn't know Garret, explains how Garret knows Purdy, and then gets down to business. Hoffman listens to Johnny's careful explanation of his powers and the vision he's seen for Juvenol with a straight face. He then makes some psychic jokes, thinking the whole thing is a prank on him. When he sees how serious Johnny is, Hoffman becomes uncomfortable and a little frightened to be alone

with him. He pretends to take Johnny seriously, promises to get right on this and even fire off an e-mail to research. Johnny grows angry and impatient, doesn't have time for this feeble-minded shit. He reaches out and grabs the lawyer by the wrist and is swept into a future-vision *wherein he becomes Wendell Hoffman in his suit and black-rimmed glasses, sitting with seven other corporate lawyers. They're sitting behind their CEO, who is sitting in front of a Senate sub-committee who are conducting an investigation into the Juvenol crisis and the FDA's role in it. A gaggle of press hover in the background, snapping pictures with tiny, high-end digital cameras that have become the pro-standard in 2009. Testifying before the sub-committee is a handsome man, DR. THOMAS BERKE, 36. Dr. Berke developed a computer model that revolutionized (will revolutionize) the way we map Human DNA. This model clearly shows the fatal flaw in Juvenol, but was not available to the FDA when they approved the product in 2003. Johnny/Wendell suddenly lurches forward and sneezes violently. Many heads turn to him, including Dr. Berke, the last face Johnny sees before he is pulled back into the present, where present-day Wendell Hoffman yanks his wrist away. Hoffman snatches up his phone and calls building security. Thomas Berke, says Johnny. Dr. Thomas Berke discovers what's wrong with your drug, you have to ask him. Hoffman, backing away from his desk, says, I don't know what you're talking about, but you have five seconds to leave this office. Two Security Guards enter the room, relieving Johnny of the chance. They escort him out and warn him not to come back.*

Johnny shrugs off his defeat at Meyer-Schwab. His mission is clear: find Dr. Thomas Berke. This proves to be more difficult than it seems. Johnny goes straight to Walt, whose initial 411 searches come up blank. As does the AMA search for Doctors.

The national search comes up blank, and then Walt has another idea. He finds Thomas Berke but tells Johnny, you're not gonna like it. The guy has an address but no phone number, not even an unlisted one. And he lives over 6,000 miles away in Vancouver, British Columbia. CUT TO:

Johnny and Purdy in Purdy's limo. At Johnny's insistence, Purdy has arranged for immediate transportation to Vancouver, but not without a quid pro quo. At Purdy's insistence, Johnny must sign legal documents protecting Faith Heritage from Johnny's actions. Basically something that says, The views and opinions expressed by Johnny Smith do not necessarily reflect the views of Faith Heritage Alliance, etc. Purdy senses a major storm brewing, and although he supports Johnny, he must protect his flock. Johnny signs the papers, feeling that as long as Purdy is not in his way on this, he can protect himself however he likes. The limo stops, and we reveal it's on a tarmac in front of a private jet.

Vancouver. Johnny tracks down Thomas Berke. His address is in the seedy, drug-addict infested gas lamp district near downtown. Johnny knocks on an apartment door and THOMAS opens the door. It's the same man from Johnny's vision, but it takes Johnny a second to realize it. The composed scientist that Johnny saw is an unshaven slob, wearing a grungy Dr. Who T-Shirt and clutching a forty of Boons. The apartment behind him is basically a closet with a computer. He looks at Johnny over with glazed suspicion, What are you selling? Bibles?

Johnny discovers the truth: in present day 2003, Thomas Berke is a loser. A burnout. A man who believes his best years are behind him. Thomas doesn't recognize Johnny, and Johnny isn't eager to take the tack of spilling the beans that he's a psychic,

especially considering how well that went over at Meyer-Schwab. Instead, he tells Thomas that he's very interested in the field of three dimensional modeling for chemical interactions, and that he heard Thomas was an expert. Thomas explodes, accusing Johnny of being sent by M.I.T., his alma mater, to spy on his research. You guys already denied me my grant, told me it didn't work, and you know what? You're right! It doesn't! But don't think you can fly up here and grab my data. Johnny regrets his introduction, and decides to tell Thomas exactly who he is and why he's here. Thomas is stunned at first, especially at the part where Johnny claims that Thomas will become a respected scientist who testifies before senators; a great man. This is almost harder to believe in than a man who can see into the future. Johnny asks Thomas if he's allowed to prove himself. Thomas shrugs and extends his hand. *Johnny takes it and is suddenly in a hospital room. He stands nearby as Thomas, six years later, tells his wife to Breathe! just as a Doctor tells her to Push! CLAIRE BERKE, raven hair, green eyes, perfect skin, strains to give birth, asking them both to Shut up! Thomas holds her hand, and Johnny watches on as the Obstetrician delivers their baby. Instead of the expected cry, an eerie silence. The doctor looks up at Thomas and Claire, who is reaching her arms out for her newborn. Thomas steps around to see the baby as the Doctor signals to the nurse, who runs out of the room, calling to another nurse. Thomas freezes as he sets eyes on his child — and its severely withered body. He stands frozen as Claire begins to scream .*

Johnny comes out of the vision, surprised and saddened. Now things are making more sense. Thomas will become a parent to a baby struck with the Juvenol curse, and that will inspire him to find the cause. Thomas laughs. A baby? Him? Not in this life.

Johnny assures him, he'll have a son by a woman named Claire. She has black hair, green eyes. Thomas looks confused for a moment, and then tells Johnny he doesn't know anyone who matches that description. Claire who? He doesn't know any Claire. Johnny doesn't know either, and Thomas suddenly gets angry and defensive. He can't solve his algorithm in a week, he's been working on it for five years for nothing! He's a failure. Johnny reminds Thomas that even Einstein flunked out of high school. Thomas retorts, you can't just take Einstein out of high school, sit him in front of a blackboard and force him to come up with the theory of relativity in one week. Thomas throws his bottle at Johnny, rages at him for making him feel even more miserable than before, and chases him out of his apartment.

Johnny is back at square one. Thomas Berke, it appears, is a dead end. Maybe if he had more time but Juvenol ships nationwide in six days. Johnny is out of time, out of options. He decides to take matters into his own hands. So much for being quiet.

Johnny calls a press conference, on his own, and goes public with what he's seen. He tells the press he believes Juvenol to be an unsafe product that will have disastrous effects upon its users' children.

The fringe media eats this up, of course, spinning a prophet-of-doom angle. The mainstream media has a more interesting reaction. Legit news producers are intrigued: why is a psychic protesting a prescription drug? It's very specific, and not particularly exploitative (he didn't predict the next major terrorist strike or anything). News outfits pick up the story and run it as a later segment in the eleven o'clock news.

The next morning, Meyer-Schwab takes a major hit on Wall Street, their stock dipping dramatically. Now there's a story to report. Now there's a new joke for Leno's opening monologue. A financial panelist show like The McLaughlin Group discusses stock fluctuation and "The Smith Factor"... they're only half-joking.

Retaliation from the corporate giant comes swiftly.

Johnny made the press conference on Monday. On Wednesday, he is served with multiple lawsuits; libel, defamation, etc. Faith Heritage Alliance is also being sued by Meyer-Schwab, and Purdy's lawyers move to coordinate damage control. Juvenol's parent company issues a statement that guarantees their product is safe, and wonderful.

The FDA agrees. They have passed clinical trials that tested for pregnancy issues.

Johnny's fanatic followers come out in strong support of him, though some scream that Johnny has "sold out", believing claims that he's been hired by Procter & Gamble or some other competitor to Meyer-Schwab in order to hinder sales. Worst of all, Johnny gets a vision that show his efforts have been almost for naught: though his message will reach many young women that will now avoid Juvenol, it will still become a huge hit.

And, in a perverse way, this "bad press" only serves to spread the brand-name further.

Johnny answers a phone call, expecting another lawsuit or crazy fan, but instead hears the voice of Thomas Berke.

"You really believe in this stuff, don't you?"

Thomas is calling from right outside Johnny's gate. Johnny asks what he wants.

Thomas says he's been fooling around with his mapping algorithm. Johnny lets him in.

Thomas admits that after Johnny left, he started thinking. After he saw Johnny making his statement on TV, he started working. Johnny eagerly asked how far he got. Thomas shakes his head, "nowhere." Johnny smiles with a little black humor, and says that's okay, we still have three days or so left. Thomas then confesses the other, *real* reason he's come all the way to Cleaves Mills. He lied. He does have some idea about who "Claire", his future wife, could be. He went to grad school at M.I.T. with a girl named Claire Eisenhaus who had long black hair and beautiful green eyes. He actually had a major crush on her, though he hasn't seen her in years, and doubts she'd ever go out with him, let alone have his child. Thomas runs a nervous hand through his hair, and Johnny notices that the guy has cleaned himself up a bit since their last encounter. Something about this feels right to Johnny, and he decides they need to find this Claire Eisenhaus as soon as possible. Thomas says, "oh, I know where she is...but you're not gonna like it." "What, does she live in Bulgaria?" "No, she's here. She works for Meyer-Schwab."

Johnny is now certain that this woman, Claire, is the key. She's a scientist, Thomas is a scientist, they get together somehow in 2006, have a baby in 2009 who is afflicted with Juvenol syndrome, and then *together* are able to discover and define the genetic flaw that no one can see today.

Johnny needs to change that timeline. He needs them to get together by Sunday. He needs that evidence now. That means going back into the lion's den, a.k.a. Meyer-Schwab's plant in Portland. When Johnny enters the lobby, everyone... from the receptionist to the janitor to the executive waiting for the elevator... recognizes him. The reception is less than warm. Johnny asks to see Claire Eishenhaus, and gets stonewalled. He leaves his number before security comes over and throws him out.

Later that day, Claire calls the Smith house. Furious. "Who the hell are you and what do you want from me?" It seems that Claire has been temporarily suspended by Meyer-Schwab, pending investigation into her relationship with Johnny Smith. They suspect an insider was working with Johnny in a scam to damage their product. Claire of course denied this, she doesn't know this kook from a hole in the wall... but he did ask for her by name, so during this sensitive time, her superiors think it's best she take a break...

Johnny apologizes, and offers to explain everything, but not over the phone. He wants to meet in a public place, a restaurant he knows. Claire, frustrated and wanting to get to the bottom of this, agrees. Johnny hangs up and turns to Thomas, "get ready for your date."

What follows is the most awkward blind-date-with-psychic-chaperone ever put on film. Claire shows up at the restaurant and is surprised to find Thomas waiting for her instead of Johnny. She recognizes Thomas from school (and we'll learn that she thought

he was the most brilliant member of their graduation class). Claire has brought a tape recorder along, seeking to record Johnny admitting that he's never met or talked with her before. Thomas makes an excuse for Johnny being late, explains how he met him for the first time only a few days ago. Thomas is clearly attracted to Claire, and feels insecure around her. He lies about what he's been doing these past few years, claims he's been working on a government project with top-level clearance. Claire isn't angry with Thomas like she is with Johnny, but she's definitely wary about his motivations. Thomas excuses himself and heads to the bathroom, where Johnny is waiting. He hands Johnny a napkin that Claire touched, and Johnny tries to use his powers to play "Psychic Cyrano", seeing if he can get a vision that will give Thomas an angle to help make the sparks fly.

Romantic sparks, however, fail to materialize. It seems that getting star-crossed lovers to cross their stars on demand isn't so simple, though Thomas and Claire do fall into an easy rapport, matching wits. Thomas ends up grilling Claire about Juvenol, asking if they tested it for recessive gene mutations. Claire refuses to discuss it. She came here to get herself out of trouble, not dig in deeper. He suggests some other possible problems with it, and Claire feels as if she's stepped into a trap. The date ends badly when she gets up and storms out.

When Thomas steps into the bathroom and Johnny asks how it's going, Thomas silently tosses Johnny a spoon that Claire used. Johnny's vision reveals that things have gotten worse... now Thomas and Claire never get together.

And the hits just keep on coming. Meyer-Schwab releases a press package that is, for all intents and purposes, a smear campaign against Johnny Smith. It exploits and distorts all the dirty little secrets from past episodes. Did you know Johnny's medical file listed him as being treated for Ketamine addiction? That a mother sued him for trying to harm her two little boys in a minivan accident? Everything that Johnny predicted that didn't come true, and even things that he did (Cathy's steakhouse – nine kids dead), is brought into the light.

Johnny has a fight with Thomas when he tells him, "it's all up to you, now." Thomas is despondent; he didn't ask for this responsibility and he doesn't want it. He hasn't seen this future that Johnny tells him is fact. He confronts Johnny about why he's trying to cheat fate. What if these children are *meant* to die, what if that's just the way things are. Because you see something, what gives you the right to try and change it? The philosophical opposite of Purdy, Thomas is a man of logic questioning Johnny about the fundamental nature of his motivations. This flips a switch in Johnny, and he loses his shit. It's not like he asked for this responsibility either. The visions he get are a terrible torture. They hurt. And the only thing he can do to relieve the pain is to do something about them. The last thing he needs to do is defend himself against someone who believes in nothing.

Johnny leaves Thomas, gets into his jeep and drives. And drives. And drives. We don't know where he's going until he gets there late at night: a giant warehouse on

the outskirts of Cumberland County. Johnny stops his car in front of the high razor fence that surrounds the perimeter. The Meyer-Schwab logo is faded on the side of the warehouse. Parked along the side, like sleeping behemoths, are a long line of semi-trucks. Johnny sits and stares at them.

Juvenol ships in two days.

A phone rings at the Smith house. Thomas, on his way out with his bags packed, stops to pick it up, expecting Johnny. It's Claire Eisenhaus, surprised to hear Thomas just as much as he's surprised to hear her. Claire is calling to talk to Johnny, she still needs him to confess they've never met and resolve the situation at her company.

Thomas says that Johnny isn't there, and then he begins to confess himself. He tells Claire the truth, about what he's really doing now, about his feelings of failure and his feelings for her, ever since school. It goes deeper than the crush he's admitted to Johnny before. Thomas apologizes to Claire for the mess he feels he's gotten her in. Claire is silent for a while, and then quietly admits that she's been thinking about what he said in the restaurant. About recessive gene mutation. Juvenol does mutate a small set of genes to do what it does, but there is no harmful effect to a woman or the eggs she carries, they've proven it. But, Thomas adds, it takes two to tango. Two people for every pregnancy. A man, and a woman. Two pairs of genes. Which opens up a million possibilities that no clinical trial could spot unless it took longer than a generation. Claire agrees, and then, on Johnny Smith's phone, the two begin talking.

Johnny comes home to find the last thing he expected to see sitting in his driveway: Claire's car. Inside, Claire and Thomas are feverishly working, files spread all over Johnny's kitchen table. They haven't found an answer, but they've discovered a very big, very dangerous question mark. Thomas starts by explaining that although he and his parents have brown hair, his sister is blonde. That's because Mom and Dad both carried a recessive hair gene that had a one in sixteen chance of expressing itself. Juvenol causes a recessive gene mutation in women and men, which... Johnny cuts him off. Whatever they've found, they need to get it to someone who can change things. NOW.

*Note: Steve Binder has worked out a scientific explanation for how this product could end up affecting one in a hundred births (imagine how many kids that would affect if this thing sold half as well as Viagra did – 40 million units). It even makes sense about how the Meyer-Schwab and the FDA could miss it. I'm not going to include the techno-exposition in this document, though the point we're going to make in the script is that the solution isn't about computer modeling technology, it's about Johnny getting these two particular minds together to solve the problem.

Thomas suggests they take what they've found to the press, but Johnny disagrees. He wants Claire to take it into Meyer-Schwab. "Let them be the heroes." Claire makes the call to her research supervisor, and everything snowballs from there. Johnny watches the pieces fall into place, right down to the wire.

Meyer-Schwab scientists examine the hypothesis...

The trucks move out on Monday Morning...

Meyer-Schwab sends out an emergency recall...

The trucks turn around before reaching their destinations...

Meyer-Schwab releases a statement explaining their delay of Juvenol. Recent media speculation and public interest has inspired them to refine their product so they can make it even better. There is no mention of Johnny Smith...

Johnny bids farewell to Thomas and Claire at the same restaurant they met at before. Both of them apologize to Johnny for the way they treated him, and the doubt they heaped upon him (especially Thomas). Johnny shrugs it off, says it's part of the job (something you'd never find him saying last season... maybe Johnny is recognizing a stabilizing sense of duty, maybe he's just relieved to make it through this particular adventure). Upon Claire's recommendation, Thomas is going to return to M.I.T., and complete his doctorate (he's feeling like moving back to the East Coast anyway). Claire and Thomas have bonded over their experience, but haven't "fallen" for each other romantically. Touching them both, Johnny gets a vision we don't see, and tells Thomas and Claire not to worry. "Worry? Worry about what?" He tells Thomas and Claire that they won't have a baby in six years, they'll have one in three. They both laugh this off, but then the laughs die off awkwardly. Johnny wishes them well, gets up to leave, and Claire and Thomas both ask "Boy or Girl?" at the exact same moment. They look at each

other, both a little freaked out. Johnny smiles to himself, but doesn't answer them or even turn around as he walks out of the restaurant...