

THE DEAD ZONE

"MISBEGOTTEN"

by

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Revisions by Michael Piller

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On *The Dead Zone*, we always begin with the thematic resonance that attracted us to a story - a cultural relevance and humanistic ambition that makes an episode distinctive and meaningful to our audience.

In this story, Johnny is abducted by three gorgeous babes and held for their personal pleasure in a haunted house.

Screw cultural relevance. I was supposed to pass on that pitch?

Ah but there is a real mystery at the core of this and a scary one in the finest Stephen King tradition - Shawn Piller might say it's *Misery* meets *The Collector* meets *Scream* - and not everything is what it seems to be.

It really is a fear that everyone with a public profile has to live with - I know it well: after the USA premiere, some guy wrote me that he was Johnny Smith and I had stolen his life (we put an armed guard at the office for a couple of weeks). Someone is out there, aware of us, watching us, thinking about us. It is a real jeopardy that we dismiss from our minds or try to... until someone slips by security and jumps up on the stage during your performance, or breaks into your house because they adore you or shoots you to impress Jodi Foster.

People do these things.

A grad student clerk at the Faith Heritage Alliance goes through the mountains of mail, separating out ridiculous business propositions for Johnny Smith into one pile and personal mail into another. She blushes at some of the letters and emails Johnny is getting... they don't want help, she tells Purdy, they want to... well, be intimate with him... Purdy reads one of the steamy letters, reacts... and his breath is taken away... he says a little prayer for the lost and lonely... and tells the grad student to destroy the offensive mail.

You get to know the sounds of your house... they're your sounds... and when there's a sound that isn't one of yours, you know it too... even in your sleep...

That's what wakes Johnny up.

He listens at the bedroom door for a moment... and hears someone moving downstairs... a shadow crosses below... he quietly calls the police... there's someone in my house, he tells them...

The someone turns out to be a comely young woman in her mid-twenties who beat security by rowing a boat off the lake in the back of the property... and scaling a rock wall... you have a lovely house, Johnny, she says... it's been in your family since the sixties, hasn't it... your parents used to have lovely parties here...

She introduces herself as PENNY BARTON and she's bashful and charming and crazy as a loon in her own way and Johnny indulges her in his pajamas as best he can as he waits for the arrival of the police...

The deputies arrive and arrest her. She's disappointed in Johnny. You'd like me if you knew me, she says as they take her away. And Johnny's never been quite as scared in his entire life.

A few days later, Johnny commiserates with Bruce as Purdy berates the security company for being lax... and new massive new security installations are underway. Now you know why they built castles in the middle ages, Bruce tells him. But Johnny knows every lock on the door is not just locking the crazies out but locking him in... in a life he never wanted... he is losing touch with his own world... feeling more and more isolated...

He has a lunch date with Dana and Bruce asks how that's going... and Johnny admits there's a new tension there... Dana knows somehow about him and Sarah.

There is no 'you and Sarah' - it was a one night mistake, cautions Bruce... Johnny wishes he knew what to think about the women in his life... you'd think his powers would make it easy for him to see the right course to take but they don't. In the end, Johnny's still human with the

vulnerabilities of any man and no smarter about women than the rest of us poor bastards.

On the way to meet Dana, he sees a female motorist in distress, flagging him down on a rural road, hood up. The woman (ANITA GREY) is attractive and in her late twenties... she says she's helpless when it comes to cars and her cell phone has died... might he give her a hand? (Here and afterwards, Anita goes out of her way not to be touched by Johnny.)

Johnny knows cars pretty well and agrees to take a look but the moment he touches the car, he gets a vision of Penny, the woman who broke into his house. As Johnny reacts to this momentary diversion, briefly disoriented, Penny's hand holding a chloroformed handkerchief comes up behind him and a second later he passes out. The last thing he sees is a third pretty young woman, early twenties, hard-bodied, Goth, (MADDY TORRANCE) with a professional digital video camera recording his abduction.

Johnny finds himself regaining consciousness in a dark abandoned farmhouse, wrapped up grotesquely in a chair - like Jerry Lewis in *King of Comedy*.

As Maddy continues to record the events on her camera, Penny introduces him to the others... Maddy, the Goth girl, is her little sister and an aspiring film-maker. Anita is their friend who came up with this plan. What plan?, asks

Johnny, through his muffled, sock-filled mouth, terrified but trying to control the situation.

Anita knew about a so-called haunted house in the farmlands where an entire family had been killed by a drifter who'd never been caught. Wouldn't it be a great film, they thought, if they could record a famous psychic solving the famous unsolved murders? Maddy has a clear vision of a "Blair Witch" type triumph.

It was between you and John Edwards, Maddy admits. Penny talked us into you.

Penny smiles. Johnny looks to Penny with uncertain appreciation.

Anita is the most forceful of the group, a new friend of the sisters. She recently began a lesbian relationship with Maddy that has already begun to show signs of tension that comes out in their occasionally snippy dialogue (in fact, they're having undisclosed sexual problems). Anita tells Johnny they had sent several proposals and requests to the Faith Heritage Alliance but all they'd received were form letters, *FORM LETTERS, Johnny...* "Thank you for your interest. Have a great future. God bless. Johnny Smith" It's the first time Johnny has ever seen one of these letters and he apologizes for it... but he makes it clear this is not the way to go about this... and he's not about to cooperate...

Oh, I think you will, Johnny, says, Anita, her tone sending a chill through Johnny as she walks out... all the time, Maddy continues to record with her camera... (which we cut to in *Blair Witch* fashion on video) in this most bizarre and yet terrifyingly real scenario...

Penny promises Johnny not to worry about Anita, she's a little high strung, that's all... she'll make sure he's well treated... she really does care for him in a special way... and this will be their chance to spend a little quality time together so he can get to know her better.

As she runs her fingers through his hair, he gets a horrible vision of his future at the end of this - and it's bloody indeed...

Our story proceeds down several avenues from here:

-- when Johnny doesn't show up for his date, and doesn't respond to calls, Dana feels that he's stood her up... angry and jealous, she decides she's had enough and goes to confront Sarah, expecting to find Johnny with her. He's not and when Walt reports that Johnny's car has been found abandoned on the side of the road, Sarah and Dana team up to look for him. As they do, they may begin to confront some of their hostility and find they have more in common than they anticipated. Sarah finds Dana to be far more than the airhead slut she previously considered her to be and

Dana finds Sarah to be a woman of uncommon power who won't take shit from anyone and won't take no for an answer.

-- Johnny tries psychology of any and all sorts in the chess game with the women, even telling Penny he's had a terrible vision of the future in this house but sadly she thinks he's lying. Penny ultimately reveals her deepest wish - and that is to have Johnny Smith's baby. And we stage one of the most outrageous (the only?) sado-bondage seduction sequences in this history of television. (She hums the theme from *Rosemary's Baby* as she strips to the buff.) It's nearly rape. But it's interrupted by one of the:

-- Strange, unexplained events that begin to take place within the house... that seem to be warnings, threats... could it really possibly be haunted?

-- Maddy begins negotiations for Johnny's release with Purdy probably through video streaming to the Faith Heritage Alliance website -- the Reverend and the young Goth auteur making a strange negotiating couple indeed. She shows clips of her film in progress and wants a distribution deal in place and she's as tough (and good) a dealmaker as Ovitz in his prime (she will make Purdy hold his hand on the bible and swear to God that he will fulfill his promises). When she talks about the incredible profits from *Blair Witch*, Purdy glances at his office display of an expensive new

theology building proposed for campus. *It almost begins to make sense.* The footage is dynamite, Mike Kennedy observes.

The *important* thing is that this deal frees Johnny, says Purdy, thoughtfully.

-- With a message from Purdy urging him to cooperate fully with the women, Johnny finally tells Anita he'll try to solve the mystery of the murders... it may be his only chance to escape... and they let him loose and as he walks the halls (at Anita's gunpoint) he gets visions of the grisly affair...

A boy, 12, runs down the hallway and disappears. As Johnny looks down to the floor, he sees that the boy has left bloody sneaker prints behind him...

Other flashes out of continuity --

The same boy playing a board game with his sister... 'I saw the man watching the house again', he says, his voice trailing off into the darkness...

And more flashes:

Dead bodies and a blood dripping from fingertips...

And...

Screams of torture...

And...

The little boy with a misshapen tool, bloody twisted blade... crying, "stop it!, stop it!"... but then the vision

reveals he's standing alone, screaming at no one but himself...

There was no drifter, gasps Johnny.

The boy himself tortured and killed the three other members of his family: mother, father, sister. He had been institutionalized for years after the incident - thought to be in shock from the killings - but now it's clear from Johnny's visions he was schizophrenic and experienced a psychotic break.

The rescue effort continues as Walt does his police thing with Bruce in tow... but it's Sarah and Dana who ultimately track down the identities of the women, finding clues in the junk mail at the Alliance... that lead to Anita's address... and they find a house that is filled with archival news photos of the farmhouse killings... clearly, Anita is not just interested in this matter, she has been obsessed with it... but why?

We may get an inkling when we see Anita going to the bathroom at the farmhouse... urinating.... standing up.

Johnny expects to be released now... but Anita refuses to accept his explanation about the little boy - it just doesn't make sense - how could a twelve year old do that to his family? Johnny's been lying to them from the start. She orders him tied up again... and he sees his bloody future again... he tries to escape... Anita grabs his arm

and he has a vision of her morphing into the little boy in the visions... the little boy she used to be...

Anita is not a woman. She's a transvestite. A very sick transvestite. Johnny stares at her/him. Anita knows he knows. As the truth spins out, and the other girls react with horror and disgust, Anita slips into the psychotic break that's been threatening to overwhelm her/him since they arrived at this house (and she/he stopped taking meds so she could see things more clearly) thus the ghostly incidents... and now she/he is about to replay the original crime...

Exits are blocked... windows are jammed... Johnny is slashed with a torture tool, much blood as he saw in his visions... we're intercutting with the video of Maddy's camera as she goes down, screaming as Anita attacks her and now the camera is on the floor as blood seeps across the floor in front of the lens... and Penny is going to be Anita's next victim... but Johnny comes back seemingly from the dead and tackles Anita who is one hell of a formidable transvestite... it's quite a battle until Johnny finally prevails... and the police crash through the doors... and it's finally over...

By the way, did I mention I see this as a light episode?

A postscript: after we fade out... after we roll the end credits... after USA promotes Monk and their next tennis tournament and another rerun of Law and Order: Special Victims Unit...

We have one last shot before the logos...

Of a line of people around a block at a movie theater waiting to get into to see the "horror reality sensation", "A film by Maddy Torrance"... *FARMHOUSE*....

The End