

## THE DEAD ZONE

“Cabin Pressure”

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November 22, 2002

Johnny Smith is a man who has learned to trust his feelings... his visions. But, the world he often has to convince is based on logic, rules and the law. That's never been more true than when he realizes that the commercial flight he's on is going to crash. Just like “The Siege”, this episode is a puzzle. Johnny sees bits and pieces. Fiery destruction. The death of his friends. Problems with elusive solutions. But, unlike “The Siege”, there's no way to talk the problem through and walk out the front door. Not at 20,000 feet. So these doors must stay closed and the conflict must play out between a man of reason and a man of science. The psychic vs. the pilot. Visions vs. computer read-outs. Uncertain life vs. certain death.

*“Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy night.”*

- Bette Davis, All About Eve

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Mr. Smith is going to Washington. Johnny and Reverend Purdy board a flight from Bangor to Washington, D.C. to attend a national Faith Heritage rally. As far as Purdy knows, Johnny is interested in promoting an FHA mentoring program, but Greg Stillson will also be at the rally so... you figure it out. Stillson's already in D.C., but Sonny Elliman and Sarah are travelling to D.C to organize Stillson's appearance at the rally. Walt is going with her. They're supposed to be enjoying rare time alone to patch up their recent marital problems, but there's already tension between them. As Johnny boards, he touches the plane “just to check” and gets no disturbing visions. But as he walks to his seat, he does get weird vision flashes of another sort. He's not scared of

flying, but many people on the plane are. Johnny picks up on the real events their fears are based on and experiences them first-hand. Basically, the cabin is pressurized psychically as well as physically.

After a flawless take-off, Captain RICHARD KLEIN comes on the intercom and tells them that there are storms in their path, but he'll try to keep their three hour trip smooth. Johnny just wants to sleep. But, as he adjusts his airflow vent, he gets a brief disconcerting VISION. *He sees a starry sky. A sudden icy chill goes through him and a wind buffets him.* And, as quickly as it came, the vision is gone. Sonny notices Johnny shiver: "Cat walk across your grave, John-John?" Johnny looks to see Sonny sitting in the seat across the aisle from him and says, "I'm not dead yet." Sonny shakes his head as if to say, "Just give me a reason..."

The flight progresses smoothly. Purdy is deep in conversation with an older woman named ASTRID, a classics professor at NYU who's enthralled by stories of Johnny's powers. Astrid compares Johnny to Cassandra, whom the Greek gods blessed with the gift of second sight. But, Johnny knows the rest of the story, "Then they cursed her by making sure no one would believe her. I can relate." When the first-class flight attendant PHYLLIS hands Johnny a fresh chocolate chip cookie, he has a sudden, terrifying VISION: *The plane is going down at high speed. It's tilted at a harrowing angle. People scream. And as Johnny looks up at Phyllis, her eyes widen in terror and she is flung across the cabin, striking the rear wall. Her neck SNAPS grotesquely.*

Johnny turns to Purdy. "Something's going to go wrong with the flight. We're gonna go down." Purdy thinks Johnny is just feeling more residual fear. "Maybe, God forbid, that's how that flight attendant will die someday, but not on this flight." To verify it, Johnny touches Purdy and winces. "No, it's us... today. We're gonna crash."

Phyllis relays a message that Johnny wants to speak to the pilot, but post-9/11, it's not so easy to get this access. Even Purdy's insistence that Johnny is a man that must be listened to holds little sway here. Johnny tells Walt and Sarah what he saw. Sarah can't believe that he couldn't see this until it was too late. Johnny has to go with Purdy's faith argument on this one -- he must be there to stop it. Johnny is angry that he can't even get the pilot to talk to him. Walt pats his holstered gun and says, "I never thought I'd be saying this, but there's one sure way to get him to listen." Johnny takes in this possibility.

Finally, Johnny is able to get a moment with Captain Klein. He is a poster-boy pilot -- young, handsome, confident. He listens to Johnny's story calmly and then shrugs. He doesn't belittle Johnny's claims, he just doesn't believe in psychic abilities. Johnny asks him to run diagnostics, checks, anything. The pilot replies that the plane's computer does that automatically. "Give me something concrete to check and I will." Sonny watches Johnny closely. Even if he can't overhear the whispered conversation, he recognizes the urgency of Johnny's body language. He frowns; the freak thinks something is going to go wrong. A few seats away, an older no-neck GUY watches Johnny closely as well.

Lightning flashes outside and the plane shakes with occasional turbulence as Johnny works to get more information on what will go wrong. He does his best to look casual as he feels his way through the plane, acting like he's searching for his misplaced carry-on. And then he bumps up against Sonny, who blocks his path. "What do you think you're doing, John-John? You didn't bring a carry-on and you're making people nervous." Johnny realizes right there and then: as hard as his job is going to be on this trip, Sonny Elliman plans on making it harder. It's what he lives for.

Johnny considers the possibility that there may be a bomb on board. Hey, it's on all our minds when we step on a plane nowadays. And, he's on a flight headed for D.C., a city on major terrorist alert. Johnny and Walt finesse the stack of boarding passes from Phyllis and Johnny does a PSYCHIC flip-through of the passes – and, by extension, the passengers. He zeroes in on one really nervous Indian GUY who's sitting right behind Sarah. His eyes dart around; he's jumpy as hell. Maybe he's just scared of flying, maybe he's on drugs... or maybe he plans on blowing up this plane. But, as Johnny and Walt quietly discuss what to do about it, the no-neck man, JACOBS, steps up and reveals himself to be an armed air marshal. He wants them to sit down. Johnny points out the suspicious passenger. Jacobs says that Sonny warned him that Johnny was the suspicious one... and he has to agree. As the situation begins to spiral out of hand, Sarah defuses it with the easiest solution possible. She bypasses the testosterone-fest and asks the Indian guy why he's nervous. He says he's going to D.C. to meet the woman his parents want

him to marry and he's freaking out. Sarah turns back to Johnny, Walt and Jacobs. "Back down, guys." Jacobs warns Johnny that he better not disrupt this flight any further.

Johnny sits down and rests his forehead against his window. A vision **BLASTS** him: *The view outside the window tilts alarmingly as the plane goes into a dive. Several loud BOOMS sound and FLAMES shoot out of the engine. A moment later, the wing ignites. The flames illuminate Johnny's wide eyes.* But, as Johnny comes out of this vision, he realizes that he now knows where the problem begins: the starboard engine.

Now that Johnny's on the air marshal's shit list, it's even more difficult to get the pilot to talk to him. But, finally Johnny is able to tell him what he saw: "The starboard engine explodes, then the wing... then the plane." But, Klein says it's impossible. The engine can't explode. Johnny asks him to at least consider the possibilities. Lightning? Bird strike? Piece of equipment sucked into the engine? All are highly unlikely and wouldn't bring the plane down. Johnny's still thinking, "What about a bomb in the engine, planted by the ground crew?" Now Klein is getting mad. "Our crew is top-notch and I did a visual inspection before we took off. I don't know what you're trying to accomplish but I need you to stop disrupting my flight or I will have the air marshal arrest you." But, Johnny knows time is running out. If he doesn't convince this guy now, he may not have another chance. The situation escalates. Soon, Jacobs, Sonny and Walt have joined the situation. Guns are drawn and pointed. Klein turns to re-enter the cockpit and Johnny reaches out to stop him. On his touch, flash to a VISION...

*As it was before, the plane's diving at a steep angle. The cabin is in chaos.*

*Johnny sits in his seat... eerily calm, staring out the window. The loud BOOMS sound, the engine FLAMES and the entire wing bursts into flames. As the fire engulfs the cabin, Johnny FREEZES the scene. Flying luggage is suspended mid-air. People are caught mid-panic. And the roaring flames are stilled in their path of destruction. Johnny reaches out to touch the flame and follows its path BACKWARDS. Back through the wing, back into the engine. Where the flame becomes a spark ... which becomes an electrical impulse which Johnny follows back through the hydraulic system to where the problem all began... in the cockpit. Up through the switch to the hand that flipped it.*

*It's Captain Klein's hand.*

Johnny stares at Captain Klein in disbelief. Now his refusal to listen makes an eerie sort of sense. The pilot is going to take the plane down. Backing away, Johnny returns to his seat. Klein returns to the cockpit and soon his reassuring voice is heard on the intercom. He tells everyone that the situation is under control; they'll be landing soon. Johnny agonizes over what to do. What will lead Klein to deliberately crash the plane? Johnny certainly didn't see a gun at the guy's head. Is it a terrorist act? A homicidal suicide attempt? This tension plays out for a while, but then Astrid talks to Johnny. She asks him if Klein really seems like a guy who would deliberately crash his plane? And if he doesn't, what does the vision mean? Astrid tells him he already knows the answer. Johnny figures it out. "He's trying to save the plane."

But even if Klein is trying to do the right thing in his vision, something will go wrong. Johnny looks out on the wing. “I need more information. Just one touch.” Sweating with the tension, Johnny adjusts the air vent and gets the same brief VISION. *A starry sky. A sudden icy chill as a wind buffets him..* Johnny asks Phyllis where the air comes from. She tells him that it’s recirculated through the engine.

Johnny touches the air vent and concentrates. And the VISION hits. *Johnny follows the ventilation circuit back out through the fuselage, the wing and the engine itself. Suddenly, Johnny’s standing on the wing mid-air. He freezes the scene. It’s a surreal experience. He’s wing walking at 20,000 feet. He examines the engine carefully. It looks fine. No obstructions. No cracks. Johnny is stumped as he takes in the amazing view. And then he notices the ice crystals suspended in the air around him. With a sense of dread, Johnny bends down and checks the leading edge of the wing. It’s encased in ice.*

Johnny knocks frantically on the cockpit door. Klein steps out just as Jacobs steps forward with his handcuffs and tries to lead Johnny away. But, Johnny desperately tries to get Klein to listen to him.

“The entire starboard wing’s encased in ice.”

“Half an hour ago, you told me the engine was gonna blow.”

“The fire I kept seeing. It’s not the problem, but I think it’s the solution. I think it’s the only way to melt the ice.”

Klein looks around. Everyone is looking to him for his decision. He either sics the air marshal on the nutcase. Or he listens to him. CUT TO: Inside the cockpit, Klein and SEAVER, the co-pilot, listen to Johnny. Klein cranks the starboard de-icing mechanism, but Johnny tells him it's not working. Johnny is convinced that Klein will burn the engine to melt the ice. "In my vision, there's a series of booms, the engine flames out... and then the plane explodes." The plane suddenly LURCHES as it's been doing it for the last ten minutes or so. Seaver says, "If this guy's right, then that's not turbulence. It's the auto-pilot compensating for the ice. But, it won't hold for long. And when it fails..." Klein figures out what happened in Johnny's vision. "I must have been trying a last ditch effort to melt the ice, but the wings are full of fuel. There wasn't enough time to take the proper precautions and drain the fuel completely."

Johnny: "Then we have to dump that fuel now."

Klein resists. He won't deliberately sabotage the plane to solve a problem Johnny sees in his head. Johnny replies that Klein doesn't see any of the problems that his computer tells him about. But, he believes they're real anyway. Johnny tells Klein that, for once, he has to trust his gut. Klein responds, "If I do what you ask, I know for sure I will have to make an emergency landing where people may die. If I don't, we may be able to land just fine. I don't know that the ice is bad enough to take us down." This is the man of science and logic vs. the man of feelings and visions.

Klein says he just can't do it. Johnny reaches out and touches Klein's arm...



...and describes the scene at Klein's home later that day. The dark sedan pulling up in the driveway. The suited AIRLINE OFFICIAL telling Klein's tearful WIFE about the crash. No survivors. Johnny identifies Klein's eight year old son, JAKE, and four-year-old daughter, MAYA and gives a detailed account of their heart-wrenching reactions. There are tears in Klein's eyes when Johnny finishes. Klein has been asking Johnny for hard evidence the whole time, but this eerily detailed vision is the last thing he expected. But, it's exactly what's needed to get through to this man.

"Okay... apparently there's no time to waste." Klein starts the automatic fuel dump; it'll take twenty minutes. Johnny feels the plane lurch again. "You did it this way in my vision and it wasn't fast enough" In true Steve McQueen fashion, Johnny and Walt have to go down to the underbelly of the plane to do a manual fuel dump. It's action-packed. Doors will open. They will almost get sucked out, but they will dump the fuel.

And just in time. As predicted, the auto-pilot fails, the plane begins to roll and dive. Klein says, "God help us" and burns the engine. But, as he feared, the heat isn't enough to melt the ice. Klein and Seaver frantically try to recover control. And then the BOOMS that Johnny heard suddenly make sense to Klein. They were compressor stalls – basically, pilot-controlled sonic booms in the jet engine. Klein frantically flips switches, cutting off fuel supplies, re-routing circuits. He flips the switch. BOOM! The engine flames and the incredible vibration CRACKS the ice. BOOM!... crack...

Exhausted, Johnny leans back against the side of the plane and suddenly flashes to a VISION on the wing: *One last compressor stall in the engine causes flames to shoot out, the boom SOUNDS and the ice SHATTERS.* In the cockpit, Klein regains control of the plane in time to make a harrowing emergency landing at Dulles. Officially, he'll have to go before the NTSB to defend his actions, but there's no denying the man's a hero. As he shakes Johnny's hand, Johnny smiles and tells him, "Your family's waiting for you."

By the end of the story, Sonny owes Johnny. He may have fought him every step of the way, but he can't deny that the freak saved his life. Walt and Sarah had a wrenchingly-honest "don't go to bed angry" situation. But, in this case it was a "don't go to your fiery death angry." Coming out of this, the bond between Walt and Sarah is stronger. When the plane was going down, Walt was the one by her side while Johnny was busy saving the world. Purdy's faith was tested... and he's feeling the strain. Spending time with Johnny Smith certainly seems to put a guy in the line of fire. And then there's Johnny Smith. What has he learned... besides the fact that travelling by train can be quite pleasant? He thinks of this as a test of the emergency psychic broadcast system. A microcosm of the uphill battle he will have to fight to convince people that Armageddon is coming. Cassandra couldn't convince the Greeks that there were Trojans in the wooden horse, but maybe Johnny Smith can. Only time will tell.

