

THE DEAD ZONE
"THE HUNT FOR OSAMA"

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Following the events of 9/11, the United States Government has been using all available means to track down the perpetrators of this crime against the American people. Although constructed as fiction, many of the facts from which this story was created are real and were provided by sources close to the investigation. The U.S. government will neither confirm nor deny that events like those depicted within this story actually occurred.

It wouldn't take Johnny long to realize he'd been schmoozed...

That this is their way of ingratiating themselves, getting past initial defenses...

That this is how it's done, how they do everything - with slight of hand, testing and probing, one deception after another. A window inside a window inside a window.

The jeep won't start. Classic cars -- it's always something. This time it's the modified three valve fuel pump, a rare and difficult part to replace.

Johnny takes it to the parts supply store where he finds a new man working the counter. FRANK, the clerk, is

a friendly guy who tells Johnny he doesn't have that kind of pump in stock but he knows a guy who might have one.

That night, Johnny's doorbell rings as he's sitting down to a Chinese take-out dinner and it's Frank holding a new part. My friend, George, told me you might need this sooner than later and I was in the area, he says.

Wow, you didn't have to do that, says Johnny inviting him in, offering to share his Kung Pao chicken. Frank accepts. And they sit and talk, schmooze, and it isn't until they're clearing the table and Johnny grabs his plate that he gets a vision that breaks the spell:

Frank is wearing a dark suit, going through a government checkpoint, walking across an official seal embossed in a marble floor.

Frank notices Johnny's reaction. Who are you, asks Johnny.

Frank congratulates Johnny on passing the first test and is up front now that he's made the personal connection: I work for the government, he says. In a special unit. I'd like to talk to you about how you might be able to help your country.

Off Johnny's reaction...

The asbestos removal trucks arrive the next day. Johnny's house is cordoned off from the rest of the world. Johnny explains to Bruce that he's going to go to a medical conference out of town for a few days while the work is being done.

Inside the house, a team of agents and scientists prepare to test Johnny's abilities before he is accepted into the unit. Frank explains a few things as the first test is being set up. The government has been using psychics in intelligence work for a while. Frank can tell Johnny this - without the security clearance he will eventually require - because it has already been leaked and is public knowledge. These psychics perform 'remote viewing' -- identifying and describing targets often in tandem with on-sight ground and satellite operations. Obviously, the hunt for Osama is the highest priority operation, but their most effective psychic was lost at the Pentagon on 9/11. They need someone who specializes in psychometry - whose abilities are generated by touch. (They learned about Johnny during "The Very Thought of You" which will run before this episode.) Johnny gets the impression that he's not the only one being interviewed for this position.

It's not all smooth sailing in this early introduction because there's another agent, a woman named HARRIET, who thinks this is all bullshit. Anyone who believes in this is nuts, she says -- it's a waste of taxpayer money and people like Frank who believe in it should have their clearance pulled. She's quite rude to Johnny, and Frank and Harriet argue quite publicly. In fact, as Johnny will discover in time, they're doing a variation on good cop - bad cop to put more pressure on Johnny. It's another test - this one to see if the psychic is able to take the heat for what he believes under hostile conditions. (Once Johnny proves he can, the good cop - bad cop routine will be dispensed with.)

Now, the official testing begins. The first test is to pick out a double blind target: that is, a small nondescript object is chosen randomly from a group of other nondescript objects that have been assembled by an independent office at a top secret facility. No one in the test group at Johnny's house has been told where these objects are from - Johnny's job is to touch each object and accurately describe the location it comes from. The interviewers, Frank and Harriet, ask Johnny questions, but only in response to what Johnny says about his visions or draws on a piece of paper. The test is done four times.

In two cases, Johnny gets no visions at all. A very poor start. Sometimes his powers work, sometimes they don't, he tells Frank. (And this is mundane stuff, rather falling into the "boring" visions that Purdy correctly said Johnny never gets). Harriet keeps the pressure on him. Johnny correctly identifies one target which is still well below average and they're ready to give up on him when they give him the last one and are shocked when he correctly describes the top secret office, the personnel who assembled the test and classified code words off file folders. Obviously, he has a remarkable power albeit somewhat undisciplined.

Other tests include one in which he is deliberately misled to believe one set of assumptions about a target and the testers want to see if his powers can see through the deception. All the time, a scientist observes him like a lab rat, making notes about his body language, his eye movements. But the final test is shocking and shatters the collegial atmosphere that has existed so far. Johnny is given an item that belongs to a government official and asked to describe what that person is doing right now.

Johnny sees -- *An agent - with Johnny playing the role - is in the process of assassinating an enemy agent in the field with a garrote.*

Johnny is outraged by what he is witnessing and fights for self-control. The observers receive a phone call confirming the hit has been made. This was a test to see if he could deal with objectionable targets. As the team examines the results, Johnny, badly shaken, goes to the bathroom to wash his face. On the way, he encounters a young man standing alone in the hallway that he hasn't seen before. The young man smiles at him. Not as easy at it appears - government work? Is it?, he gently asks. Johnny acknowledges. Some advice, adds the mysterious young man, there are times for sharing information and there are times to make everyone in the room think you're dumb. He moves away into the other room. Johnny washes his face and wonders what he's getting himself into.

The circus is gone in a matter of hours and Johnny is not told what his status is - he is thanked, reminded of his oath of secrecy - did he pass or fail? Frank just smiles and says maybe they'll meet again.

Johnny's life goes back to normal - or normal for Johnny at least. He's at J.J.'s soccer game, talking to Walt and Sarah, when he sees Harriet staring at him from across the field. She makes a point of waving to Johnny so Walt and Sarah can see her, then is affectionate to him

when she comes over, kissing him lightly on the cheek. As she does, Johnny gets a vision of a panel instructing her that Johnny is to be brought into the unit immediately. But all Walt and Sarah think is that there's a new woman in Johnny's life.

Once alone, Harriet explains that Johnny's going away for a few weeks - his friends will receive postcards from Italy where he'll be on a well deserved getaway with the new girlfriend. The affair will be torrid but brief and he'll come home sadder but wiser. She asks him if he's sure he's ready to join their unit. If he says yes, she adds, Johnny is making a commitment to learn certain information that cannot be shared with any other human being who has not been cleared for such access.

When he agrees, she gives him an oath and he must sign a human use waiver authorizing the federal government to use him experimentally, "even though no risk assessments have been made as to what might happen during training or operational involvement."

Harriet takes Johnny to the secret remote viewing lair at Mont Garnet, Vermont. He is introduced to psychologists and anthropologists as well as military personnel most of whom are vaguely overweight - not exactly the cream of the crop. In fact, many of the military officers have been

assigned here to fill out their last years before qualifying for pensions or as a way of getting them out of the way of more serious operations. There's a very clear sense of a lack of commitment to the program from the government - money is always scarce and the military guys sigh, do their jobs and keep their mouths shut for the most part.

But there is one gung ho colonel, we'll call him HALSEY, who is so caught up in the project that he's almost unstable in his enthusiasm. He thinks he's learning to be psychic himself and attends spoon bending parties in his free time. Johnny is informed by Halsey that there are a couple of guys in black suits who will never quite be out of his sight.

Johnny also meets the veteran not-so-good remote viewers who are openly hostile and angry about how easily the new guy got into the unit and the way he is being treated. (They are equally hostile to one another and are constantly involved in displays of one-upmanship.) The negative interaction takes place in subtle ways -- for instance, one psychic - an older, deeply cynical remote viewer named GRANOWITZ - reads Johnny's mind and, finding he likes sugar in his coffee, hides the sugar box. At the same time, Johnny is supported now and then by the

mysterious young fellow he met earlier - a gentle nod of encouragement here or a smile there. The guy seems like a good fellow.

Harriet, who has discarded the bad cop persona entirely, becomes Johnny's primary handler. And to be clear, there is no genuine romantic tension here but the relationship becomes quite personal even though Johnny suspects that it is her job to make it personal. They know Johnny needs someone here he feels he can trust absolutely, confide in. That's her. And although he is reluctant at first, the pressures, the isolation and the hostility of the other psychics eventually do lead to the two of them bonding intimately.

Later, he will wonder if she was manipulating him or genuinely cared about him.

Harriet takes Johnny to a steel vault buried deep underground. In the vault is a room constructed of multi-layered glass, active audio-screening materials and the entire room is suspended from the floor to prevent the intercept and translation of vibrations which might result from voices, tapes, or other electronic media.

Johnny expects to be briefed on the latest information on Osama's whereabouts. But that's the exact opposite of what they do. They don't want to frontload Johnny with any

leading information. They want to hear what he has to say. So they tell him nothing. They do, however, give him a piece of clothing. Johnny touches it and finds himself in a cave in Afghanistan under assault by U.S. military bombs... it's a quick vision - the man wearing the article of clothing is killed. Johnny describes the man and there is disappointment in their faces. Based on their questions, Johnny begins to realize why he's here: *you want me to help you find Osama Bin Laden*, he tells them. They neither confirm nor deny who his target is... only acknowledging that the target is a significant figure in the war on terrorism. But Johnny knows.

As the story unfolds, we will continue to play the relationships we've established. There will be more incidents of withholding information, surprising him, testing him to see how firmly he believes in his findings. There will be internal politics between agencies that pull Johnny in different directions. Personal jealousies. Disbelievers. Plus the mysterious nice fellow who shows up again to counsel him when things get rough.

We will take creative license in these areas to craft dramatic fiction. However, in the sequences when we examine the search for Osama, we will stay as close to the

facts as we have been able to determine them to the best of our ability.

It's not as easy as giving Johnny Osama's turban and asking him where to send the bombs. They do have items recovered from raided Al Qaeda camps where Osama and his top lieutenants were once known to be hiding. And one of the items takes Johnny in a vision to a small village in an unidentified Arab locale. Johnny finds himself observing a doctor who has an ill patient who may or may not be Osama. (And we will tease with glimpses but never show Osama or hear dialogue from him.)

We will also intercut with U.S. ground forces, air forces and naval forces - using stock footage to establish our scope - as they analyze what Johnny tells his handlers - although by the time the information reaches the strike teams, it is identified only as intelligence originating from the SPECOP (Special Operations) Command Center -- no indication of the unusual source is given. As far as the ground troops know, the CIA has undercover people in the village.

Johnny sees the doctor dealing with his well-guarded patient's illness, sees strange instruments lying on a table that associate to a kidney specialist. Johnny is able to identify others who are close to Osama -

lieutenants, a cousin, friends, confidants - and we intercut with secret CIA files showing the faces he's seeing in his visions - as he describes scars, skin blemishes, birthmarks (viewable), left-handedness vs. right-handedness, how they stand, or walk, habits, tics, color of eyes, shape of nose, etc. All this is done in a sweeping visual montage.

The results are exciting. Although they never use the actual name with Johnny, they are obviously convinced this really could be Osama. They really may have him this time.

The handlers press him for details... and Johnny is able to describe a vast array of clues that the operation uses to hone in on the specific location:

-- The color of the tribal scarves that are being worn.

-- Specific armament they carry (preference for a specific gun), how it's hung on their body, type of shoes, color preference for garments, etc.

-- Their formal greeting and how it is expressed, or the introduction prayer on meeting someone who is close or in authority over them.

-- Type and content of the food they are eating, its prevalence to the specific area or town.

-- The way the women are dressed, what freedoms they are allowed, what kinds of jewelry they wear, how they interact with other family members - as some tribes show different preferential treatment toward specific family members first.

-- The way the buildings are constructed and decorated inside and outside. The types of floors and wood they are made from. Condition of furniture and how it is made, where it came from, is it hand made or manufactured.

-- Canned goods, wrappers (newspapers) for foods bought in the market place, how they store their food.

-- Weather and geography, i.e. where fruit grows of a specific nature indicating altitude, or soil type.

-- Mode of transportation, tag numbers, care of vehicles, accessibility to water, that indicate something about the size of the village.

-- How the roads are laid out indicating clues to the age of the village and how close to a major city it might be.

-- People talking about distance or how far they had to come, even the idea that they arrive during the day and must stay over night before returning speaks to distance from their point of origin.

-- Types and means being used to communicate with the outside world.

All extremely valuable information. Some of the details provided by Johnny don't seem to be of value within the context they are presented. The fact that there are papers held within blue folders doesn't on the surface seem important at the time but once he learns later that folders in the country of Afghanistan are only black, gray or tan, he realizes the significance: it means Osama is no longer in that country. Furthermore, they are able to connect the blue folders with other intelligence that begins to pinpoint the location...

Harriet confers with Halsey... Johnny realizes that there's some disagreement at the highest levels of the unit but he doesn't understand what it's about.

At the same time, the enemy is smart and is very much aware that U.S. intelligence is tracking Osama... and they are taking extraordinary security measures that often frustrate Johnny. There is most definitely a game of cat and mouse at work here and the adversary knows he's in a game - certainly not aware that a psychic named Johnny Smith is the cat - but it seems that way as the two sides joust and the day draws closer for the mission that will take out the man the unit believes may be Osama. And it

almost seems like Osama was talking about someone like Johnny in an interview just after 9/11 in which he says to one of his men who spoke of dreaming of the planes flying into the WTC building: "You must command your dreams, you cannot dream these things as they can hurt us."

When Johnny asks Harriet what the problems are at the command levels, she sidesteps the question. There are always problems at the command level, she says; you just concentrate on the job you have to do.

Johnny's next vision tells him that the doctor and the patient and the entourage are planning to evacuate the village within twenty-four hours. A decision has to be made now.

Johnny is brought to a conference room where an oversight panel is meeting -- he sees Granowitz, the cynical remote viewer who has been hostile to him since his arrival. Johnny is told that the unit has been doing the exact same Osama exercise with Granowitz (telling neither about the other) and the results have been very different. The other psychic, using different skills, has seen evidence of Osama in an entirely different location...

Both psychics are challenged and the discouraged oversight panel tries to decide if there's anything worth saving out of this whole goddamned operation. Meanwhile,

time is running out at the village and Johnny's doctor and his patient are about to be spirited away. In the end, a key piece of Johnny's vision is confirmed by a ground observation post, identifying a lieutenant to Osama that Johnny described. That, combined with Granowitz' uneven track record - not to mention his bad attitude - tilts the decision in Johnny's favor.

Orders are given, move in on the village, take him alive if you can.

But the argument in front of the panel with his colleague disturbs Johnny and, at the suggestion of the nice guy who always seems to show up at the right time, he seeks out Granowitz for a talk. Johnny overcomes Granowitz' resistance and convinces him to compare notes. The other psychic's images have several things in common with Johnny's visions.

Almost like a performance of the same play in a different theater in a different town.

Deceptions. Windows within windows.

Why wouldn't the enemy play the game by the same rules we play by?

Johnny goes back to the room against the wishes of Harriet and Halsey... he's done his job... but his mind is terribly concerned now - and as he returns to the village

in a vision... he is able to confirm his worst fears. He will never know whether Osama is dead or alive but now that he's looking for it, Johnny finds clear and incontrovertible evidence that the doctor, the patient, and much of what he has seen in his visions - simply isn't real. It has been created by the enemy as one of multiple misleads throughout the Arab world to throw off the U.S.'s constant pursuit of Osama Bin Laden.

And he sees what happens if we send in a strike force to "grab" Osama: they'll be wiped out. It's a trap.

The generals are not at all happy to hear this... they love the psychics when they're telling them what they want to hear - but when they deliver bad news - well, they're unreliable nutcases. Most of all, the Generals have made their command decisions, given orders, their names and reputations are on the line and they don't want to accept that they've been fooled. But again, their ground forces are able to confirm that this could very well be a trap.

The answer is simple: forget the strike team and send in a smart bomb -- wipe out the bastards. In so doing, they take down a couple of Al Qaeda lieutenants and a cousin of Osama - the men that Johnny saw in his visions. They issue a press release declaring a major victory.

Johnny is declared a washout and escorted out by Harriet. On the way, they pass a wall of pictures and Johnny sees the friendly fellow who's been counseling him. He asks Harriet who he is - she tells Johnny that's Ted Checco the man he replaced - the remote viewer who was killed at the Pentagon. Johnny's eyes narrow.

I don't understand, says Johnny, I've never been a medium - I don't have the ability to talk to the dead.

Maybe you don't, says Harriet. But he did. At least he said he did. We couldn't confirm or deny it.

Johnny studies the picture a beat, realizing there are still many things about this universe of ours that he doesn't begin to understand...

And as he walks away...

THE END