

THE DEAD ZONE

"THE COLD HARD TRUTH"

beat outline 10-26-03
written by Michael Taylor
revised by Karl Schaefer
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TEASER

1. JOHNNY AND BRUCE - DRIVING Bruce laughing, Johnny annoyed as they listen to a call-in talk radio show out of Bangor hosted by Bob Jericho, a Lenny Bruce like DJ who specializes in outrageous vitriol, dissecting callers with the "cold hard truth" before punching on to the next victim. After three quick calls, it's not hard to believe this guy's big mouth is going to get him killed someday. Johnny's attention is piqued as Jericho moves onto the news of the day and one of his favorite subjects to skewer, Johnny Smith, who is in the papers again for rescuing a missing girl and her father. (In fact, Jericho's radio commentaries about Johnny may have been sprinkled through out previous episodes, one of the many pitfalls of Johnny's semi-celebrity.) Jericho muses about Johnny's checkered public exploits, and despite his skepticism, decides to give Johnny a call on the air to ask for some psychic advice. Johnny is surprised when his cell phone rings. How the hell did this guy get his unlisted number? When he's too smart to answer, Jericho starts to rant about Johnny. It's funny and mean, and more than a little true, cutting remarkably close to the bone. He even gets a few stifled laughs out of Bruce. But when the rant starts to veer into Jericho wondering aloud why Sheriff Bannerman can't seem to solve a crime without his human ouija board, and what's the connection between Sheriff Bannerman's wife and Johnny anyway?--- Johnny's had enough, and turns the jeep around. He's going down to the station to talk to their management and get this loudmouth fired.

2. AT THE RADIO STATION Within sight of the glass broadcast booth where Jericho continues to bark at the world, Johnny corners the station manager and gives him an earful. How'd he get my number, this is an invasion of privacy, if you don't fire this guy or make him cease and desist I'm going to sue him, the station, and you personally for slander and harassment, etc. By the manager's reaction, we get the impression Johnny is not the first irate listener he's had this conversation with. Johnny is so hot and distracted, when his phone rings, he reflexively answers it. It's Jericho, who has spotted him in the studio, and called Johnny up live on the air. Johnny tries to stay out of it,

but he's in Jericho's world now, and Jericho comes out of the booth with a mic, confronting Johnny, trying to egg him into responding. When he waves his mic in Johnny's face, Johnny shoves the mic away, triggering a vision:

3. VISION P.O.V. - from ten stories up, looking out at a city skyline. The view suddenly rushes forward, falling in a vertiginous spiral down the front of a building, the ground rushing toward us. As we fall, the P.O.V. rolls 180 degrees, looking back up to see where we fell from, revealing the silhouette of a man, someone who pushed us? Before we can see him clearly the view 180's again and we plummet to the ground and blackness.

4. BACK TO REALITY Jericho is still in Johnny's face as he comes out of the vision, taunting Johnny to tell the viewer's what he saw. As Bruce tries to usher him away, Johnny makes a prediction: If Jericho keeps abusing people on the air, his big mouth is going to get him killed someday. Jericho scoffs that you don't need a psychic to predict that, and to prove it, he asks anybody who wants to kill him to call in. Before Johnny can communicate that he's serious, the switchboard lights up and Jericho cuts him off.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

1. RADIO STATION As Jericho teases a Chinese food delivery kid in the background - the station manager walks Johnny to the elevator trying to calm him down by telling him not to worry, if Jericho's ratings don't improve, he'll be off the air by the end of the week anyway. The manager even offers Johnny his own show, which Johnny declines, trying to get the manager to take his vision seriously. Just then Johnny's phone rings, it's Jericho, wanting to know if he could borrow a few bucks for the Chinese food, he forgot his wallet. Johnny just snaps the phone shut and gets on the elevator with Bruce.

Inside the elevator, Bruce finds a fortune cookie dropped by the delivery boy. He opens it and laughs, "You will embark on an unwanted journey." Bruce hands the fortune to Johnny, "You should frame this." Johnny takes the fortune, triggering:

2. VISION The Chinese delivery boy smashes into a chalkboard that reads "Wednesday Dinner Special." Finding himself in a Chinese restaurant, Johnny turns around toward what propelled the kid and sees a tangle of waiters and chefs trying to break up a fight on the floor. The waiters are shoved aside revealing the combatants: an angry man in a baseball cap is pounding the heck out of Jericho. As Johnny

soaks in the vision, a ringing phone pulls him back to reality.

3. JOHNNY AND BRUCE - REALITY Johnny notes the name of the restaurant on the back of the fortune, then answers the phone, knowing it's Jericho, "Just shut up and listen for once..." but it's not Jericho, it's J.J.'s school. J.J.'s been hurt and Johnny is the third name on his emergency list, they left messages for the parents. Could he come to the school right away?

4. INT. J.J.'S SCHOOL - DAY Sarah is already there when Johnny arrives. She looks worried. Johnny laughs with relief when he finds out it's only real-world serious: J.J.'s been in a fight. He won't say why. Walt arrives. It's awkward, Walt and Sarah are still separated. Walt is caught off guard by Johnny being there, and is a little pissed about it, but betrays nothing to J.J. who is watching the coded exchanges between the adults, particularly his mom and dad, searching for signs that they might get back together. Sarah pulls Walt outside to update him, leaving Johnny and J.J. sitting together on the bench outside the principal's office. J.J. obviously doesn't want to talk about it, so they just sit there, Johnny nervously tapping his foot. J.J. is unconsciously doing the exact same thing. Johnny notices this and stops. A question pops into J.J.'s head, "How come the school called you?" Johnny, caught off guard, doesn't answer for a long beat, then recovers, "I'm on the emergency list." Meanwhile, Sarah and Walt try to avoid talking about the elephant in the room -- their continuing separation. Walt checks on Sarah, but it's clear things are still chilly between them. Just the fact that he has to ask speaks volumes. Back on the bench, Johnny and J.J. are tapping their feet again - this time J.J. notices. Johnny realizes J.J. has noticed, but before he can say anything, Walt and Sarah return in full parental mode. Johnny can see they've got this under control so he excuses himself, getting out of there before J.J. can scrutinize him anymore.

5. INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT Johnny and Bruce are lurking in a back booth. Bruce wonders why they are there? "This restaurant is on the first floor. You said he gets pushed off a tall building." Johnny replies, "That's where it ends. Maybe this is where it starts." Johnny nods toward the booth where Jericho is eating, the same booth he was getting beat up in. Before their won ton soup can arrive, Johnny sees the man with the baseball cap enter the restaurant. Finding Jericho, the man sits down, clearly agitated. Apparently this guy's wife called into the show and Jericho so decimated her that she's on anti-depressants now and has lost her sex drive. Jericho, unrepentant, refuses to apologize. But the guy isn't there for an apology, he's there to kick Jericho's ass. A fight ensues, which Johnny lets go on for half a beat, before he and Bruce

try to pull the guy off. Soon enough, the waiters are there, breaking it up -- except this time, unlike the vision, instead of the delivery boy, Bruce is the one who crashes into the specials board.

6. OUTSIDE THE RESTAURANT - LATER Across the street from the radio station, Walt hauls off the angry man in the ball cap, while Bruce and Johnny help Jericho get to his car. But it's been vandalized, besides which he's too drunk to drive, so they wind up driving him home. He thanks Johnny by insulting them both and throwing up in the back of his car.

7. INT. JERRICHO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT Johnny opens the door and Bruce enters with Jericho, dumping him on the bed, passed out. Bruce excuses himself to go hose off his shoes, leaving Johnny alone to poke around. Stacked up in the small apartment are lots of unpacked boxes. Johnny touches one and hears a cacophony of angry voices. Every box, same thing -- angry voices, all too jumbled to understand. Johnny's attention is next drawn to a desk. He opens a drawer and finds a loose stack of birthday cards. Before he can touch one, Jericho slams the drawer shut and grabs Johnny's arm, triggering another vision.

8. REPRISE OF THE FALLING VISION *Still only a terrifying P.O.V. - it's full meaning remaining a mystery.*

9. BACK TO REALITY Jericho telling Johnny to quit touching his stuff and get out, out of his apartment and out of his life. Before he leaves, Johnny repeats his warning, and asks Jericho what's in the boxes. Jericho replies, "Hate mail," ripping one open to show Johnny the envelopes inside.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

1. EXT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - DAY Johnny is hosing off his Jeep when Sarah stops by on her way to pick up J.J. at school. She talks to Johnny as a friend, wondering aloud how things got so messed up with Walt -- and worrying about J.J. She tells Johnny why J.J. got in the fight. Some kids at school were listening to Bob Jericho on the radio and were teasing J.J. about how Walt needs Johnny to solve a case. Johnny tells her that's not all he said, Jericho also intimidated that Johnny and Sarah were once involved. Sarah asks if he said anything about Johnny and J.J. "Not yet" Johnny tells her, but it's only a matter of time before J.J. finds out. They discuss telling J.J. but Sarah needs to talk to Walt first -- until their situation is resolved, it might be best to wait. Sarah and Johnny seem in a good place, she thanks him for listening, then shakes her head at where they've found themselves after all these years, wondering how two lives could change forever in a single moment.

As Sarah drives off to pick up J.J., Johnny finds Jericho's jacket in the backseat. Touching it he triggers:

2. VISION *Jericho being lifted off the ground by two massive tattooed arms, hands gripped around his throat. The viewpoint is looking up at Jericho, seen against blue sky, so this could be anywhere, including a high rooftop. Without warning, the hands release him, and he falls out of frame.*

3. RESUME JOHNNY Groaning at the thought of rescuing this jerk again.

4. EXT. RADIO STATION - DAY Listening to Jericho along the way, Johnny drives to the station. As he arrives out front, he sees Jericho's car getting towed from where they left it last night. As he heads into the tall building Johnny notices that the Tow Truck Driver has the same tattoos as the arms choking Jericho in the vision. The tow truck driver is laughing at Jericho as he wraps up his show. Johnny tries to get the tow truck driver to put the car down and leave before Jericho comes out, but he doesn't have enough money. Unable to move the driver along, Johnny heads into the building, hoping to cut Jericho off.

5. INT. STATION Johnny arrives at the broadcast booth but finds it empty, a pre-recorded commercial running while Jericho takes a break. The engineer tells Johnny that Jericho went to the roof for a smoke.

6. EXT. ROOF Johnny bursts out onto the roof expecting to see the tow truck driver throwing Jericho off -- but there's nobody there. Hearing a commotion, Johnny runs to the edge of the roof and sees Jericho down below being choked by the tow truck driver.

7. EXT. RADIO STATION By the time Johnny gets there, Jericho is out cold on the ground and the tow truck is driving away with his car.

8. INT. E.R. - NIGHT The doctor tells Johnny that Jericho has a concussion, and that somebody needs to stay with him to make sure he doesn't fall asleep for eight hours until they are sure there's no swelling. With nobody else to leave him with, Johnny has no choice but to take Jericho home with him.

9. INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT He plays reluctant host to Jericho who milks his condition for all it's worth. Jericho gets a chance to play psychic, exploring the house, commenting on Johnny's life. It's annoying, but Johnny is also gaining a grudging respect for Jericho's insightfulness. Johnny describes his vision of falling to Jericho, and it has a strange effect on him, shutting him

up. Before Johnny can follow up on Jericho's reaction, there's a knock at the door. It's Walt, J.J. is missing, Sarah thinks he might have run away, and they want Johnny's help. They have no choice but to bring Jericho along.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

1. DRIVING TO SARAH'S HOUSE Jericho finds this all very cozy. Walt wants to kill the guy, but Jericho redeems himself slightly by showing a real interest in J.J.'s welfare.

2. INT./EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE She's waiting on the porch, phone in hand in case J.J. shows up. She's happy Johnny is here, but surprised to see Jericho. A couple of deputies show up at the house and they all meet outside in front to discuss the search. Jericho seems as worried as anyone. Sarah gives Johnny J.J.'s backpack. She found it on the front lawn. Maybe Johnny can remote view where J.J. is. Johnny grabs the bag and we hear the Dead Zone whoosh. Johnny pauses a beat, processing the vision, then starts laughing. Everybody wonders what's so funny. They follow Johnny back into the house and upstairs to J.J.'s room. Johnny walks to the open bedroom window and leans out, finding J.J. sitting comfortably on the roof, knees tucked up to his chin. It's his secret spot, a place he goes to be alone. Sarah and Walt are relieved, then concerned. J.J. tells them he's sorry he didn't answer when they called, he just wanted to be by himself to think. As Sarah and Walt give J.J. a hug, Jericho watches the family reunion, and is so uncharacteristically moved he must leave before betraying his feelings. Johnny sees him go and follows, but Jericho is gone by the time Johnny gets outside. Johnny finds Jericho's hospital i.d. band on the driveway. Picking it up he triggers:

3. FALLING VISION REPRISE *Faster. Farther. More horrific. More real. The silhouette of the man is more distinct, but still unidentifiable.*

4. THE RADIO STATION - NEXT DAY Johnny goes back to the station manager, asking again for them to take Jericho off the air, this time for his own good, before his big mouth gets him killed. Johnny thinks he might actually want somebody to kill him -- death by talk show. Station Manager says not to worry, he's already off the air, bad ratings got him first. That slot is still open if Johnny is interested. Until then a feel-good call in "therapist" will be taking Jericho's slot. Johnny is worried about Jericho, he wonders if there's anybody, a friend, family, who might look out for Jericho. Manager tells Johnny he's the closest thing Jericho

has to a friend. He did mention an ex-wife on the air once in a while, maybe the engineer knows how to get a hold of her -- and if you see Jericho, tell him we boxed up his personal stuff and he should come pick it up, along with his last check.

5. EXT. EX-WIFE'S HOUSE - DAY Johnny finds the ex-wife, living alone in a small house, teaching music to kids. When Johnny tells her why he's there, she doesn't want to talk to him. She shuts the door on Johnny, without telling him anything. Through the door, he gets a vision of her crying on the other side. Before he leaves, he tells her if she changes her mind, she can contact Jericho through the radio station.

6. EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY Johnny pulls up to find J.J. playing street hockey with a few friends out front. Johnny asks if his mom is home. J.J. says no, she's at the market. Johnny picks up an extra hockey stick and motions for J.J. to hit him the puck. J.J. slaps the puck to Johnny, triggering a vision.

7. VISION: *Johnny, Walt, and Sarah sit with J.J. -- we don't need to hear the words to know that J.J. has just been told Johnny is his father. He looks from Sarah, to Walt, to Johnny, a look of betrayal growing across his face as he shakes his head no. Sarah tries to wrap him in a motherly hug, but he pulls away and runs from the room, confused, devastated. It went as bad as it could go.*

8. RESUME REALITY Johnny comes out of the vision to find J.J. giving him a strange look. Johnny tells J.J. to tell his mom he dropped by, then gets in his car, watching J.J. and his friends for a beat. Just then, Bruce calls and tells Johnny to turn on his radio. Johnny does, hearing Jericho on the air. But not as a D.J. -- as a caller.

9. JERICHO ON THE ROOF OF THE RADIO STATION Standing on the ledge, a portable radio at his feet, hearing himself live as he rants into the phone, threatening to jump if the station manager cuts him off the air. Johnny reacts - realizing that Jericho isn't being pushed off the roof in the vision, he jumps.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

1. EXT. RADIO STATION - NIGHT By the time Johnny reaches the radio station, darkness is falling and a crowd has formed out front. Walt and Bruce are already there, and they usher Johnny into the station -- Jericho has been demanding that Johnny get on the air with him.

2. INT. RADIO STATION - NIGHT Johnny is brought into the broadcast booth just as the "feel-good therapist" is losing her temper, about to tell Jericho to go ahead and jump. She leaves in tears, one last victim of Jericho's vitriol. The station manager puts Johnny on the air, with Bruce helping at the controls. Jericho insists Johnny take a poll - he'll do whatever the next ten callers say. Caller after caller votes for him to jump (including some of the callers we've already gotten to know in the course of the show). Things are looking bad, when Johnny glimpses something familiar in a box filled with Jericho's stuff - a kid's birthday card, like the ones he saw in the drawer in Jericho's apartment earlier. He touches the card and is pulled into a vision.

3. INT. JERICHO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - VISION: *Jericho, alone with a half-empty bottle of scotch, finishes writing a long note inside the card. He signs it, "All My Love, Your Father," then studies it for a long beat before opening a drawer and setting it atop the stack of unmailed cards Johnny saw previously.*

4. RESUME INT. RADIO STATION - DAY Johnny opens the card, skims the letter inside - a letter that was apparently never sent - and something clicks in his head. Telling Bruce to take over, he takes the card and heads for the roof.

5. EXT. RADIO STATION - ROOFTOP - DAY Walt's there and tells Johnny to "go help your friend." "He's not my--" Johnny starts to protest, then stops himself, because by now it's clear that Johnny really is the closest thing to a friend that Jericho has. As Johnny approaches the edge, Jericho again threatens to jump, but Johnny says to at least wait to hear what he's got to say. He confronts Jericho with the card, telling him he thinks he knows why the DJ's been trying to get himself killed and is now taking matters into his own hands. It all has to do with this card, and the others just like it in his apartment - cards that were never mailed because there was no one to receive them. Jericho can't help reaching for the card, and when he touches it, it triggers a split-reality vision -

6. INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY - VISION *A terrible moment from Jericho's past plays back: he's on the phone with his agent talking deal points while a cleaning woman opens a window to clean it, stepping away for a second - just as Jericho's young son chases a ball toward it. Jericho turns in time to see the danger, then shouts and rushes toward the boy, who turns at the last moment but then loses his balance and tumbles backwards. Jericho's outstretched hand brushes his clothing but is unable to grab on. And now, as the camera's P.O.V. falls away from Jericho's horrified eyes, Johnny understands why he thought Jericho was the victim of this fall. It's because Jericho's been reliving it for years, putting himself in his lost child's place. His own awful*

guilt shaped what Johnny saw (just as the old spy's belief that he was disappearing caused Johnny to have a literal disappearing vision in "The Man Who Never Was"). That same guilt has put his whole life into a free fall. He's been lashing out at the world and everyone in it, tearing into their hypocrisies, their weaknesses, their lies, all in the name of ferreting out the "cold hard truth." But the final truth is that his real target has always been himself.

7. EXT. RADIO STATION - ROOFTOP - DAY The vision ends. Jericho tells Johnny that not a day goes by that he doesn't relive that moment, imagining himself in his son's place, taking the fall for him. "So now you know," Jericho concedes. "But what makes you think that changes anything?" And now Jericho reveals what he has against Johnny, the reason he turned him into a radio whipping boy. It's because Johnny has the temerity to act as though he really is a savior who can change fate. Rescue the drowning girl from the trunk. Save the kids from the fire or the unborn babies from the deadly skin cream. Only Jericho doesn't believe in saviors of the religious or psychic variety, only in a world where kids fall out of windows because you looked away for a second, absorbed in the bullshit and hubris of your own life, and there's nothing you can do to bring them back, except maybe, just maybe, take the fall that they took for you. And as he backs closer to the edge, we INTERCUT:

8. INT. RADIO STATION - DAY Where Bruce is now desperately screening calls, trying to find someone, anyone, with a supportive word for Jericho, before putting through that tenth call. But all he hears are "jump," "bastard," "take a flying leap," etc., as he punches his way through the call board. He hits the last lit-up button, says "I'm sorry, can you turn down your radio?" Then: "Who is this?" And as he reacts to what he hears...

9. EXT. RADIO STATION - ROOFTOP - DAY Jericho's heels are over the edge. "Don't," Johnny pleads. But Jericho says he's gotta go with his callers' votes, and so far it's a unanimous thumbs down. "C'mon Bruce," he says into his phone, "Punch through that tenth caller." And then he's stopped cold by the woman's voice coming from his radio. "Bob?" she says. "Bob, can you hear me?" It's Jericho's ex-wife. For a beat he's stunned into silence. His eyes go to Johnny, who nods his encouragement. "Aren't you going to take the call?" Finally, Jericho does, and we play their conversation on the radio as listeners in their homes and cars, the staff of the radio station, the crowd at the base of the building, all hear Jericho's ex-wife tell him it's time for both of them to forgive themselves, and each other, for an accident they were helpless to prevent, an accident that may have changed their lives in an instant, but shouldn't have ended them. "Please, Bob, just talk to me," she pleads. And finally Jericho does, stepping back from

the edge. As they start to talk, a conversation no one else needs to hear, Johnny tells Bruce to play a record. The crowd below breaks up, emotionally drained, and Johnny's about to leave too (Jericho is clearly safe now; Walt's cops have the situation under control), when Jericho calls out to him. He doesn't quite thank him. Instead, he recalls an exchange from their long night together, reminding Johnny that he has some unfinished business of his own. That starts Johnny thinking again about a connection that he needs to make, no matter what the emotional risks...

We FADE OUT, then FADE IN on:

10. INT. RADIO STATION - ANOTHER DAY Jericho is back on the air, his on air catharsis making him a ratings hit again. At first he seems his old bad self, but then he tempers things by cutting a troubled caller some slack, then playing a jazz recording. He waxes philosophic on how life can change forever in a heartbeat, but there's still time to make it right, the source music becomes soundtrack over -

11. INT. BANNERMAN HOUSE - DAY Johnny, Walt, Sarah and J.J. gathered in the living room. We see the scene leading up to the moment from Johnny's vision, where he told J.J. We hold on the moment before that revelation... and FADE OUT.

END ACT FOUR

THE END