

THE DEAD ZONE

“BROKEN CIRCLE”

Revised Story Outline

By Michael Taylor

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We ended last season on a cliffhanger: Johnny knocked cold by a vision of his new love, Rebecca Caldwell, dying after shooting Greg Stillson—an assassination that Johnny’s own future self has told him he mustn’t stop. Now, as we pick up the threads of that story, we set in motion a much larger one, painting a backdrop against which the rest of Season 4 will unfurl. For three years, a vision of Armageddon has hung over Johnny Smith, as frightening for its obscurity as for the destruction it portends. How and when will it happen? And, more specifically, how will the key figures implicated in that vision—Greg Stillson, Gene Purdy, and even Johnny himself—help bring it about? While ultimate answers may continue to elude Johnny, the forces that will shape Armageddon will now begin to be revealed. As “Future Johnny” and “Future Man” quite literally fade out of our series, a mysterious new player emerges from the shadows and aligns himself with both Stillson and Purdy. His message to each: “You have a role to play.” Johnny, too, has a challenging task—stopping Armageddon—but his only support comes from his small but loyal band of friends. He can trust no one else, not even, as he comes to realize, himself.

We open in the past, 1978 to be exact, in a SMALL MIDWESTERN CHURCH. Twelve-year-old Greg Stillson is again helping his Dad sell bibles, as he was during a swing through Maine two years earlier (as seen in “Destiny”). James Stillson is only looking to get the addresses of well-to-do churchgoers who might spring for the cost of a new bible set, but Greg, showing off for the Minister’s pretty young daughter, convinces the man to replace all of the church’s own tattered bibles. His father’s reward for his inspired salesmanship? A vicious slap across the face for “almost blowing the pitch,” though really it’s Greg’s talent and charm that’s threatening James Stillson, signaling that the son is destined to surpass the father. As Greg rubs his jaw, fighting tears, CUT TO:

PRESENT-DAY GREG STILLSON in his D.C. office as a handler tactfully suggests that it’s time to replace his father with a more “professional” manager. We sense that Stillson is open to the idea, but his emotional ties to his current “manager” remain complicated. For now he demurs—just as James Stillson enters and flicks on the TV. Looks like Greg’s “pal” Johnny Smith had had some

bad luck—good luck for them. He’s been hospitalized for brain surgery. As a news show comes on, showing the exterior of a Maine hospital, we CUT TO:

A HOSPITAL O.R. where Johnny is already under the knife, or, in this case, a slender arthroscopic probe which is being inserted into his skull. His neurologist, Dr. Jaeger, monitors its progress via a tiny internal camera as he narrates for the benefit of observing surgeons. As the probe passes through the temporal lobe, the repository of memories, we PUSH IN on Johnny’s partly closed eyes, pupils twitching as if in REM sleep, and the screen fills with a rush of black-and-white images—telling moments from Johnny’s past. Then the probe pushes deeper, into Johnny’s “Dead Zone.” Suddenly the images explode into rich, super-saturated color as Johnny’s most recent visions—the very ones that put him on this operating table—tumble across the screen: Rebecca buying a gun; Future Johnny warning Johnny not to stop her; Rebecca shooting Stillson and being shot down by his bodyguards. The images are intercut with an oddly discordant new vision: a first-person view of a partly-clothed Rebecca leaning over us seductively, as though we’re Johnny lying in bed, and saying “I love you,” her expression strangely detached. Then we hear Jaeger saying that he’s begun excising Johnny’s Dead Zone. Everything FADES TO WHITE... as Johnny shouts “No!”

We CUT TO an EXISTING SCENE from “Tipping Point Part 2” of Johnny sitting up in his hospital bed, finding he’s been restrained while a nurse preps him for surgery. The entire operation has been a vision. As the nurse exits, Bruce enters and tries to get his friend to relax. But Johnny can’t, telling Bruce that he’s just had a vision. Off which, we CUT TO ANOTHER EXISTING SCENE (augmented by new footage), which takes place in the hospital corridor as a Federal Marshal (Pendragon) and a small team of deputies sweep in to take custody of Johnny. The Rachel Caldwell murder has been reopened; it’s now a federal case. Pendragon and his men bull their way past Walt and Sarah but by the time they get to Johnny’s room, both he and Bruce are gone. END TEASER.

ACT ONE finds Bruce's car speeding down an interstate, Johnny slumped in the passenger seat, half nodded out from painkillers. As double-trailer semis whoosh by in the opposite lanes, Johnny's mind conjures images of Rebecca, disjointed fragments from the oddly seductive "I love you" vision. This isn't Johnny's brain on drugs; it's Johnny's brain on pain: a symptom of his deteriorating condition that will warp his visions throughout the episode. Struggling to shake off these Dead Zone "cobwebs," his fingers unconsciously find his cane top...

"Shouldn't you be in the hospital?" a familiar voice accuses. Johnny whips around to see Christopher Wey—"Future Man"—behind the wheel. Somehow, Johnny's addled brain has put Wey in the driver's seat, displacing Bruce. Is it a vision, an hallucination, or some combination of both? Johnny can't be sure. But Wey's anger seems real enough. "You better think about what you're doing before you screw this up, Smith!" And then Johnny blinks and finds Bruce once again driving, looking at him with concern—and not just for his health. Bruce can't help but ask: What if his future self is right and that by saving one life they're risking millions? It's a question Johnny's grappled with before, albeit on a smaller scale, and he tells Bruce he's not about to "play God" with another woman he's grown to love. As they near Washington, he tries Rebecca's cell again, taking us to:

REBECCA STEPPING THROUGH A SECURITY SCANNER at the entrance to a Congressional office building. She picks up her phone, which is vibrating in a small plastic bin, sees Johnny's name and sends the call to voice mail oblivion. But meanwhile her purse has set off an alarm. For a moment we think she made the mistake of bringing her gun to Congress, but it's just a thick set of keys. Rebecca's no fool; anxious as she is to avenge her sister's death, she has a plan. She's here to meet with Greg Stillson and arrange to get him alone. In a scene that again borrows from an existing one, she mends fences by lending her support to his "Rachel's Law" anticrime bill, then asks him out for a drink. Stillson's about to agree—when his father walks in and tersely reminds him that he has work obligations. Stillson eyes his father with irritation, clearly chafing under his

micromanagement, then smiles again for Rebecca. Maybe later on those drinks. But meanwhile he's looking forward to seeing her at a press conference for the bill later this afternoon. He'll send a car to pick her up and whisk her past security. We sense that Rebecca realizes this may be her best chance to get close to Stillson with a gun, at least before Johnny figures out her plans, if he hasn't already, and tries to stop her. As she exits, then leans against a wall and sighs, steeling her resolve...

BACK IN CLEAVES MILLS, Walt's under siege. Pendragon's all but taken over his sheriff's station as he coordinates a statewide manhunt for Johnny. Sarah's hanging around, anxious for news, while sign-waving supporters of Reverend Purdy— who's been jailed inside after publicly admitting that he forged Mike Kennedy's suicide note and confession to Rachel Caldwell's murder—are waging a highly vocal "pray-in" outside the building (though we just see a handful of them on a security monitor as Roscoe enters, lugging a huge bag of Purdy's mail). Amidst which, Walt's trying to research Sonny Elliman, Greg Stillson's Chief of Security, whom Johnny's visions have pegged as Kennedy's killer. He follows up by grilling Purdy (in another existing scene we may use and augment), who's surprisingly chipper, saying he just had his first good night's sleep in months. Confession is indeed good for the soul. Unfortunately, he doesn't know why Elliman killed Kennedy. What he does know is that Elliman is Greg Stillson's bagman and enforcer. Loyal as a pit-bull, he doesn't do anything without Greg's say-so. All of which buttresses Walt's belief that Johnny's been right about Stillson all along: not only is he ultimately responsible for Kennedy's murder, but probably Rachel's as well, either directly or through his "pit-bull," Sonny.

He returns to his office, mulling his next move, when one of Pendragon's men reports that a trap on Johnny's cell phone has shown repeated calls to Rebecca Caldwell's number in Washington. Pendragon concludes that's where Johnny's headed, possibly intending to harm the sister of his murder victim, or even Greg Stillson, who's reported him as a dangerous stalker and is, in fact, the reason Pendragon's been put on the case. Sarah says that's ridiculous; Johnny loves Rebecca and

he's not stalking Stillson. But Pendragon nevertheless orders surveillance on Rebecca's apartment, as well as a chopper to speed him and his posse back to the capital. After he splits, Sarah tells Walt they've got to find Johnny first and get him back to a hospital before his condition worsens, or one of Pendragon's cowboys takes a potshot at him. Walt's not sure that's the best course, and makes a strong case for making Elliman his top priority right now. Johnny won't be truly safe until he stops running, and he won't stop running until Rachel's real murderer is arrested and his name is cleared. "Maybe not," Sarah allows, "but proving Johnny's innocence won't help him if he's dead. Besides, Elliman's in D.C. too, isn't he?" As Walt finds himself succumbing to her more emotional logic, CUT TO:

REBECCA'S APARTMENT as Johnny and Bruce arrive. Rebecca isn't home, but Johnny's been here before and uses his spare key to let them in, hoping for a vision that will lead them to her. Instead, he has a vision of himself and Rachel spending a blissful weekend holed up inside: making love, chasing each other down the hallway, watching a late night movie on the couch. It's more evidence of an intimacy that will make their relationship seem that much more real to us. But to Johnny's surprise, he also sees James Stillson and Sonny Elliman planting surveillance bugs—apparently they've been spying on her—and then Walt entering the apartment with his gun drawn. Adding to the confusion, it's day on one side of the apartment, night on the other; raining out one window, sunny out the next. The overlapping visions are accompanied by spasms of pain, further evidence of Johnny's deteriorating condition. Finally, he picks up a small photo of himself and Rebecca and has a vision of her at a dressing table, putting on her makeup, then loading her gun. Strangely, it's Johnny who feels like a ghost as he helplessly reaches out to her. Then his eyes go to a press release for the event—it will be held on the steps of a downtown courthouse. Now he knows where to find her, but there's little time. Johnny pockets the photo as he and Bruce head for the door,

only to be stopped by another vision: federal marshals coming up in the elevator. As they make for the stairs, we END ACT ONE...

...and resume with another FLASHBACK TO STILLSON'S PAST: a brief scene in which Greg, now 16, angrily confronts his father, who's just sent his pregnant girlfriend packing. Stillson silences his son first by physically overpowering him—throwing him up against a wall—then by lecturing him about how he's actually done him a service. A bone-headed mistake like this one could've derailed him from his destined path: a path toward power and glory. Then, straightening Greg's tie in a faux fatherly manner, he smirkingly adds that it only cost him two hundred bucks plus the address of an abortion clinic to buy the girl off. "I woulda gone as high as five but that little twist sold out cheap." Red-faced, Greg slaps his father's hands away as James Stillson just laughs.

WE RETURN TO THE PRESENT to find Greg staring thoughtfully out the window of his limo as he talks to his handler on the phone, telling him maybe it is time to set up a meeting with that "management consultant" he's been pushing. James Stillson, who's finishing a call of his own, asks Greg what that was about. "Nothing you need to worry about," Greg says. "Wrong," his father says, straightening Greg's tie in a familiar controlling gesture. "Everything you do is something I need to worry about." As in the scene from the past, Greg bats his father's hands away. We sense an anger that's been contained for many years getting ready to explode as he gets out of the car, slamming the door behind him. His father just sighs, then turns to the driver, Sonny Elliman, and gives him a nod. As Elliman pulls away from the curb...

...We find WALT watching from a rented car across the street. He's been tailing Elliman. As he slips into traffic behind them, we cut away again, this time finding:

JOHNNY AND BRUCE, having eluded the marshals at Rebecca's apartment, are now rushing to the press conference in a cab that Bruce has commandeered. In a tense chase sequence that again makes use of existing footage, they're pursued by more feds while Pendragon's chopper

roars overhead, coordinating the pursuit. Ultimately, the feds cut off the cab, only to find Bruce alone at the wheel. Johnny's already jumped out and is racing to the courthouse on foot, even as Rebecca nervously starts to open her purse and reach for her gun...

But as she does, the cell phone nestled next to it rings again. A beat, then she lets go of the gun and takes out the phone, sees it's Johnny again. This time, maybe sensing it could be the last time she might hear his voice, she answers, still determined to go through with her plan. But Johnny's first words catch her off guard: "I always liked that dress," he says. She looks up, her eyes finding Johnny standing apart from the crowd of press and onlookers on a "grassy knoll" on the other side of a security barrier. It's as close as he could get. Yet despite this tenuous electronic connection, Johnny is able to connect with Rebecca emotionally, telling her that by killing Stillson, she'll be killing a part of herself, and a part of him as well. Ultimately, she can't do it. She nods a tearful acknowledgment to Johnny. But as she does, Stillson follows her look and sees Johnny too, as does Pendragon, now at his side. The chase resumes, Johnny thinking he's at least saved Rebecca—until he ducks into a jostling crowd of reporters and has another disorienting vision, this one looking as if it was shot simultaneously from the POV of several news cameras, all showing a handcuffed Rebecca being perp-walked into a police station as overlapping newscasters identify her as the alleged killer of freshman Congressman Greg Stillson. With a start, Johnny realizes he hasn't stopped Rebecca's plan after all, merely delayed it. Meanwhile his pursuers are right on top of him. Trying to lose them, he darts into traffic—only to have a nondescript, government-style sedan screech to a stop, cutting him off. To Johnny's surprise, it's Sarah. "Get in!" she shouts. As Johnny does and she floors it, narrowly evading Pendragon's men, we END ACT TWO.

We pick up with PURDY, who has a visitor: a quirky, James Carville-like man in a rumpled suit who also wears a ring with an unusual religious symbol—a talisman of some secretive brotherhood, which Purdy recognizes and reveres. The Rumpled Man indicates the bags of mail from

Purdy's supporters, and wonders why the Reverend is languishing here when so many people are clearly begging for his guidance and leadership? Purdy says he must be punished for his sins. In response, the man puts a hand on Purdy's shoulder, and Purdy can't help but glance covetously at that "ring of power." "We all have sins to atone for," the man says, "but you have a role to play, Reverend. A crucial role." As Purdy basks in this affirmation of his own special destiny, we wonder just who this new player is...

WE RETURN TO D.C., where Sarah is determined to drive Johnny straight to a hospital. But Johnny won't go, not when Rebecca's still gunning for Stillson at the risk of destroying her own life. Johnny's insistence on risking *his* own life practically brings Sarah to tears. She came all this way to help him. Why won't he let her? "You *are* helping me," Johnny insists. "Just help me for just a little longer." Given no choice, Sarah reluctantly checks in with:

WALT, who's followed James Stillson and Sonny Elliman to Rebecca's apartment where they've been planting bugs. Apparently, Johnny's earlier vision was of this future, not the past. James Stillson leaves, and Walt takes the opportunity to confront Elliman and tell him he knows he killed Kennedy. Elliman's plenty surprised, but he's a cool customer and figures Walt is once again acting on "psychic evidence," the kind that's inadmissible in court. Walt hoped he might get lucky and convince Elliman to deal his way out of this. But nothing doing. He's ready to leave it there for now, but Elliman pushes his luck, ragging on the "hick sheriff" for trying to throw his weight around in the big city. "Shoulda stayed home and boned your cute wife. Or is that the psychic's job?" Bad move. Walt turns and punches him in the face. Elliman's no pushover but in the ensuing fight, Walt comes out on top. As he stands, he looks at the blood on his knuckles and we CUT TO:

A PARKING GARAGE where Walt is telling Sarah and Johnny about Stillson's dad and Sonny Elliman trying to bug Rebecca's apartment, which explains Johnny's vision. Walt didn't exactly get Elliman to confess to killing Kennedy, but he didn't go away entirely empty handed. He

holds out his fist, now streaked with dried blood. Elliman's. Johnny touches it, and has a vision of Elliman burying Rachel Caldwell in the woods as James Stillson watches in the background. It doesn't tell him who killed her; it still could've been Greg, with his father and henchman cleaning up after him. Johnny tries calling Rebecca again. This time, she's at a RECEPTION that followed the press conference. The noise makes it hard for her to hear Johnny pleading to meet so they can talk this out. Then a smiling Greg Stillson comes up behind her, closes her phone and pulls her into:

A PHOTO OP. From all the kudos Stillson is getting from his Washington cronies, it's clear to Rebecca that his nascent bill is already scoring him a political coup—on her dead sister's shoulders. When he follows up by making some self-serving comments about Rachel's dedication to his campaign, it's enough to steel her resolve again. She flirts with him: Does he have time now for a celebratory drink? Stillson's face lights up. Ignoring the baleful look his father is shooting him from across the room, he says he'll make the time. Conveniently, he keeps a hotel suite with a full bar nearby. Rebecca forces a smile, clutches her purse, and allows him to lead her away.

Elsewhere, PENDRAGON IS GRILLING BRUCE, who's trying to convince him that he's after the wrong man. Johnny's isn't out to harm Greg Stillson. Much as he may dislike the man, he's actually trying to protect him. "From whom?" Pendragon wants to know. But Bruce can't go there, saying only that Stillson has made enemies. Pendragon actually isn't overly concerned about Johnny's guilt or innocence, he's just here to do a job, à la Tommy Lee Jones. Still, Bruce is making him question whether he's being used by Stillson to settle some kind of personal score. He agrees to call off the manhunt, but only if Bruce helps bring Johnny in. As Bruce ponders this, we find...

JOHNNY, WALT AND SARAH on the move again. They've just missed Rebecca at the reception listed on the Stillson itinerary that Sarah used to track down Johnny. Now, as they get back in the car, Johnny takes out the photo of himself and Rebecca that he pocketed in her apartment. Concentrating despite his pain, he sees a series of images: Stillson's hotel; a POV of an elevator door

opening; then, once again, the seductive vision of Rebecca. Only now he sees that it's not himself whom Rebecca's seducing, it's Stillson. Her awkwardness is obvious; she's no Mata Hari. And when she murmurs "I love you," we can tell it's because she's indeed thinking of Johnny to help get her through this. Meanwhile, she's reaching for the purse that she's positioned beside the couch...

Johnny snaps out the vision, frantically dials his phone, and we intercut with the hotel suite, where the scene he envisioned is happening right now: Rebecca reaching for her purse just as her phone inside rings. Only now Stillson grabs the purse first. "Know what?" he says, crossing with it toward the door. "I may have to pass a law banning these things. Invasion of privacy." He opens the door, tosses the purse to a bodyguard, telling him to keep it safe and well out of earshot, before returning with a salacious grin to a very flustered Rebecca. "Now where did we leave off?" he says.

Back in the car, Johnny fights off dizzying waves of pain as they rush toward the hotel. His hand grips his cane. Suddenly, he realizes the car has stopped. In fact, everything has stopped: Walt and Sarah, traffic, pedestrians, time itself. And then he's no longer in the car; he's standing amidst the tableau of a frozen Washington. A smear of unnaturally bright light hangs over the distant White House—and Johnny realizes this is the microsecond before the nuclear blast that will level the city. "Didn't I make it simple enough?" a voice asks him—and Johnny turns to see his white-haired future self facing him, holding his cane top. "One life to save millions. There's still time... to do the right thing." But Johnny can't accept this, accusing his future self of arranging all of this: manipulating Johnny into making contact with Rachel Caldwell, then using him, in turn, to manipulate Rebecca into becoming an assassin. He's made both of them his pawns, something Future Johnny freely admits. He says he had no choice knowing that Johnny—his own past self—lacked the strength to do what was needed to stop this future from happening. He points to the bright smear of light. "This is why," he says. "Why you have to choose." And suddenly the vision ends and Johnny is back in the

car, still speeding toward the hotel. The pain of this vision doubles him over but he just tells Walt to drive faster. He's made his choice. He only hopes there truly is still time.

We build our climactic sequence in a tense intercut. In the hotel suite, Stillson has excused himself for a moment, allowing Rebecca to find a new weapon: a knife from the suite's kitchen. She hides it as Stillson returns, then offers to give him a massage. He lies down on his stomach, smiling... as outside, Johnny, Walt and Sarah pile out of their car. Walt and Sarah stage a fight so Johnny can slip past the marshals that Pendragon has posted there. But then a surprised James Stillson tries to grab him just as Johnny steps into an elevator. He has a final stunning vision: James Stillson clubbing Rachel Caldwell to death with her own camera. Greg's father is the real killer. The elevator doors close as the two men turn to stare at each other, Stillson perhaps sensing what Johnny's seen. But Johnny still has to stop Rebecca from committing another murder. He bursts into Greg Stillson's suite, yanking the knife away just as she's about to stab him from behind. Stillson's naturally stunned, not realizing at first the danger he was in and wondering what the hell Johnny's doing here? And Johnny explains, as much for Greg's benefit as for Rebecca's, that Stillson's father killed Rachel. She must've inadvertently discovered something about the campaign, or his father thought she did. Greg says he's insane, but at this point, Johnny just ignores him, pulling Rebecca away. He collapses a moment later in the lobby, where Sarah, Walt and Rebecca now rush to finally get him the medical attention he so desperately needs.

But our focus remains upstairs with Greg Stillson, who now confronts his father with Johnny's accusation, and is shocked when James doesn't even bother denying it. He did what he had to protect Greg from his own animal instincts, just as he has all Greg's life. In the end, it's just a nutty psychic's word against theirs. So who gives a shit?

But James has grossly miscalculated. Greg genuinely cared for Rachel and now a lifetime's worth of anger boils to the surface. He lashes out at his father verbally, nailing him for the pathetic,

coattail-riding loser that he is—and his father SLAPS him, hard, just like he did in the Teaser. But Greg isn't eight years old anymore and the stinging blow just ignites an explosion of rage. He slams his father into a wall repeatedly, until before he knows it, James Stillson is dead...

Greg Stillson is still kneeling over his father's body, convulsed with a gut-wrenching mixture of grief and catharsis, when his handlers enter the room with someone we've seen before: the rumpled man who visited Purdy. "Stand up straight, Congressman," says Greg Stillson's new management consultant. And as the man, whose name we have yet to learn, helps Stillson up, he puts a steadying hand on his shoulder, a hand bearing that same ring. "You have a role to play, Mister Stillson. And I'm here to make sure nothing stands in your way." And off that unsettling moment...

Days later. Close on a newspaper headline describing the "accidental death" of Congressman Stillson's father following an apparent drinking bout. The newspaper's lowered as Johnny looks up to see Rebecca crossing to where he's standing by the railing of a bridge over the Potomac. He has a bag slung over one shoulder and he's making do without his cane, his features drawn but no longer creased with pain. It's a difficult meeting for these two, and as soon as their eyes meet, Johnny knows where it's going. "You're not going back with me, are you?" he says. There's a long pause, then Rebecca just shakes her head. She's still coming to grips with how close she came to killing a man—the wrong man, as it turned out—and losing her soul in the bargain. Johnny's turbulent life, his visions, Armageddon... it's all too much for her. For a while, at least, she needs some distance.

For his part, Johnny didn't need a vision to see this coming. They share a kiss, a last tender moment, then she walks away. A beat, then Johnny takes his cane out of his shoulder bag. He's realized that it's the ultimate cause of his headaches through the connection to the post-Armageddon future that it enables: the closed "circle" it creates with his future self. He intends to break that circle by casting it away. As he grips it for the last time, Wey and Future Johnny briefly appear, protesting angrily that he can't do this on his own; he needs them. But to Johnny they're just phantoms; he's

already decided that the only way to change the future is to venture into it without the benefit of hindsight, or the manipulations of the more cynical man he yet become. He arcs the cane over the water, then watches it drift away with the current.

Only then does he turn—to Walt, Sarah and Bruce, who have driven up in the background and are waiting to take him home. Pendragon watches from his own car nearby, having agreed to let Walt keep custody over Johnny for the time being.

Off Johnny as he walks toward his friends, and an unknown future...