

THE DEAD ZONE

“The Collector”

Story by James Morris & Shintaro Shimosawa

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What does it really mean to be needed? How far would you go to satisfy that feeling? Johnny’s visions of a young girl’s abduction leads him on a life and death race to find “The Collector” – a disturbed man who kidnaps young women and attempts to indoctrinate them to be their most “perfect self.” It’s a race against time to save an innocent girl before she ends up dead.

(NOTE TO READER: All depictions of violence and/or sex will be OFF CAMERA. The intent is to allow the audience to create these actions in their own minds. If there is a problem with Cleaves Mills having a seedy part of town, the action can be moved to Bangor. I strongly believe we gain nothing by making Cleaves Mills some kind of unbelievable utopia.)

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In the teaser, we find Johnny alone. A series of languid shots show him sitting on the edge of an empty bed; eating cereal by himself; pressing the answering machine only to hear “no messages.” The doorbell rings. It’s Sarah and J.J.. For Johnny it’s like an answered prayer. J.J. is playing little league and Johnny promised to give him his old baseball mitt. Johnny sends the kid to the garage to look for it while he and Sarah talk. Johnny notices Sarah carrying a small notebook. She’s trying to figure out a subject for a newspaper essay contest entitled “My Home Town”. Average citizens writing in to describe their view of small town life. But Sarah has a troubled mind. A young runaway (Erica) has gone missing from a local community outreach center. A girl Sarah has come to know through her volunteer work. Sarah fears something terrible. Johnny asks if she’s talked to Walt. She says yes, but apparently no one has reported the girl missing. There’s not much he can do but post the report. Sarah seems frustrated as she tells Johnny about Walt’s increasingly long workdays and J.J.’s newfound sense of

independence. It's hard when you feel unnecessary. Johnny offers to look into the missing runaway, as J.J. arrives with the mitt as they move out for a quick catch. Sarah quietly watches from the window, a look of inner turmoil on her face.

At the outreach center, Sarah shows Johnny around. Johnny gets a hit off a locker used by the missing girl and is thrown into a VISION:

A terrified young woman (ERICA) is held captive in a small, concrete chamber. "CHANCES ARE" by Johnny Mathis plays on a set of small speakers mounted in the corner of the chamber. Powerful strobe lights flash in her eyes, blinding and disorienting her. She pounds on the door, "Let me out of here! You hear me you sick sonofabitch!?"

Johnny flashes out of the Vision. Sarah sees his disturbed expression: *"You saw something, didn't you?"*

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We open ACT ONE in the Sheriff's Station on a SKETCH in progress. Johnny and Sarah describe the abducted girl to a police artist. Walt's searched the files – there's still no report fitting this girl's description and none of anybody named Erica. Walt says he'll cross reference data from the county database, put the sketch out on the wire. He presses Johnny for more details, but the vision is what it is. Johnny notices the helpless look in Sarah's face and decides to investigate further.

Meanwhile, we cut to Erica, in a brightly lit room with concrete walls and no windows. It's stark, cold and eerie. *"I'm so hungry. Please. Just tell me what you want?!..."* We think she's alone, but we PAN ACROSS to a PAIR OF EYES staring in through a small slit in the steel door. A neatly folded, paisley sundress and some new cosmetics drop into the chamber through a chute cut into the wall. A MAN'S VOICE crackles in through a cheap speaker mounted in the corner of the room. *"Put the dress on. Fix yourself up."* We're off on those eyes...

A SEEDY SIDE OF TOWN. Prostitutes and lowlifes linger in the night. Johnny shows the sketch of Erica around. Some shake their heads, some just walk away. He finds one girl, TAMI, who recognizes the sketch. Erica shared a room with her for a few days. Rent by the week. She says that the girl never actually crossed the line as a hooker, *"It wasn't in her."* Johnny asks to see the room.

Walt comes home late again. Sarah is upset and edgy. J.J.'s been locked away in his room on the computer all afternoon. The subject shifts to the missing girl. *"How can a human being just disappear and nobody know about it?"* Walt changes the subject and asks her about the essay. Sarah says she's thinking of dumping the whole idea. She's not exactly in the frame of mind to write about life in the perfect small town.

We find Johnny at the Raintree Motel with Tami. It's a dive. He touches the bed and gets a VISION *of an endless parade of casual sex. It's a chance to have some fun with Visions. Suddenly he recognizes Erica. She takes her panhandling money and hides it underneath the base of the lamp next to the bed.* Johnny comes out of the Vision, tips the lamp over and rotates the base. Suddenly he gets another Vision; *a picture-perfect suburban house with a gnarled tree in the front yard. There's something unique about it – like two trees that have grown into one another.*

Cut to Johnny at Walt and Sarah's place. He tells Walt he thinks he knows the location where Erica may be held. Walt wants to help, but he can't just bang on every door with a weird tree in the yard. J.J., doing his homework at the counter, casually pipes in – *"I know that tree. I pass it every day on the way to school."* Walt and Johnny share a look, nice going, kid.

Walt, Johnny and other police sit outside to the house with the strange tree. *"This is it. This is the place."*

Meanwhile, Erica manages to slip her tiny wrists out of the painful, metal restraints. Frantic in her newfound freedom, she rushes to the steel door and manages to get her arm out through the middle opening and turns the knob on the other side – it's open! She checks quickly to make sure she's alone, then grabs her stuff and hurries out through a narrow man-made TUNNEL. As she escapes, she hits an unseen trip wire.

KNOCK AT THE DOOR as Walt, Johnny and other officers flank the outside of the house. *"Police, open the door."*

Erica crawls to the end of the tunnel, only to find a ladder up to another door. She's almost out!

Walt KNOCKS again on the front door. He nods a signal to a few officers – it's time to go.

Erica bursts through the door at the top of the stairs, and her face drops. To her horror, a MAN in a MASK stands blocking her way, “*You aren’t wearing the dress I bought you.*” A heavy KNOCKING on the front door turns the masked man’s attention behind him towards the door.

Walt finishes KNOCKING. He’s about to kick in the front door and nail this masked madman.

The Masked Man carries Erica back into the basement, then shuts the door and locks it. We can barely hear her screaming from the other side of the heavy door. The Masked Man MOVES towards the front door as the KNOCKING continues.

Walt finishes KNOCKING and nods for his men to get ready to force the door open.

The Masked Man (we’re only seeing his body now) reaches for the door knob, his other hand moving behind his back and holding the mask.

Walt’s about to kick in the door as it suddenly opens...

The Masked Man opens the front door to REVEAL a TEENAGE BOY.

Walt and Johnny are confronted by a housewife looking woman, LINDA, 30s. RICH, 30s, her boyfriend stands beside her.

The TEENAGER says, “*Hello sir, would you care to donate to the local high school football team. We’re tryin’ to buy new uniforms.*”

Walt and Johnny seemed dumbfounded. The woman asks, “*Is there a problem officer?*” He clearly has the wrong house!

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ACT TWO begins inside Linda’s home. Walt apologizes for the mistake and orders his men out. Johnny pulls him aside. “*We can’t leave. My visions led me here for a reason.*” Linda, the housewife, drops something and as Johnny picks it up he gets a Vision...

Linda, wearing a powder blue dress but no shoes. She’s on the floor, looking up and pleading “Please, I’ll do it better this time.” REVEALING the man in the plastic mask. The very same man Johnny saw in the first Vision of Erica, the missing runaway. The man looks down at Linda and brushes the hair off her face. “You are full of surprises.” “Chances Are” plays on a record player. Johnny flashes out of the Vision with a new, more disturbing realization: “He took you, too...”

Linda claims not to know nothing about any man in a mask. Walt tells her about Erica, the missing girl. She continues to evade the subject. In a last ditch effort Johnny whistles, "*Chances are.*" Linda reacts. It gets a little heated, as Walt and Johnny have no choice but to leave.

"*What was that about?*" Rich asks as Johnny and Walt walk out the door. Linda shrugs: "*Mistaken identity.*" Rich sits down on his recliner in front of the TV, surprisingly pacified by her response. "*Jeopardy's on....*" Linda's expression tells us how trapped she's become in her life. Her silent torment in this suburban wasteland.

Outside – Walt and Johnny move towards the car. "*She could be our only hope of finding Erica.*" Walt asks, "*What do you want me to do? Arrest her for denying a vision?*" Walt radios to Roscoe, asks him to go back to the seedy motel, see if he can find anything Johnny might have missed. Dust for prints, etc. As he backs the squad car out the driveway and starts away, Linda suddenly appears in the car's headlights, her eyes filled with a new resolve. "*I'll help you find him...*"

At the station, Linda admits to Johnny and Walt that she had been abducted, 3 years prior. Johnny asks if she's ever been to the Raintree Motel. Linda gazes out at Rich sitting quietly in the adjoining room reading a thick paperback novel (Stephen King no doubt). She had been a prostitute. Taken, held and then released by a man wearing a mask. "*Why didn't you report it?*" To which she replies: "*Who would've believed me?*"

She recounts her horrifying experience. Starved. Forced to dress up and put on makeup. There's a discomfiting ease in the way she describes her abductors ritualistic need for perfection. "*When this perfection wasn't met, he would...*" she falters momentarily. Johnny reaches out to comfort her and falls into a VISION:

FLASH CUTS. Linda on the floor in the powder blue dress. The Collector hovers over her, stoic. Linda looks up at him, intensity in her eyes. "Please. Just give another chance. I'll be what you want. I'll be good." *OVER we hear the faint sound of a train whistle. Johnny pays close attention to the SOUND.*

Johnny flashes out of the Vision. Does she remember a train whistle? Linda had nearly forgotten. Walt says he'll look into all freight routes in a hundred mile radius. Linda shocks everyone by offering to go with them on their hunt. Walt isn't crazy about

bringing a past victim on a manhunt, but he agrees. He needs to call Sarah and let her know that he'll be late -- again .

We find Sarah at home. She's completely burned dinner. Walt tells her they know the girls name, Erica Sullivan. *"She has a mother near Bangor, but we haven't been able to contact her. How's the essay coming?"* Sarah looks at her blank notebook. *"Great."* She hangs up and stares at the mound of burnt macaroni. She notices a copy of the sketch of the missing girl and picks it up. We see the wheels turning in her head as she writes the girls name across the bottom of the drawing. *ERICA SULLIVAN.*

Back at the station. Roscoe enters with a box of Erica's belongings taken from her motel room – a teddy bear, some clothes, etc. Roscoe says he dusted the place for prints. Walt. *"Anything interesting?"* *"Not unless you count two members of the town council, the Mayor's brother and the town librarian."* Johnny reaches into the box and picks up a teddy bear. He gets an immediate vision:

Erica, now wearing the paisley yellow sundress. She's seated at a table, which has a flower centerpiece and candles. The man in the mask uncovers a tray to reveal two plates full of food. Starving, Erica's eyes light up at the sight of steak, potatoes and vegetables. He sets them down, as she reaches for the food. The man slams his hand down, "NO!" Erica is startled by the moment. He sits, places his napkin on his lap and waits. Finally, she gets it and takes her napkin and does the same. It's hard for her because her wrists are cuffed and chained to her waist. She can barely reach the plate. The dinner begins as the man carefully cuts his meat, taking precise bites. Erica tries to do the same but the combination of the cuffs, her fear and hunger turns the moment into a nightmare of frustration. She drops her knife, then can't quite reach the plate with her fork. The masked man watches silently as she struggles, her frustration turning to tears. Finally, he's had enough and picks up her plate and smashes it against the wall. Erica cowers in fear. It's obvious she's been set up to fail. But why? The masked man turns his attention to her appearance, finding fault where none exists. He takes out the tube of lipstick and begins tracing her lips, eventually working into a frenzy. When he's finished she has lipstick smeared all over her face. It's both disturbing and revealing. Erica pleads with him to loosen her restraints. She's losing the feeling in her fingers. He hesitates, and then reaches down to loosen the cuffs. As he does, she tears her arm away

and lashes out at his face, tearing the mask off. We don't see his face, but Erica does. He quickly puts the mask back on before Johnny sees him. "Why did you do that? I show kindness and this is how you reward me." Erica pleads with him as she shuts her eyes. "Please. I didn't see anything...". The man calmly kisses her forehead. "I know. It's alright. Everything is going to be alright." He hesitates, then reaches down and picks up a plastic bag off the tray. Johnny watches helplessly. "No. Don't do this." The man steps behind the girl and quickly slides it over her head (the CAMERA should quickly be off the girl and on Johnny so to keep the graphic violence to a minimum). Johnny can't believe what he's seeing: "My God."

Johnny flashes out of the Vision. Walt can tell it's bad. *"She sees his face. He's going to kill her."*

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As we explode into ACT THREE, Walt, Johnny and Linda embark to find the Collector. Walt wonders if Johnny's vision of Erica's death means they could be too late. Johnny has a gut feeling they need to keep hunting. They begin where Linda's journey with the Collector ended – the banks of the Morris River. *"I sat here on this tree and watched the sun break over that ridge. I've never seen a more beautiful morning."* Johnny touches the fallen pine tree.

It's NIGHT. A GIRL suddenly APPEARS next to Johnny, standing next to the pine tree. Blindfolded. Emaciated. A girl he has never seen before. She wanders off down the river embankment, as another girl in a similar state appears, tied up and blindfolded. Then, still another appears behind him, sobbing.

Johnny flashes out of the Vision. *"You weren't the only one. He's been doing this for years."* Walt learns about a single highway that intersects a freight train route about 20 miles away...

A RUNDOWN TRACT HOME. Sarah stands on the porch, apprehensive. The name on the broken mailbox reads, *SULLIVAN*. She knocks. An older WOMAN in her late 50s answers – she seems worn down and angry. *"Don't need no more magazines."* Sarah responds. *"I'm not selling magazines."* Sarah admits she got the address from the Sheriff's department. The woman's attitude shifts quickly to concern and apprehension. *"Sheriff? What's this about?"* Sarah tells her that she knew Erica. The woman's

expression shifts again, from concern to a cold stare. *“Mrs. Sullivan, your daughter is missing.”* The woman lights a smoke. *“I thought you were here to evict me.”* She goes to close the door. Sarah puts her hand out. *“Your daughter...”* She cuts Sarah off. *“I got no daughter. Not for a long time.”* She closes the door. Sarah is quietly stunned.

Johnny, Walt and Linda pull up into a rustic looking Truck Stop off the highway. Walt says he’s going to take the sketch of Erica and ask around outside. They all react to a foul smell in the air. We notice that Linda has her own very specific, but subtle reaction to the smell. Johnny and Linda walk into the diner. An emotional scene about how the two share a common bond of loneliness. Linda explains the emptiness in her life since the abduction. *“You go through an experience like that and it changes you.”* She asks Johnny how he deals with the feeling of isolation. *“I guess I try to draw strength from the people around me. My family.”* Johnny notices that Linda is rubbing at her forearm. Suddenly, a small spot of blood appears to seep through the sleeve of her blouse. Embarrassed, she rolls her sleeve up, and shows Johnny a series of straight line cuts across the inside of her forearm. *“You cut yourself.”* *“After I got back I couldn’t make sense of things. Maybe I wanted to make sure I could still feel something – anything.”* Johnny takes a napkin to stop the bleeding, and goes into a Vision.

It’s night. The Collector leads Linda, blindfolded and wearing a dark raincoat, through a darkened structure – a barn or a pen. “I’m letting you go, but you can’t come back here. Not ever.” She seems lost, disconnected, a tortured spirit; then she hears a strange, unworldly SCREAMING. Then MORE. The SCREAMING seems to be all around her. Johnny looks down and notices her bare feet are covered in BLOOD. It’s confusing and disorienting.

Johnny flashes out of the disturbing Vision as a WAITRESS approaches. Johnny comments on the strange smell outside. *“It’s the slaughterhouse, ‘bout ten miles up the mountain.”* As the waitress goes on about it, the camera PUSHES IN TIGHT on Linda’s face. We realize that something has been sparked within her. A memory. The waitress continues as Linda suddenly spills her water glass. She abruptly gets up and excuses herself to the bathroom. Johnny figures she’s stressed out, but we know something else is happening. Johnny takes the check and steps to the register.

As Johnny touches the BELL at the register he gets another Vision:

A mysterious, small man wearing a hat down over his eyes. He touches the same BELL as he picks up some take-out. Waitress, "Two steak dinners with all the trimmings." Another FLASH - The dinner table set for two in the concrete chamber. It's exactly the way Johnny saw it before. Erica pleads with him to loosen her restraints as Johnny realizes he's once again returned to the MURDER VISION, only this time the VISION FREEZES just as the masked man reaches for the plastic bag. Johnny studies the scene, realizing he's been given a second chance for some reason – then he notices it. He zeros in on The Collector's wristwatch, it reads 11:45 pm, 22nd day of the month.

Johnny flashes out of it and checks his own watch – 10:55 pm, 22nd day of the month. They have less than an hour before she's killed. He rushes to the Women's Room, bangs on the door. "*Linda? We have to go!*" No response. "*Linda?*" He slowly pushes the door open. She's not there. Suddenly he's into a Vision. *Linda, her hand on the same door just moments earlier, but instead, she has second thoughts and exits out the back door of the diner.*

Johnny rushes outside to Walt. "*Have you seen Linda?*" Walt, "*Yeah, she was cold and went to get her sweater from the car.*" Johnny, "*You gave her your car keys?*" Walt, "*How else was she going to get in? (off Johnny's look) John?*" Johnny runs over to the parking lot – but the police car is gone. Walt can't believe it. She played them both and now she's going to find this whacko and kill him herself.

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In ACT FOUR, Walt and Johnny are left hanging at the Truck Stop; "*She must have realized she was close to where she was held.*" The noise from the flatbed truck loaded with pigs suddenly becomes distracting. Johnny stops, thinks a moment, VISION FLASHBACK. Linda and that horrible SCREAMING. Out of the VFB. Johnny approaches the truck and sticks his hand through the slats. Walt thinks he's losing it. Off the pigs, Johnny has a Vision:

A slaughterhouse. Johnny sees the pigs herded together PACKED into a fenced in area. We hear awful, hideous SCREAMS. The SAME BIZARRE SCREAMING HE HEARD IN PREVIOUS VISIONS.

Johnny comes out of his Vision. *“Pigs. The screaming came from the pigs. We have to get to that slaughterhouse.”* Walt uses his badge to help them catch a ride up the mountain.

At the slaughterhouse/farm, Johnny and Walt walk through a wet, muddy area. They look down and realize that their feet are covered in blood (Walt has a small maglight). It’s just like Johnny’s vision of Linda with blood on her feet. They realize they’re standing in the run-off from the slaughterhouse.

Walt and Johnny discover an isolated farmhouse. Walt finds his stolen patrol car and realizes his shotgun is missing. Johnny finds the white van parked in a shed. Walt calls for backup. He’s not going in without help, not with his shotgun missing. Johnny checks his watch. 11:10 pm. Erica is going to die in less than a half-hour. They have to do this now. Walt reluctantly agrees as they split up to search the grounds.

Gun drawn, Walt eases around the back of the farmhouse, while Johnny’s able to slip in through an open window. He creaks through the darkness of the old house, until he comes across Linda’s bloodstained blouse and picks it up. Why would she take it off? Off the shirt he gets a Vision.

The same recurring vision of Linda’s prior abduction by the Collector. She’s wearing the powder blue dress and looks up from the floor. “I’ll be better, I promise.” The Collector reaches down to brush the hair off her face. “You are full of surprises.” Suddenly, Johnny sees it. Something he never noticed before. A small spot of blood seeps through the sleeve of her powder blue dress. It hits him like a bolt of lightning. “This wasn’t a vision from your past, it was from your future.” (Remember, in the Diner scene Linda admits to Johnny that she started cutting herself AFTER she was released by the Collector. Therefore, the Vision he’s seen three times previous in the episode couldn’t be one from her PAST, as he assumed, but had to be one from her FUTURE) Suddenly. We hear Linda’s VOICE from behind him: “Don’t look so dejected.”

Johnny flashes out of the Vision and spins around to find Linda standing directly behind him – wearing that now familiar powder blue dress and holding Walt’s shotgun. *“You took me exactly where I wanted to be.”* Before he can react - Linda introduces the butt of the shotgun to Johnny’s face, knocking him out. She stands over him, holding the 12-gauge. It’s creepy. As though we’re just meeting the real her for the first time.

Back OUTSIDE, Walt almost steps into a crudely fashioned booby-trap. He locates the entrance to what appears to be a tunnel underneath the house. He hears the faint sound of a girls cry for help.

Johnny wakes up, groggy. *“Chances Are”* plays on an old record player. Linda watches him from a dark corner of the room. *“I don’t expect you to understand any of this. A man so full of love and support.”* Johnny begs her not to go through with her plot for revenge. *“Revenge? My God, you still don’t see it do you?”* And in this moment, Johnny suddenly sees the truth. She’s not coming back to kill her abductor, she’s coming back to be with him. Linda explains how her current life paled in comparison to the sensations she experienced in captivity. Johnny tries to reach her, explaining Stockholm syndrome. *“He’s going to torture you and maybe kill you.”* Linda replies: *“Not if I can be everything. Not if I can be – perfect.”*

The door creaks open and for the first time, we meet *The Collector*. By all accounts, not the monster of the imagination, but more like an aging high school science teacher. He and Linda have a powerful moment of reconnection. He pushes her down to the floor as we see them play out the same scene from Johnny’s previous recurring Visions.

Walt crawls forward through the narrow tunnel. But he finds himself blocked off. He can see Erica, but he can’t get to her. *“Stay calm. I’ll go upstairs and find another way down.”* She’s terrified and pleads with him not to leave her. She begs him to give her his gun. *“Please, mister, I don’t want to die. Not down here by myself.”* Walt checks his watch. They have minutes left to save her.

The Collector grabs Johnny by the hair. *“Where is the other one?”* But Johnny gets a Vision:

A little boy stands at a vanity mirror next to his mother, mid-20s. “Put mommy’s record on.” A pair of small hands set the record on the player as we hear “Chances Are” – the same one Johnny has heard throughout the story. The Mother’s hands shake nervously as she applies her make-up. The beams from a car light illuminate the room, and then flicker off. Dad’s home. “Do it right, mommy so Daddy won’t get mad.” Her hand shakes. “I can’t.” The little boy gently takes the lipstick from her. “I’ll do it for you mommy.” And he carefully places the lipstick on his mother. FLASH CUT...a

violent confrontation as the terrified little boy huddles against the wall. The Father screams, "Why can't you get this right?" A GUNSHOT. Johnny stands in the doorway, looking at the little boy and the aftermath of the violent confrontation. (NOTE: Again, this should be theatre of the mind. We shouldn't see anything graphic.)

It all becomes clear to Johnny who this guy is. A mother too weak to protect herself or her young son. She eventually killed herself – the ultimate abandonment to her psychologically shattered little boy. Then they hear Walt outside. The Collector sets the barrel of the shotgun on Johnny's chest, hammers back the trigger and puts a finger to his lips, "Shhhh."

Walt breaks in through the front door, but finds himself on the business end of his own twelve-gauge. From here we move into a high-octane climax that pits Johnny against the Collector in a hand-to-hand finale. In the end, The Collector and Linda ESCAPE the raging inferno, leaving Johnny and Walt behind to rescue Erica.

The coda to the episode finds Sarah alone at home finally writing her essay to the local newspaper. "MY INVISIBLE HOME TOWN" We hear her emotional VOICE-OVER about how we lose sight of each other in life. How we take for granted the people we love and the people we don't even know. The danger of letting ourselves become invisible to each other. Against this V.O. is a MONTAGE of images – Erica being led from the farmhouse in a blanket; citizens discussing headlines invoking wrath on Johnny's involvement of Linda; Rich, Linda's boyfriend alone eating diner in an empty café; Erica's mother sitting on her front porch smoking, a look of long buried regret in her tired eyes; Johnny back at home, alone; and finally Linda and the Collector driving down a dark, lonely highway. She reaches across to touch his hand as the truck's taillights disappear into the darkness of the night.

The End