

**THE DEAD ZONE**  
*“Heroes & Demons”*  
Story by Michael Taylor  
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*Johnny Smith’s visions may make him unique, but there are many other people whose minds, while not psychically enhanced, cause them to experience the world in equally unusual ways. In this episode, Johnny is sought out by one of them: an autistic boy who wants him to save his father, a tough cop who once led an elite Boston police unit before a murder conviction landed him on Death Row. But while Johnny’s visions will help him puzzle out a dangerous mystery that takes him deep into a world of violent and corrupt big city cops, ultimately it’s the boy’s own savant-like abilities that hold the key to saving his dad. Think of it an unusual spin on this season’s “fathers-and-sons” theme, as a man who thought himself beyond redemption finds it through the courage of a boy he thought beyond his reach.*

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Story opens with a sequence that plays like a series of P.O.V. visions but will prove to be the perspective of an autistic boy who’s undertaking a terrifying (for him) journey by train and bus. Strangers appear menacing, even those who try to help. He tries to calm himself by consulting precise hand-drawn transportation maps and cataloging his surroundings in a scrapbook-like journal – making lists of things such as the colors, makes and models of passing cars. We’ll come to learn that his mind naturally focuses on such physical details; the physical world in all its multiplicity and specificity is a refuge from the frighteningly ambiguous world of people, adults in particular. The journey takes him to the door of a familiar house in the middle of the night. He rings the bell. And the door is opened, revealing Johnny Smith, staring down in confusion at an intense-looking 10-year-old boy, now revealed to the audience for the first time. END TEASER.

The boy isn’t mute; for an autistic kid, he’s pretty high functioning, though he still has tremendous difficulties dealing with strange people and strange surroundings. He states who he is – **Donny Fallon** – and that he’s come here from Boston to find Johnny so he can help Donny’s father, who’s in jail charged with murder. Donny insists that his father’s innocent, and that Johnny – whose exploits he’s tracked in his scrapbook and whom he reveres as a modern-day equivalent of his hero, Sherlock Holmes – is the only person who can help him.

But when a concerned Johnny crouches and touches the boy's arm, he gets a weird P.O.V. vision of what appears to be an execution-style killing in a labyrinthine abandoned factory, though the murder itself is all but obscured by a veritable thicket of physical details.

Apparently, Donny was an inadvertent witness to the crime that led to his father's death sentence. Or it may be that Donny didn't see the crime directly but extrapolated it in his mind's eye, Rashomon-style, from a thousand little details, like the sounds of gunshots, footsteps and arguing voice, reconstructing the traumatic event through his own bizarre Holmsian process.

In any case, it's Johnny's first disturbing glimpse of what it was like to experience the world as Donny does, in frightening circumstances, and he reacts with a start. So does Donny, who recoils from Johnny's touch and begins screaming uncontrollably. Off Johnny's surprise and confusion...

We pick up a short time later. Sarah, Walt, and J.J. have come over, having gotten Johnny's call while on a family dinner outing. Sarah, who as a substitute teacher has worked with autistic children before, has managed to calm Donny down. And maybe J.J. helps too, since Donny is more comfortable with kids his own age than he is with strange adults. (While J.J. may not have a prominent role in this episode, we could do a B-runner in which we see that he's jealous about the time Johnny's spending with Donny, and perhaps even of Donny's savant-like abilities. He's "special," in a way J.J. feels he's not. This, in turn, could set up the later "Huck Finn" story-line we've talked about, in which J.J. pretends to have psychic powers, dispensing advice and visions to his friends, only to have one of his fake visions inadvertently hit a little too close to the truth – drawing Johnny and J.J. into a dangerous "Blue Velvet"-type scenario.) Meanwhile, Walt and Johnny have managed to establish that Donny ran away from a mental institution in Boston. Walt's also familiar with Donny's father's case, as is just about every cop in the northeast. Apparently, Donny's dad, **Sean Fallon**, was convicted on a federal charge of killing an undercover DEA agent, which is how he ended up on Death Row in a federal pen in Massachusetts, a state that doesn't have capital punishment. His appointment with the lethal injection table is only a few days away. (This scenario is based on the real-life case of a man who was recently sentenced to death in a federal court in Boston under a federal law that allows for capital punishment when a murder

involves carjacking. Federal law similarly allows for capital punishment in cases involving the murder of federal law enforcement officials, like the undercover DEA agent in our story.)

Walt thinks this is one “case” Johnny should sit out. Fallon was convicted as part of a Rampart-like scandal, and Johnny could be stepping into a hornets’ nest of bitter and angry big city, all on the word of an autistic kid who clearly has no idea what he actually witnessed. For once, Johnny agrees. But he still needs to take Donny back to Boston, and Sarah offers to go along to help him care for the boy. (This episode could also be an opportunity to put Sarah in the Bruce role, though as an alternative we could consider partnering Johnny with a new female guest star. Maybe Sean Fallon’s sister, who I imagine as a sexy, somewhat wild young woman – like Cher in *Mask* – who was forced to care for Donny after her brother was convicted and who can be Johnny’s guide through the tough Boston neighborhoods and cop precincts her brother worked. Or it could be Donny’s teacher at the special school he attends, a somewhat more reserved young woman with special insights into Donny’s condition who can help Johnny relate to him better. Either one could also be a quasi-romantic interest for Johnny, adding a little romantic heat to the episode.)

Johnny takes the disappointed Donny back to the institution (or to his sister’s home), but when he gets there, he takes in the depressing surroundings, then has a vision off a globe that Donnie keeps in his room, a long-ago birthday gift from his father that recognizes Donny’s obsession with mapping his surroundings. It gives him a glimpse of the close relationship father and son shared. Although Sean was a tough, even violent cop, he was gentle and protective toward his son, though the job of caring for him became much more trying after his wife died of cancer. Johnny realizes he can’t simply abandon Donny to his grim new life, not after the brave journey the boy made to find him. He convinces Sarah (or whomever he’s partnered with) that he’s at least got to make a token effort to check out the facts in Donny’s father’s case.

Of course, Johnny’s good intentions will gradually draw him deeper and deeper into the case. The situation, in a nutshell, will prove to be this: Sean Fallon is indeed innocent of the murder he’s been charged with. He was set up by his protégé and partner, an outwardly very likeable young cop named **Jay Gillies** who, having weathered the Rampart scandal, now

heads Sean's Special Investigations Squad. Sean still completely trusts Jay, and will be shocked and disbelieving when Johnny starts to put the pieces together. But there's more to the mystery. Gillies, in turn, was acting on behalf of an equally smooth and ambitious Internal Affairs Division lieutenant who transferred into I.A.D. after a stint in narcotics. The lieutenant made Ray a deal: He'll use his drug trade knowledge to steer Ray and his team toward lucrative busts, in return for Ray's help framing Fallon, a long-time adversary, and at the same time taking out an undercover DEA agent who was about to expose the lieutenant's own corruption.

The lieutenant is now a captain and a rising star in the department: a powerful and corrupt player. As Johnny gets closer to the truth, he'll find himself in increasing danger. Walt may arrive on the scene to help back him up. But corrupt cops aren't the only obstacles that Johnny must overcome to ferret out the truth. Fallon himself doesn't want him poking around in the case, even as the countdown continues on his death sentence. Partly, it's because he doesn't share his son's faith in Johnny's abilities. But mostly it's because he wants to protect him, both from possible reprisals from his former colleagues, and also from the truth. He may not believe he's guilty of murder, though he was framed so adroitly that he may wonder if he did actually kill the DEA agent. But he does know that in many ways he's a morally compromised man. He doesn't want his son exposed to the truths about how he did in his job, including his violence against suspects and even in regards to money he may have reluctantly taken to pay for the special services and education his son needed.

From the point of view of the autistic boy, Fallon is innocent not just because he's his dad, but because he's a cop, and cops are good. Donny's view of the adult world is black-and-white; it's the only way he can deal with it. But the reality of his father's world is one of grays, and much of the pathos of the story will come from Donny's attempts, with Johnny's help, to reconcile his innocent faith with this darker reality.

Johnny's investigation will take him, and Donny, through the seamier parts of Boston's criminal and cop worlds, ultimately returning them to the abandoned factory where the murder took place. On that night, Donny had hidden in his father's car after a confrontation in which his stressed father had tried to explain to the boy – who at that time was less vocal

and more closed-off – that he might no longer be able to take care of him. Donny couldn't make sense of what he “witnessed” in the factory, but with the knowledge and understanding of Donny that Johnny has gained from their time together, as well as his greater knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the killing, he's now able to correctly interpret his first-person visions and see what actually happened there. The frame is revealed, but now Johnny, the boy, and their comrades (Sarah and/or Walt, the teacher, etc.) find themselves surrounded by Ray's S.I.S. squad. The boy's unique abilities to “map” the factory's underground warren of tunnels, aided by Johnny's visions and Walt's tough guy heroics, save them. Armed with hard evidence, Johnny's able to get a last-minute reprieve for Donny's father. His sentence is reduced to time served, and in an emotional scene – all the more emotional because of Donny's difficulties expressing his feelings – father and son are re-united.

Back home, though, a rift may have opened between Johnny and J.J., J.J. now feeling he has to prove himself worthy of his psychic dad.