

THE DEAD ZONE

“Three Days of the Psychic
Aka The Hunting Party”

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By
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(NOTE: This outline covers the plot of the A-story. A Walt/Sarah storyline can be weaved throughout, i.e. the fate of her pregnancy.)

Our story begins with a *cold open* in the rag-tag studio of a low-tech satellite radio station. **Mitchell Frost** (40) the outspoken, ultra-liberal talk show host is mid-rant, unabashedly criticizing the policies and efficacy of the current presidential administration; taking particular exception with the Vice-President AARON DANBURY. Frost is an unkempt, chain-smoking radical who spews fantastical, unsubstantiated government conspiracy theory; seemingly out of his mind. (We could even integrate the FBI/ATF mishandling of Michael Taylor’s cult standoff plotline; a ripped from the headlines correlation to the public outcry against the ill-fated government treatment of the David Koresh/Waco situation.) In this particular rant he presents an elaborate plan by an all powerful, shadowy coalition of captains of industry to populate the highest tiers of government with pawns; virtual puppets to carry out their nefarious biddings.

Frost takes a few on-air calls: the first angry listener blasts him for being un-American. Frost dismisses him as an ignorant sheep on his way to slaughter. The next mysterious caller cryptically informs him that they’re watching you. Frost recognizes the voice of that of his long-time *Deepthroat* (calls himself SIX); a DC insider that has been feeding him confidential information, fueling the flames of his conspiracy theories. Frost asserts his fearlessness; he will not be intimidated. The American public has a right to know the truth. As he continues his patriotic tirade, he looks up... the ON AIR light has gone dark; he is no longer on the air. He eyes the control booth, his engineer is gone. Annoyed, he storms from the broadcast booth into the main office; seemingly deserted at first. The he finds them, the engineer and a researcher murdered in cold-blood; a professional hit. (We will only see

lifeless legs and bloodied arms at this point) Frost freezes in fear, until an O.S. noise startles him and he bolts.

Meanwhile, Bruce is helping Johnny hook up a new computer at the house. (We can establish Johnny as an internet neophyte.) No sooner is the system up and running that the software announces *You've got mail!* Rather bizarre since nobody has Johnny's email address yet. Johnny opens the message:

The first stone has been cast....

Johnny is thrown into a vision that takes him across the light speed impulses of electronic information to the emails source of origin; a computer in the radio station office. We find Johnny, dressed all in black at the terminal. Frost's voice can be heard in the background over the studio monitors; the station's frequency painted on the wall. He sends the message, then retrieves a silenced pistol from his waistband... proceeding to murder the engineer and researcher execution style.

Johnny comes out of the vision rattled to the core. He runs over to the radio and tunes to the appropriate station... nothing but static. He locks eyes with Bruce... *here we go again.*

ACT ONE opens with Walt driving Johnny through an abandoned industrial park searching for a particular address, the radio station. Walt is all too aware of Frost and his propensity for drunk and disorderly conduct; he's arrested him on numerous occasions. By his assessment, Frost has more than a few screws loose.

They find the building and Walt and Johnny head in. As the search begins, a drunken Frost jumps from a closet wielding a baseball bat fearing the killer has returned, but Walt easily tackles him and handcuffs him. Frost tells them about the massacre of his co-workers, but the bodies are gone; no evidence left behind. As if it never happened. Johnny however saw it and knows it to be true. Frost rants and raves that they are trying to silence him; he knows too

much. He proudly cites his stealth as the only reason he's still alive. He demands protection from Walt. All in all it sounds like the ravings of a mad man.

Johnny touches a door frame and gets another first person vision of himself as the assassin. This time Frost comes out of the broadcast booth to discover the bodies. Johnny/the killer could have easily taken him out, but did not. Frost was never a target.

Johnny assures Frost that they weren't after him, but whoever did the killings wanted Johnny involved and had to have known about his abilities. Walt assures Johnny he'll get a CSI unit out to scour the place for any evidence. Walt uncuffs Frost and he immediately downs a flask of liquid medicine. Walt warns him about driving. Johnny volunteers to drive him home.

Johnny drives Frost's car. Frost admits that he knows of Johnny and his dealings with Greg Stillson. He was convinced Johnny is in his pocket. Johnny assures him that truth is far different. Frost is skeptical of Johnny (his nature to mistrust everyone).

They arrive at Frost's dilapidated trailer; the neglected double-wide he calls home. Frost, the classic political thriller enthusiast, aware of the literary and cinematic rules of espionage, checks the main room for phone taps, closes blinds to thwart prying eyes, and plays loud music to negate long distance listening devices. The place is covered with research books, maps, charts (think Mel Gibson's apartment in *Conspiracy Theory*) as well as hundreds of empty liquor bottles and prescription pill vials.

Frost dives into piles of notes searching for any information he has on his *Deepthroat*. He tells Johnny that he will be able to corroborate his story that the evil organization is after him. He has to contact Six; who he really knows nothing about. No tangible way of contacting him.

Suddenly KENDRA (30) an attractive statuesque blonde, enters from the bedroom doorway in nothing but a towel, fresh from the shower. (Note: she is smoking) She is annoyed Frost is so late and surprised to find he brought home a friend. Frost is dismissive and tells her she

has to leave, he has lots of work to do. The same goes for Johnny. Kendra begrudgingly grabs her stuff and offers Johnny a ride.

Kendra drives; her attire is decidedly trashy. Johnny is curious as to why she would have any interest in Frost. She is amused by the question... *it's only business*. Kendra is an escort, but Frost doesn't pay her for sex, just for company. After his wife left him, he couldn't stand being alone. Frost has engaged her services for quite a while. She actually finds his neurosis somewhat charming; he's harmless. Kendra comes across as a sweet, genuine innocent; a simple, country girl.

Johnny enters his house alone and is surprised to find the TV is on. He doesn't remember leaving it on. As he turns it off, he is struck with a vision...

The TV news, two days from now.... A nation is mourning. The Vice President has been assassinated!

ACT TWO opens with Johnny at the sheriff station asking Walt to inform the Secret Service. Walt is reluctant. It is a slippery slope. The VP gets lots of death threats and the SS is more than adept at protecting him. Johnny's response... *not this time*. At that moment, Walt is handed the CSI report from the radio station. It's totally clean. Almost too clean; no blood, no fibers, no fingerprints, almost as if nobody had ever been there. Johnny is concerned something big is going on as Frost suggested. Walt is surprised that Johnny is actually giving credence to his fantasy. Walt shows him the file he has on Frost. As Johnny thumbs through, we cut to:

Frost's trailer. Johnny bangs on the door and is granted entry by a severely hung-over Frost. Johnny wants to know what he has against the VP. Frost rattles off a laundry list of complaints with his actions in office. Johnny pushes him further and wants to know if it's personal. Frost denies it, until Johnny shoves the police file in his face. *What about all this?* As he takes the file a connection is made, thrusting us into a vision...

A series of sequences played out in succession. Frost a vice-presidential speech heckling the VP; Secret Service agents escort him out as he hurls threats. Frost ambushing the VP at a restaurant, scaring his family half to death; showering him with accusations before the SS lead him off. Frost smashes his car into the front gate of The House (the white, brick-walled, Victorian-style home the VP lives in).

Frost dismisses his actions as misunderstandings. He served his time in a mental facility for his behavior and was released. He claims he is no longer that person, having paid the ultimate price... the loss of his beloved family. Johnny wants to know if Frost owns a gun. Frost assures him that he does not. The only shots he plans on taking at the VP are verbal. He ask Johnny to leave, but still somewhat intoxicated, stumbles into a table knocking the contents of an ashtray all over the stained, orange pile carpet. Frost fumbles to clean it up, a thoroughly pathetic sight. Johnny kneels to help, picking up a lipstick stained butt; snapping him into a vision...

The click of heels on polished marble introduce Observer Johnny to the cleaned up Kendra; wearing a studious pant suit, her hair up respectfully, confidently carrying an attaché as she strides through an office building. Showing her credentials as she passes through a security checkpoint, addressing a delegation of Japanese businessmen in JAPANESE as they pass her by; leering. She passes through a double door officially marked THE COALITION FOR A BETTER TOMMOROW. A secretary buzzes her into a main office, where she shakes hand with a man we only see from behind. What we do see is the unknown man's Armageddon ring.

Johnny comes out of the vision stunned. He asks Frost where he met Kendra, Frost indicates she found him. Johnny tells him that he was played. She isn't what she appears. Frost laughs off the suggestion... he's been to her ratty apartment. Seen pictures of her family on the farm, etc. She even gave him a key! Cut to:

The door swinging open to Kendra's apartment. The place is completely empty, as if never lived in. Frost is flabbergasted; it was full a few days ago; furniture, personal effects, a lifetime of belongings all gone. Johnny touches the bare walls...

Vision: The apartment reassembles around him, all of Kendra's worldly possessions materializing. Kendra, in sweats, lies on the couch, cradling Frost's head against her bosom; he is crying. He talks about how much he misses his wife and daughter and how he blames the VP, Danbury for it. She consoles him, suggesting that Danbury should have to pay. The phone suddenly rings...

Snapping Johnny out of the vision. He and Frost go into the empty bedroom where a solitary phone rings from the middle of the bare floor. Frost hastily answers to a familiar voice; it's Six. He tells Frost to put Johnny on the phone. Six tells Johnny that THEY wanted Johnny involved. It was part of their plan from the beginning. Johnny asks him what plan. Six doesn't answer the questions; all he says is *meet me in ten minutes*. Johnny tells Frost about their rendezvous. Frost wants to know where. Johnny cradles the phone and has an unseen WHOOSH. Cut to:

A public phone receiver dangling off the hook in a large, bustling park. Johnny touches the partition and has another unseen vision. Turning away. Frost follows. They arrive at a large fountain where a middle-aged man is waiting for them. He introduces himself as Six. He tells them that everything Frost has been saying is true. There is a secret organization controlling everything. Frost beams with vindication. Johnny wants answers. He wants to know who these people are. How can I stop them? Does it have to do with the murder of the VP? Six gives him a cold stare and says "It's too late... the first stone has been cast". All of Johnny's red flags go up. He reaches for Six, but the man easily evades his touch and takes off. A foot chase through the crowded park ensues...

Johnny watches Six collide with an innocent passerby. He shakes it off and keeps moving to evade Johnny. A few more steps and he slows, wobbling uneasily, then collapsing to the pavement; gasping for air, dying. Johnny runs to his aid, touching his face...

WHOOSH the scene rewinds and Johnny now sees the seemingly innocuous passerby stick Six with a syringe as they bumped. (We may reveal that the passerby, in a trench coat and hat, is actually wearing high-heels... it's a woman)

Back to reality, Johnny scans his surroundings for the perpetrator. We pull back to reveal a park full of people and the futility of Johnny's quest for a needle in a haystack. Things are getting stranger by the minute...

At the top of ACT THREE, Walt and Johnny are at the coroner's office. The coroner tells them that Six's body is no longer there; two men came and whisked him away. They said they were with the State Department and their paperwork was in order. The coroner nervously tells them to meet him around back.

In the alley, the Coroner tells them that while he didn't have time to do an autopsy, he did run a blood screen. The toxicology report indicated that the toxin used to kill Six was a high-tech weapons grade chemical agent, the likes of which he's never seen; instant death. The Coroner also describes an elaborate tattoo on his arm; a detailed dragon holding a sword. The number six included in the design. Walt postures that it may be some special-ops military insignia and promises to make a few calls to investigate its origins.

Johnny returns home to find Frost waiting for him on the porch. He is completely drunk and totally disconnected. He feels that he and Johnny have destroyed everything. They led THEM right to Six. He feels that was the plan all along, to use them to root out the information leak and now all is lost. The powers that be have won. Johnny tries to reason with him but Frost tells Johnny to stay away from him and heads off to crawl inside a bottle. Johnny gets a call from Walt...

In the confines of Walt's private office he tells Johnny that an old friend of his at the Department of Defense came through but the information is extremely sensitive. He retrieves an old photograph from an envelope, handing it over; *we never saw this*. The photo is of a

six-man elite black-ops military unit. Six is one of the soldiers, in face paint and holding a sniper rifle. The apparent commander of the unit is familiar to Johnny... young Janus!

Johnny drops the photo on the desk and flies from the office like a bat out of hell. Walt futilely calls after him, then proceeds to light the photograph and burns it up.

A stretch limousine pulls up to a corporate jet parked on a private tarmac; Faith Heritage stenciled across the tail. Purdy emerges from the limo just as Johnny's Range Rover comes racing up. Johnny confronts a surprised Purdy. Questioning him about Janus and about *THE COALITION FOR A BETTER TOMMOROW*. Purdy explains that Janus is a powerful lobbyist, part of an important social action group pushing for grassroots reform in an effort to ensure a brighter world. Johnny tells Purdy that he is in bed with the devil. Purdy tells the pilot there is a change in plans... they are going to Washington, DC.

Johnny and Purdy move through the same corridor we saw Kendra in earlier. They arrive at Janus's office and Purdy addresses the secretary, announcing his presence. She indicates that Mr. Janus is out of the office. Johnny touches the desk and gets an unseen WHOOSH. He leaves the office, leaving Purdy with the secretary. Johnny crosses the corridor and heads purposefully into another room...

A wood paneled study that houses a poker table, populated by a delegation of grey-haired upper crust gentleman; Janus at the helm. They all turn to Johnny. Janus smiles and waves him over to an empty seat at the table; *We saved you a seat Mr. Smith*. As if in a surreal daze, Johnny obliges, sitting at the table. The cards are dealt, but Johnny's eyes never leave Janus. (I envision a terse, tense scene between the two that goes on over the game.) At one point Johnny throws down his cards and announces that he knows Six was working for Janus, feeding Frost only the information he wanted him to have. With that revelation, Janus dismisses the rest of the men, leaving him and Johnny alone. Johnny asks if Six, or whatever his real name was, knew that he was expendable. Janus responds that all good soldiers know the risks. Janus takes note of Johnny's frequent glances at his arm; *all you had to do was ask*. He rolls up his sleeve to reveal the distinct dragon tattoo, his contains the number one. Janus

comes around the table and offers his open hand to Johnny; *isn't that why you came here?*
The moment of truth has finally arrived. Johnny takes his hand and Whoosh...

The scene should play out like the great Deniro/Al Capone baseball bat scene in The Untouchables, except here Johnny and Stillson continually change place. Janus will circle the table outlining his vision for a new Democracy; a stronger, more powerful nation. Every time we cut back it is either Johnny or Stillson being addressed. What we will ultimately gleam from the vision is that the entire plan hinges on Stillson's ascension to the oval office. He tells Stillson that when the time comes to be a hero, he must embrace his destiny.

Johnny comes out of the vision in utter horror; the plan is clear: Janus is going to have the vice-president murdered. Janus indicates he has no idea what Johnny is talking about and suggests he discuss his theory with Mr. Frost. He tells Janus he is a mad man. Janus remains calm and collected; *there's nothing you can do Mr. Smith. The first stone has been cast. The revolution has started. There's no turning back now.*

(Note: Act three may need another vision early on, but I want it to be organic.)

ACT FOUR opens with Johnny rejoining Purdy on the steps of the building. He is adamant about finding Stillson. Purdy indicates that won't be difficult, showing Johnny the front page of the paper... a photo of Greg Stillson and Aaron Danbury (the VP) posing for a press shot; both in fatigues and both holding rifles. Purdy explains that they are on the VP's annual hunting retreat in the woods of West Virginia. Johnny asks Purdy to get in touch with the most powerful people he knows and warn them that the VP is in danger.

Johnny drives a rented car through the Virginia backwoods; intercutting his cell phone conversation with Walt. Walt has an APB out for Frost and is on his way out to the trailer now. He warns Johnny not to be a hero.

Stillson, Danbury, and a gaggle of political types enjoy cigars and Brandy in an ornate hotel lounge. Stillson and the VP appear all buddy buddy. Johnny bursts in but is immediately stopped by the Secret Service. Stillson is shocked and dismayed by his appearance. As they

drag Johnny away he warns the VP, telling him not to trust Stillson. Stillson laughs it off, indicating that he has had problems with Johnny Smith, the nut job, before. He excuses himself to get to the bottom of it.

Johnny is locked in a hotel room for questioning by the SS. Stillson enters and wants to know what the hell he's doing there. Johnny confronts him about the plan, but it is clear that Stillson has no idea what he's talking about. Stillson doesn't know the specifics of Janus' intricate scheme. *Johnny grabs for Stillson and gets a quick vision of Stillson himself in the crosshairs of a rifle. (Not sure yet how this vision works.)* This throws Johnny for a loop. Is Stillson a target too? Stillson tells the agents he wants Johnny arrested and storms out; late for another hunting excursion. Johnny watches helplessly from the window as Stillson, the VP, and the whole party, security included load into the jeeps.

A team of SS agents come in and question Johnny in standard form but are quickly interrupted by another agent who enters and tells them Johnny is free to go; *you must have friends in high places.*

Johnny rushes out, stopping at the front desk to ask the clerk where the hunting party was going. On his way out, he gets a call from Walt...

Walt stands in a smoldering debris field where Frost's trailer once stood; everything is destroyed. Any and all evidence erased from existence.

Meanwhile, Stillson, Danbury, and their entourage are in the woods, hunting rifles poised for action. Suddenly shots ring out and one of the secret service men is hit, the bullet traveling through his shoulder, striking Danbury in the head. A direct precision hit. The SS scramble to cover his body and secure him. Stillson cowers at first, and then raises his rifle and charges into the woods.

Meanwhile Johnny races through the woods. A single gunshot rings out. Johnny arrives to find Stillson standing over Frost's dead body. Stillson is in shock. Johnny kneels by the

body; defeated. Stillson threatens Johnny with the gun, spewing accusations that Johnny was part of it. Johnny bravely grabs the gun away from him, triggering a vision:

Frost sits in his trailer, drunk. He looks up and smiles, pleasantly surprised by a visitor. Observer Johnny turns to find Kendra dressed in all black; the same outfit from the teaser. She offers a trite apology then reveals Stillson's hunting rifle and shoots Frost dead. We FLASH to a sniper rifle bolt being cocked. Through the crosshairs, Stillson comes into focus. A beat, then the crosshairs shift to the VP. A shot through the SS agent and the VP drops. Kendra, the real assassin places the gun in Frosts dead hands and walks away, whistling; a job well done.

Johnny, feeling steamrolled, tells Stillson they were all set up from minute one. Frost was the perfect patsy, with a history of violence and motive; a clear hatred for the VP. They alienated him from his loved ones, terrified him at every step, and forced him into isolation. Johnny feels responsible, as if he was an accomplice. Johnny has finally lost a battle.

TAG: Johnny returns home to again find the TV on. He watches blankly as we replay the nation in mourning news cast. We see now what we didn't see before... the reported killer, Mitch Frost. Stillson is painted as a hero for his bravery. There is already talk of Stillson replacing Danbury in the White House. Johnny picks up the remote and switches the TV off. As he does he is thrown into a first person vision...

Johnny sits in a hospital room at the bedside of an unidentified, unconscious patient. He takes the man's hand into his own; revealing he is wearing an Armageddon ring identical to the one Janus wears. We're close on Johnny as he leans in and whispers... "This is only the beginning... We pan over to reveal Johnny is talking to his comatose self.

Johnny comes out of the vision in a daze; eyeing the remote curiously. Something O.S. draws his attention and he turns to face the camera... recognition in his face. We push in on his glazed eyes, barely able to make out the reflection of a man standing in the doorway. Dad?