

THE SEEKERS

10-page sample script by Robert Wisham

Second edition - ADDENDUM to graphic novel treatment included*****

PAGE ONE

PANEL ONE

A large horizontal panel that takes up at least a third of the page. ARTHUR NORDEN, a lone figure in the desert, is sitting down; his arms folded on top of his knees. One hand holds an empty canteen upside down, as if Norden just took his final drink. His head is bowed, perhaps in prayer. Archeological equipment surrounds him. He's sweaty, tired, and clearly not concerned with his personal appearance. Once a media darling, Norden's looks haven't endured years of sun, worry, and alcohol very well. He's not "Nick Nolte mugshot" bad at this stage, but he's getting haggard. He's still brawny enough to kick butt, though.

PANEL TWO

He spots something in the distance.

NORDEN
What th--?

PANEL THREE

A jeep, kicking up a cloud of dust, approaches Norden.

NORDEN (off-panel)
Oh, no.

PANEL FOUR

The jeep is close enough to the "camera" to reveal its driver, JENNIFER HART.

NORDEN (off-panel)
Not HER again.

PANEL FIVE

The jeep stops a few feet away from Norden. Norden squints his eyes and rubs his forehead as if he has a headache.

PAGE TWO

PANEL ONE

Jennifer, smiling, steps out of the jeep, holding a bottle of pricey, brand-name water. She's young, blonde, and of course, TV-pretty.

JENNIFER

Good afternoon, Mr. Norden. I assume you remember me?

PANEL TWO

Norden shoots her a nasty look.

NORDEN (1)

You've spent the last month clogging my voicemail. You've followed me to every fleabag motel in the Southwest.

NORDEN (2)

This is the first time you managed to track me in the desert, though.

PANEL THREE

Norden stands up, facing Jennifer.

NORDEN (1)

I'm almost impressed.

NORDEN (2)

And, trust me, I knew about Jennifer Hart long before she started stalking me. I saw your MAXIMUM spread.

PANEL FOUR

Jennifer, slightly embarrassed, responds.

JENNIFER (1)

That was...a long time ago. My FORMER agent thought that it was a good idea, and --

JENNIFER (2)

-- Anyway, that's not important.

PANEL FIVE

Jennifer hands Norden the bottle of bottled water.

JENNIFER (1)

It's like I told you before, Mr. Norden. I'm after a story. You claim that an...ALIEN or something climbed out of the earth and caused that cave-in.

JENNIFER (2)

That's the story of the millennium, Arthur. I'm not letting that go.

PAGE THREE

PANEL ONE

Norden casts a suspicious eye towards Jennifer.

NORDEN (1)

Right. And after the media makes me a laughing stock, YOU suddenly emerge as my defender?

NORDEN (2)

Sorry, not buying it.

PANEL TWO

Norden takes the bottled water and pours it on his sunburned face.

NORDEN

You're running some sort of game.

PANEL THREE

Jennifer pulls a small video camera out of her jeep.

JENNIFER

You were a fascinating man before all of this happened, Mr. Norden. Now, you're an eyewitness to potentially the greatest event in human history.

PANEL FOUR

She points the camera at Norden.

JENNIFER

SOMEONE needs to tell that story. Why shouldn't it be me?

PANEL FIVE

Jennifer casually leans against the jeep and smiles, playing on her looks, but also attempting to put Norden at ease.

JENNIFER

Do you really think I want to spend the rest of my life interviewing the Black Eyed Peas?

PAGE FOUR

PANEL ONE

Night, in a small town in eastern California. An exterior shot establishes a tiny bar and grill.

PANEL TWO

A chubby, middle-aged waitress is pushing a drunk (a fifty-ish man with a scraggly beard) out of the front door. He's holding a folded up newspaper in his hand.

WAITRESS

Last warning, Harry. If you stumble back in here, I'm callin' the sheriff.

PANEL THREE

The drunk stumbles into the parking lot, looking back at the waitress.

DRUNK

An' I tol' you I ain't drunk! Ya don't wanna SEE me drunk, I'll tell ya...

PANEL FOUR

The drunk stands near a car that may or may not be his. He fumbles in his pockets for his keys.

DRUNK

Jush wanna read my paper in peace...I swear, what'sh thish country comin' to?

PANEL FIVE

The newspaper drops to the ground.

PANEL SIX

The drunk falls to the ground, passed out.

PAGE FIVE

PANEL ONE

A pair of pupil-less eyes appears in the shadows.

PANEL TWO

They belong to a strange alien being, THE GATHERER. He emerges from the darkness, not far from the fallen drunk. The aliens in the story are all basically humanoid (or else the lecherous man in Las Vegas wouldn't have been attracted to the female that emerged under the casino), but have purple skin. The Gatherer, due to his important role, should have some other distinguishing physical trait. His skin should be covered in scales, or perhaps have an odd, wrinkly texture.

PANEL THREE

The Gatherer squats over the newspaper and aims his jeweled, hi-tech bracelet at it.

PANEL FOUR

The bracelet scans the paper with a bright green light. English words and their alien translation (along with some photos from the paper) appear side-by-side in the air above the Gatherer.

PANEL FIVE

The Gatherer holds up his index finger (or whatever the equivalent for this species of alien is).

GATHERER

Stop.

PAGE SIX

PANEL ONE

Large horizontal panel. In the sky above, we see a projection of the article that's drawn the Gatherer's attention. Next to the text is a photo of a solemn, forty-something year old man standing in front of his suburban home. The text reads:

Richard Parker never expected to lead a movement. He didn't pay too much attention to politics, either, although he does admit to voting for Governor Quarles in the previous election.

"You could say that was a mistake," Parker told me with a smile. It's the closest he's come to a joke during the three weeks I've spent with him for this story.

Richard Parker, 44, has become the loudest voice against Governor Quarles' decision to commute all death row inmates' sentences to life imprisonment. The governor made this decision after numerous verdicts were overturned by new DNA evidence.

"Until it affected me, I never really thought about this issue before. I was probably against the death penalty at one point in my life. But I was kid back then. I wasn't a father. I didn't understand what these animals with no respect for human life put families through."

Parker lost his two daughters, Ashley (9) and Hannah (4), eight years ago when convicted felon Anderson Rosen kidnapped the girls from their front yard, apparently as a part of a ransom scheme. Unfortunately, the girls...

****THE STORY CUTS OFF HERE, WE DON'T NEED TO KNOW ANY MORE
DETAILS****

PANEL TWO

Gatherer glances at this bracelet. (NOTE: The Bracelet does speak, but its word balloons should not have pointers.)

GATHERER

A good test, agreed?

BRACELET

Suitable, yes.

PANEL THREE

Gatherer stares at the drunken, sleeping man.

GATHERER

And already one of the natives volunteers himself. Fortunate, indeed!

PANEL FOUR

The Gatherer picks up the drunkard and stares deeply into his eyes.

PAGE SEVEN

PANEL ONE

Gatherer and the drunk stand in the same position as the previous page's final panel. Only now, the Gatherer has begun to turn into green smoke.

PANEL TWO

The same position again, except the Gatherer is gone...and the drunk's eyes and mouth are filled with green smoke. The Gatherer's alien bracelet has also begun to materialize on the drunk's left hand.

PANEL THREE

The Gatherer, now in possession of the drunkard's body, looks down at his human form for the first time.

GATHERER

Acceptable. Remaining life expectancy of subject is suitable for mission. Nevertheless, current intoxication level is exceedingly high.

PANEL FOUR

A close-up of the waitress from before.

CAPTION

Soon...

WAITRESS

Harry! I told you...

PANEL FIVE

The Gatherer has walked into the bar and grill. He stands at the doorway, cupping his mouth with his hands.

GATHERER (screaming)

ATTENTION! I am presently too intoxicated to operate a motor vehicle! I require transportation to a nearby domicile! Assistance requested!

PAGE EIGHT

PANEL ONE

Morning, at a middle-of-nowhere gas station. Norden and Jennifer, riding in her jeep, are stopping for gas.

CAPTION

The next morning.

PANEL TWO

Norden is pumping gas (we can't see her, but Jennifer is inside buying junk food) and two college-age snots are staring at him from behind.

PUNK #1

Aw, man. It can't be!

PUNK #2

It is, man. It is!

PANEL THREE

The two punks place their fingers over their heads to mimic alien antennas.

PUNK #1

Zzzzzrrp! It is Arthur Norden. World famous explorer.

PUNK #2

Vvvvrrreeeppp! Famous even on Mars. We've come for you, Earthling.

PANEL FOUR

The men move closer to Norden. Norden clearly isn't pleased.

PUNK #1

Give us all of your Earth secrets.

PANEL FIVE

Jennifer walks out of the store, holding a plastic bag and heading towards Norden

PUNK #2(off-panel)

Yes. We need more...

PANEL SIX

Back to Norden and the punks. Norden is furious with what the punk says...

PUNK #2
...More Earthlings to kill!

PANEL SEVEN
Norden grabs the punk by the collar.

NORDEN
You vile son of a --

PAGE NINE

PANEL ONE
Jennifer runs towards Norden and the man.

JENNIFER
That's enough! It's not worth it, Arthur.

PANEL TWO
Norden punches the punk in the face. His friend is terrified.

NORDEN
Says who?

PANEL THREE
The punk wipes the blood off his chin.

PUNK#2 (1)
You #%&@! I'll sue! I swear to God --

PUNK #2 (2)
-- My uncle's a lawyer and I'm gonna sue!

PANEL FOUR
Jennifer has her hand on Norden's shoulder, hoping to calm him down. Norden is still glaring at the punk.

NORDEN
Oh, that's a manly response. Come back here. If I'm getting sued, I'll at least get my money's worth.

JENNIFER
Let's just go.

PANEL FIVE

Jennifer and Norden get into the jeep. Jennifer is in the driver's seat.

JENNIFER
What was THAT about? What's wrong with you?!

NORDEN
Just forget it.

PANEL SIX

The jeep drives off. Jennifer is still carping at Norden.

JENNIFER
Have you lost it? Lord...let me see your hand, at least.

NORDEN
I told you, forget about it --

PAGE TEN

PANEL ONE

A long, thin horizontal panel. Close-up on Norton's tired, sad eyes.

NORDEN
-- I'm fine.

PANEL TWO

A tight close-up of a television set. A morning talk show is on.

TV
And is YOUR child in danger of rickets? The surprising new study --

PANEL THREE

Pulling back, we see that the TV is in a non-descript bedroom. The Gatherer, still in human form, is scanning the TV with his bracelet. The TV is now on an old cartoon, featuring an evil mustached man tying a woman to the railroad tracks.

TV
You'll never get away with this!

PANEL FOUR

A mid-level shot of the Gatherer, with his bracelet visible.

BRACELET

Hours scanned: Nine.

GATHERER

Hmm...well, that should do it.

PANEL FIVE

He turns off the television set.

GATHERER

I think my “English” has improved considerably. And my “Spanish” isn’t bad either, I suspect.

PANEL SIX

The waitress from the bar and grill opens the door.

WAITRESS (1)

Okay, Harry. I think you’ve had enough time to sleep it off.

WAITRESS (2)

You ready to go home now?

PANEL SEVEN

The Gatherer smiles.

GATHERER (1)

Yes. Thanks for your help. And for upgrading to the premium cable package.

GATHERER (2)

Now -- *¿Dónde está el baño?*

GRAPHIC NOVEL TREATMENT

The story will follow Jennifer and Norden as they investigate the mystery figure from the cave-in. Norden doesn't particularly trust Jennifer, but he's lonely and figures she's his only shot at redeeming his name. He's right to be suspicious of Jennifer -- initially, she isn't a believer at all. Norden is a world-famous celebrity who's likely responsible for two deaths during that cave-in. He's claiming that some sort of alien creature is the culprit, and he isn't backing down from the story even though it's made him a laughing stock. Jennifer's initial plan is to do a "fall from grace" style documentary on his descent into alcoholism and madness. She's not an idiot, though. When she begins to see things that can't possibly have earthly explanations, she realizes that Norden was right all along.

Jennifer's first indication that Norden isn't lying is when an alien seeks THEM out. The nude alien who emerged in Las Vegas (there's no English translation of her name, so let's call her VIOLET in honor of her skin color) steals a stranger's smartphone and uses her bracelet to scan its internet connection for recent news reports that might help her locate the bomb. She learns of Arthur Norden's claims, and as luck would have it, he was just on the news this morning for punching out a young man at a nearby gas station. Violet finds their car as it reaches the interstate. Her mere presence causes a massive pile-up and numerous wrecks. Norden rescues a boy caught in a burning car, his first heroic act in the story. Violet is impressed with his bravery, and uses her powerful bracelet to rescue the remaining victims. Violet explains that she is a SEEKER, and asks Norden to take her back to the cavern where he saw the mystery figure.

At the cavern, Violet detects clues that Earth technology never could. (Violet doesn't tell the humans that she's looking for a doomsday bomb, but they infer that she's on an important quest, and naturally want to go along.) She's sure she knows where the trail to the bomb leads, but unfortunately, the incident at the interstate has attracted the attention of SECTION P. Section P is the government agency charged with investigating paranormal events. Instead of the standard Men in Black "You saw nothing." "Aliens? No aliens here." brand of G-men that will violate any civil liberty to hide the existence of aliens, Section P is composed of mostly likable agents. They have a job to do, they don't trust these aliens (understandably), and don't tend to behave unreasonably. That said, a fight does break out when they track Violet to the cavern. With Norden and Jennifer's help, she escapes.

On the run, Violet begins to bond with Norden and Jennifer. She connects with Norden, who's mourning the loss of the two men killed in the cave-in, and Jennifer, who's still dealing with the loss of her brother and the new responsibilities she's taken on after adopting her nephew. They begin to suspect that Violet's bonding a little TOO well, and eventually realize that she's empathetically connecting to them during their dreams.

Other Seekers begin to emerge. One awakens underneath a mansion in Miami. He quickly discerns that the owner is of wealth and privilege, so he steals his body and uses his influence to begin his search for the bomb. This is the ruthless Seeker who doesn't particularly care about his mission -- he views humans as weak and easily controlled. This is his opportunity to live the good life, at the expense of slave labor. When it's time to vote, of course he'll spare the Earth.

Alternating with their journey will be the Gatherer's trip across America, as he tries to reach Richard Parker, the father from the newspaper article. (He's possessed an old wino's body, so he no longer has to hide from people.) He begins his journey when a group of teenage girls picks him up as a practical joke. The initial trip leaves him with a shallow impression of the human species, essentially confirming what he learned from television. The Gatherer studies the girl's driving technique and soon knows enough to drive a car. At the first opportunity, he scares the girls away and steals their car.

Along the way, the Gatherer will encounter normal people dealing with serious problems. As a part of his study of humanity, he will use his alien powers to offer them choices they normally couldn't imagine. For example, he asks a child whose sister is dying of cancer if he would trade his healthy cells for her cancerous ones. He asks the mother of an adult drug addict if she would revert her son to a perpetual childhood if it meant curing him of his addiction.

In a brief series of montages, we see other Seekers emerge throughout the lower United States and Mexico. (One awakens under the Pacific Ocean. Luckily for him, he can breathe underwater, but he still has to contend with the sharks.) These four Seekers, plus Violet and the ruthless Seeker in Miami, make up a jury of six. The Gatherer is the final vote in the event of a tie. If he deems any Seeker unfit to make a decision, the Gatherer can also nullify his or her vote. Since he's been granted a higher authority, it's expected of him to learn more of this planet's natives than any other Seeker. He's the "gatherer" because he's collecting all of the evidence that should be needed to judge this planet.

Future scenes will flesh out some of the mysteries, and reveal more about the four new Seekers. Eventually, we'll discover that the Gatherer's moral code is, appropriately, alien. He doesn't view sacrifice for another as noble; it's a perversion of the natural order. The child with cancer is fated to die, and any effort to keep her alive only increases the likelihood of her passing her weak genes along. The mother who turns her addict son back into an infant is robbing him of his adulthood, effectively taking his life. Norden and Jennifer will continue their adventure with Violet. Violet realizes that her appearance is a hindrance in her quest, and suggests Jennifer allow her to possess her body. She's deeply offended when Jennifer refuses. Violet decides to body-snatch someone else instead, over the objections of her companions. While they debate the issue, the four new seekers adopt human identities of their own.

Why exactly the Gatherer is searching for Richard Parker will be revealed. Using his alien technology, the Gatherer will kidnap the killer of Richard's children and give Richard the opportunity to kill him. Since Richard is furious that the government has cancelled its planned execution, the Gatherer wants to know if Richard could commit the act himself. The scene won't be graphic, Richard will be given a hypodermic needle instead of a weapon, but he still has to make the choice. The Gatherer considers this the ultimate test of humanity. Killing in self-defense is easily justified in his view, but killing as retribution? What does it say about humanity's code of honor or view of justice? Given the Gatherer's own warped ethics, it's impossible for anyone to know where he stands on the issue. Hopefully, these ideas will lead into entertaining action sequences, and generate a few ethical dilemmas for the cast.

ADDENDUM

Having read the message board responses from MTV Geek, I now understand that (1) the graphic novel should have a clear ending and won't necessarily start a series, and (2) it's okay if the treatment runs a little longer than two pages. With that understanding, I present my resolution to the story:

Richard Parker does kill his children's killer. Rather than providing the catharsis he expected, Richard's quickly overcome with intense remorse. The Gatherer witnesses his response and is intrigued. Given his prestigious status, the Gatherer already knows where the doomsday bomb is located (Mexico City). He arrives in the city and waits for the other Seekers to arrive. Eventually, the other six Seekers find the final location. Three vote to spare humanity, three vote against. The Seeker casts the deciding vote. He views humanity as irrational and potentially dangerous, but he respects their passion and commitment to loved ones. So, the Earth is spared. The End. Except...two twists. One of the votes against sparing humanity comes from Violet, much to the shock of her friends Norden and Jennifer. Second twist: a cosmic accident exiles the Seekers on Earth. They must now survive on our "primitive" planet. Violet is forced to face her friends. The Gatherer is morally obligated to oversee his fellow aliens. Section P now has a lot to do. Lots of intriguing possibilities, plus there's still that doomsday device the aliens could conceivably reactivate at any time. The story won't require a sequel, but the status quo created by the ending could easily lead into new stories.