

THE SEEKERS

(Pages 6-15)

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Writer's Notes

For the purposes of this contest I'm an "amateur" in that I am not currently employed by any publisher and have not had any comic book scripts published by any comic book publisher.

I tend to give the artist a lot of freedom unless I have a very specific idea about how something should look or be framed. Because I don't know who the final artist will be, I've given more specific framing in this script, but I'm completely flexible about whatever works best for the end result on the page. I'm a very visual writer and see the scenes unfold cinematically in my head as I work, and I enjoy working in synchronicity with an artist or artists as a team to create the best finished work possible.

Regarding Norden, I went for something more along the lines of Zahi Hawass than Indiana Jones, since I respect Indy far more. Hawass, on the other hand, is fun and easy to parody.

On a related note, my first college major was archeology before I switched to anthropology and then finally art, so I can definitely bring a certain amount of realism to Norden's activities as the story progresses.

Extra points to anybody who spots the little nod to Buckaroo Banzai.

Since the Las Vegas events on pages 1 – 5 are covered in the original treatment, I've started here with page 6.

The two page treatment follows. It's assumed that anyone reading that would have already read your treatment, so I didn't repeat a lot of the information given there. Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have regarding this project, I'm online most of the time at the instant messenger handles given on the title page.

Thanks, and enjoy!

PAGE 6

Panel 1 - A beautiful woman in sexy business clothing with big green eyes and a tumble of blonde hair is in her World News Network Los Angeles bureau dressing room, gazing at her reflection in the mirror. This is reporter JENNIFER HART.

Panel 2 – She makes a horrible yet funny face at herself in the mirror.

HART: Wonderful.

Panel 3 – With a disgusted look, she throws her spike heels across the room.

HART: Stupid producer. Stupid director. Stupid... I should file a sexual harassment complaint.

Panel 4 – She looks into the mirror sadly and starts to unbutton her shirt.

HART (to her reflection): And say what? That they want me to be too sexy while I report the news? Yeah, like that would go anywhere. What have you gotten yourself into, Jennifer?

Panel 5 – Closeup on her ringing cell phone, which is sitting on a nearby counter next to her purse. The caller ID display says “Switchboard.” In the background, Hart turns toward the sound.

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Panel 1 – Hart picks up the phone.

HART: Jennifer Hart here. Oh, hi Nancy, what's up? Wait... who?

Panel 2 – New angle, Hart's still struggling to get undressed with only one hand.

HART: One of the interns from that Death Valley cave-in? Absolutely, yes, tell her I'll meet her at Max's Cafe in a half hour.

Panel 3 – Max's Cafe, downtown Los Angeles (fictional location). Hart is casually but nicely dressed and sits in a booth across from ASHLEY, a college girl of about 20, where they're sharing a basket of fries. There's also a digital recorder on the table, which is turned on.

ASHLEY: ...So I take the job for college credit, then find out that it's not connected to the university at all. But I'd be stupid to turn down the opportunity to work with the famous Arthur Norden, right?

HART: Uh... right. Sure.

Panel 4 – Closeup on Ashley.

ASHLEY: Right. So I go for it anyway, but from day one the whole thing is weird. I've been on digs before, but this one is sectioned off with big sheets of black plastic. Once you're assigned a location, you can't work in any other section, and you can't talk to anybody but Norden about what you've found.

Panel 5 – Hart's reaction, brow creased a little.

HART: Why would an archaeologist do that? I've probably seen every special that Dr. Norden ever made, but I don't remember any black plastic walls. Why the secrecy?

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Panel 1 – Two-shot of the two women, leaning in a little closer over the table as they talk.

ASHLEY: No clue, but I'll tell you something. I did get a look at the main bracing inside the cave along with Jim, another guy there, and we couldn't see anything wrong with it. Jim's an engineering student, too.

HART: So you're saying that cave-in wasn't due to structural failure?

Panel 2 – Closeup on Ashley.

ASHLEY: No, it was something else. I wasn't there when the cave-in happened, because I left the dig the day before. Norden's freaky behavior had finally gotten on my last nerve.

Panel 3 – Flashback to the dig site, which is a relatively desolate spot on the outskirts of Death Valley, with distant mountains in the background, a few little bushes and clumps of dry grass scattered around, a cave, and not much else. A white van has the words "Dr. Arthur Norden" and a flashy portrait of a middle-aged man in a cowboy hat painted on the side. In the shade of the van, DR. ARTHUR NORDEN (in the same hat but somewhat older and heavier) sits at a large table made from a piece of plywood on sawhorses, with papers, tools, small boxes, and other assorted things scattered all over it. Ashley approaches the table.

CAPTION: Death Valley, five days earlier...

NORDEN (muttering to himself): It's got to be here somewhere. I know it is.

ASHLEY: Dr. Norden?

Panel 4 – Norden looks up, startled, and tries to hide some things on the table.

NORDEN: What?? Oh... it's just you. Amy, is it?

ASHLEY: Ashley, sir.

NORDEN: Yes, that's right. Do you have something there for me?

Panel 5 – Ashley holds out a small tray with a few pieces of obsidian in it, as well as a smooth stone with a perfectly circular hole in the center. She points to the latter.

ASHLEY: Yeah, I thought maybe this one was part of a necklace? It came up when we screened that new corner from this morning.

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Panel 1 – Norden nearly grabs the tray out of Ashley’s hands, wide-eyed. She’s startled and taken aback.

NORDEN: No, no, don’t you understand? But... no, of course not. You only work section D. That’s right.

Panel 2 – Closeup on the contents of the tray.

NORDEN: Yes. It’s... only a necklace. Of course. The Shoshone Indians probably traded obsidian for it. Nice work, Allie.

ASHLEY: It’s Ashley, sir. Is everything all right?

Panel 3 – Norden looks up at her from under his eyebrows, furtive, the tray clutched close to his chest.

NORDEN: Fine. It’s fine. Everything’s fine, and will continue to be just fine, understand? Break’s over, get back to work.

Panel 4 – Ashley walks off, clearly annoyed.

ASHLEY (muttering to herself): Yeah, whatever. Weirdo.

Panel 5 – Norden is stashing the tray inside his van, and we can see that some of the papers on his plywood table have questionable titles like “The Secret Origins of Humankind” and “Unexplained Metallic Alloys Among the Aztec.” Also present are the book *Chariots of the Gods* by Erich von Daniken (or one similar without violating copyrights) and a tabloid similar to the Weekly World News with even more outlandish headlines.

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Panel 1 – Back in the present, Hart’s walking back to the office, deep in thought. I’m picturing a low angle here to give her a little bit of a “proud reporter on the trail of a hot scoop” look.

HART (thoughts): So the famous Dr. Norden’s lost his marbles, huh? Too many long days in the hot sun and long nights alone, probably. But if the cave’s support bracing was structurally sound...

Panel 2 – Hart’s cubicle office at WNN. She’s at her computer, scouring reports about the cave-in. The headline on the monitor reads “Mystery Man Causes Two Deaths At Norden Dig.”

HART (thoughts): ...Then what really caused the fatal cave-in at the Death Valley dig? I don’t buy his explanation of how some “mystery man” caused all this either. That makes even less sense, but maybe I can use it to get Norden talking.

Panel 3 – A woman stands in the cubicle doorway.

WOMAN: You better get dressed so we can get you into hair and makeup. It’s almost four.

HART: I’m sorry, tell them to have Rebecca cover me. I’ve got a hot lead that can’t wait.

Panel 4 – The woman walks off. Hart has pulled up a car rental website on her monitor and is dialing her cell phone.

WOMAN: What, I’m your secretary now, too? Fine...

HART (to the phone): Yes, do you have any Standard SUVs at the Figueroa Street location? And what are the off-road restrictions on that?

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Panel 1 – Half page. It's twilight in the desert with a beautiful sky. A mysterious figure with long white hair, THE GATHERER, is walking parallel to a paved road but a few yards away from it, looking around cautiously.

CAPTION: Later that evening, just east of Death Valley

Panel 2 – The Gatherer turns and sees a car coming.

Panel 3 – He crouches behind some shrubs and waits for the car to pass by.

Panel 4 – The car gone, he continues walking as before, a hand on the large jeweled bracelet on his opposite wrist.

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Panel 1 – The Gatherer crouches behind a clump of trees, still within sight of the road, which is not a busy one. He touches one of the jewels on the bracelet and it lights up.

Panel 2 – Closer on him as he speaks into the bracelet.

GATHERER: Where are you?

Panel 3 – He listens to the response and watches as a car passes by.

Panel 4 – He speaks into the bracelet again.

GATHERER: And the others?

Panel 5 – He stands up and listens to it again.

Panel 6 – Worm's eye view as he speaks into the bracelet and looks up at the stars.

GATHERER: I will find them and gather them. The time has come.

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Panel 1 – An SUV is driving offroad toward the sunrise, the shadows long, a trail of dust behind it.

CAPTION: Early the next morning...

Panel 2 – Norden's trademark white van is parked about 50 yards away from a small cave entrance that's been cordoned off by yellow warning tape and a quickly-constructed plywood door that further blocks the way in. Pieces of black plastic are still hanging from the outer edges of the cave's roof and there are pits and piles of dirt in the area from the deserted dig. Norden is just pouring himself some coffee he's made on a small backpacker's camp stove when Hart's SUV pulls up. She's dressed casually, in a simple button-up blouse.

Panel 3 – Hart comes over to meet Norden. She has her hand out to shake his, but Norden's are wrapped around his mug.

NORDEN: I already answered all the questions I'm going to.

HART: I'm sure it's been tedious. Jennifer Hart, World News Network.

Panel 4 – Norden looks even more suspicious. He peers at her from between the rim of his mug and the edge of his hat. He's still not interested in shaking hands. She gives him a big, warm disarming smile.

NORDEN: What do you want?

HART: The truth. I think you've been given a raw deal by everybody involved, including the press. I especially want to hear more about the man that you said caused all this. In the police report, you described him as a middle-aged man with long white hair, and when he came out of the cave, it started to...

Panel 5 – Tight on Norden, his eyes intense.

NORDEN: I should never have said that.

Panel 6 – Close on Hart and Norden. Norden seems a little agitated but not actively hostile toward Hart. He's lowered his mug, at least.

HART: But why? If it's true, we need to find this person and clear your name. I can help you, Dr. Norden.

NORDEN: No. It was stupid, telling anyone. If all this means what I think it does, then I have to... why am I telling you this? Get out of here, I have work to do.

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Panel 1 – Several luxury SUVs with the name “Brecker Institute” on them pull up to the edge of the caution tape around the cave and people in typical field dig outfits get out (jeans, tees, plaid shirts, sun hats, etc.). A couple of the people, however, are more nicely dressed than a field archaeologist probably should be. Norden watches them suspiciously.

Panel 2 - One of the newcomers, A MAN wearing reflective sunglasses, approaches Norden and Hart with his hand out. Norden doesn't reach back.

NORDEN: What's all this?

MAN: Dr. Norden, I presume. I'm John Coyote. As you can see, we're here from the Brecker Institute to take over the dig.

NORDEN: I've never heard of you. Who do you work for at Brecker?

Panel 3 – They talk, Hart takes notes. In the background the newcomers are setting up.

MAN: Dr. John Jones, but that's really not important. I'm afraid your work here is done, sir.

NORDEN: Who the heck is Dr. Jones? Done? What do you mean, done? As soon as they're done with the investigation and clear me, I'll be right back in there. I've got far too much...

Panel 4 – Close on “John Coyote.”

MAN: You no longer work here, sir. I need to ask you and your companion here to leave. Now.

Panel 5 – Norden starts to flip out. “John Coyote” holds up some official-looking paperwork

NORDEN: Leave? By whose authority? Who are you people?

MAN: I just told you. We're from Brecker. You're fired.

NORDEN: This is completely out of line...

HART: I'm not his companion. I'm...

Panel 6 – Norden quickly takes Hart aside and speaks quietly into her ear.

NORDEN: Wait. Don't tell them who you are. This whole thing doesn't smell right. You want the truth? Follow me in your car.

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Panel 1 – Norden puts his coffee things back into his van as he glares angrily at the other man. Hart gets into her SUV.

NORDEN: Fine. We're leaving. But this isn't the end of it. I have two separate project contracts you're violating, and you'll be hearing from my agent and my lawyer.

Panel 2 – Norden and Hart drive off into the distance leaving dust clouds behind them. The man in the sunglasses watches them drive off and speaks into a cell phone.

MAN/YOUNG: Yes, this is Agent Young. He's leaving, and he had someone with him. Some hot blonde, I don't know who she was.

Panel 3 – Half page shot of the new camp. Agent Young turns away from where Norden was going and we see all kinds of strange equipment being taken out of the vehicles.

YOUNG: Yes, sir. Location of interest is secure. Awaiting further instructions.

Treatment for THE SEEKERS, story arc 1, 110 pages

Following the Las Vegas scene with the mysterious FEMALE SEEKER, we see frustrated reporter JENNIFER HART in her World News Network dressing room. She's changing out of her sexy on-camera clothing when her phone rings, and she learns that a former intern of the recently-disgraced archaeologist ARTHUR NORDEN wants to talk to her. The intern dishes on the strange events of the cave-in at Norden's Death Valley site, eventually revealing that the reason she left was that she thought he was insane.

Hart's intrigued. She works at the Los Angeles bureau office of WNN, and, as an amateur history nut, she decides to ditch the sexy clothes and cushy desk assignment in favor of a road trip to Death Valley to prove that she's a serious reporter, not eye candy, by getting the real story behind the Norden cave-in.

The next morning Hart finds Norden within sight of his excavation cave, which has been sealed off by the local authorities. He's having coffee in the shade of his four-wheel-drive van which he clearly lives out of when conducting digs, when she drives up in her rented SUV. While Norden and Hart are talking, some SUVs show up next to the cave entrance. Norden is suspicious. The people that get out of them are an assortment of older and younger people in casual work clothes, jeans, boots, hats and plaid shirts. Norden confronts them, and it's explained that they are the sponsors of his ill-fated dig, and they've come to take over with a new crew. They proceed to set up camp.

Norden senses that something isn't right, so he and Hart take off down the road to camp out at an local RV park. One of the more nicely-dressed newcomers watches them leave, and once they're gone completely, the crew starts to get out more weirdly technical gadgetry. The leader calls in to the office and says, "Location of Interest secure, awaiting further instructions."

(This is the introduction of "Section P", which at this point is more of an "X-Files" type of covert operation. Not even Section P is aware of the aliens' presence until later in the story, although they do have more knowledge about the paranormal and aliens in general. It becomes a race between Norden's team and the Section P team to get to the clues first. Section P may have more experience and data, but Norden's team is more quick-witted and doesn't have to check with anybody before acting.)

Meanwhile, the GATHERER and the female Seeker from Las Vegas meet on the outskirts of Pahrump, Nevada. She walks into a diner, still wearing only a long tee, and simply takes what she wants. The Gatherer pulls her outside and reminds her that these evolved monkeys are more than they appear, and that she must be more careful to fit into their society, at least for now. They must touch bracelets in order for her to "check in" correctly with the Gatherer. They part ways, the woman continuing west toward Death Valley, the Gatherer continuing east to look for more Seekers.

At the same time in Egypt, a MALE SEEKER rises up from inside the Great Sphinx. He's clothed in nothing but a rotting linen tunic, leather sandals, the jeweled wristband of the other Seekers, and the golden laurel leaf circlet he was entombed with. He comes to rest on the Sphinx's back, the surroundings both familiar and strange. When last he was awake, the Roman Empire ruled Egypt, and he notes that the Nile is still a busy area of commerce. He finds their current technology both primitive in some ways

and impressive in others. He reports to the Gatherer, who informs him that other areas of the world are not the same. The male Seeker is treated kindly by a family on the outskirts of Cairo, who clothe and feed him. He repays them with the golden laurel leaf circlet off his head. This leaves him feeling positive about humanity in general.

Back at the camp of Norden and Hart, it's now late afternoon. Norden has been utterly absorbed in his work while Hart has been trying make dinner over a campfire, which isn't going well. At last Norden comes out and spreads photos and papers all over picnic table, upsetting their dinner stuff. Hart finally gets him talking, and at first he does sound somewhat unhinged, talking about Erich von Daniken, crop circles and crystal skulls (red herrings for the reader), but the longer he talks, the more sense he makes.

Norden shows her his evidence of some kind of civilization that existed long before the first native people of that area, including photos of ancient rock carvings from the site, which are 200,000 years old but formed with the precision of a laser. It's these carvings that launched the dig in the first place, and she listens carefully when he describes the mysterious figure that came out of the cave. Somehow, it makes sense, and her journalist's mind craves more. Together, they eventually determine that the collection of weird symbols and lines form some kind of map. But to what?

The symbols on the map don't seem to line up with anything locally, so they keep rearranging and turning things, eventually zooming out until they realize it's a map of the world (the continents actually did look about the same 200,000 years ago). The points marked out on the map seem to be in random, imprecise locations (these are the locations of the clues to where the device is). Some of them have been lost, covered over with 200,000 years of mineral deposits. If access could be gained to the cave, they realize, the rest of the map and more symbols could be uncovered.

(If BOBBY is introduced into the story, he can be brought in via a phone call from his Aunt Jennifer at this point. I could go either way on his inclusion.)

Hart calls her office to let them know she's onto something big, and asks for another week in the field at least. She argues with her producer, who finally relents, under one condition: She has to do a quick news report to satisfy management that it's worthwhile for her to be out there. Norden is torn but anxious to keep her keen, problem-solving mind around, so he okays it but warns her not to give away too much. Neither Hart's producer nor Norden are very happy with her report, but she has to play the middle ground as long as she can to keep the situation going to get her big scoop.

A THIRD SEEKER has been in a quiet, dark corner of a lounge watching news reports for several hours, hoping to see a particular type of story come through – exactly like the one Hart has just done. A light flashes on this jeweled wristband, but the androgynous figure ignores it. S/he realizes that the reporter probably knows more than she's letting on, and that if everyone worked together, things would be found much more quickly. S/he does not contact any of the other Seekers, however, and plans to gather information from the fringes, while also manipulating the situation so that the various parties end up helping each other, knowingly or not.

Things are quickly converging once again around Norden's cave, which holds the key to this first series of events and springboards us into the next arc...