

The Seekers

By

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Created by Stan Lee

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PAGE ONE

PANEL 1

Caption: The Brody Institute of Archaeology, San Jose, CA

The exterior of the Brody Institute, a stately academic building, with clean lines and modern construction. There is a large sign out front, sidewalks, green lawns, probably part of a university campus.

PANEL 2

A man sits in a chair in the hallway of the building. Along the walls, interspersed with doors to offices of various department heads are the usual bulletin boards of departmental goings-on, research fliers, photos from expeditions, plaques commemorating contributors to the program. The man is dressed in a shoddy bomber jacket; he looks haggard, like a normally well-kept person who just didn't have time to shower that morning. He clutches a notebook in one hand and a pen in the other, murmuring to himself as he writes. This is **Arthur Norden**.

NORDEN

Dear Jim and Carol...no.

NORDEN (LINKED)

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Drake...I regret to inform you --

NORDEN (LINKED)

No, idiot, they already know what happened.

PANEL 3

Norden's notebook paper is visible, the scrawled beginnings of a handwritten letter to Jim and Carol Drake, parents of a student lost on Norden's recent Death Valley expedition. Several false starts, emphatically crossed-out, are legible: "I wish I knew what to say", "It is with heavy heart"...

NORDEN

Andrea was one of the best, brightest students I've ever had the pleasure of teaching. Her intelligence and passion were rare even amongst the greatest minds in the field.

NORDEN (LINKED)
Yeah, that's okay.

PANEL 4

The hall again, Norden's head resting on his writing hand. This letter's clearly giving him difficulty. Down the hall, a middle-aged woman approaches, pants suit, glasses, hair up: Norden's boss, **Dr. Beatrice Haskell.**

NORDEN
Unless, of course, they don't want to hear how good she was at the thing that got her killed...

PANEL 5

Haskell has reached her door, just across from where Norden has been sitting, waiting for her arrival, and is unlocking it. Norden is standing, the notebook and its contents temporarily out of mind for the moment.

HASKELL
Good morning, Dr. Norden.

NORDEN
Betty, I'm sorry to bother you, but my office is locked and my key doesn't seem to be working.

NORDEN (LINKED)
Worn down, I think. I've been meaning to get it replaced --

PANEL 6

Norden's face fills in the panel so that we can see his expression as he gets this news: he looks like he hasn't slept well, and now is surprised, pained, maybe even devastated, as:

HASKELL
Arthur, your key doesn't work because we changed the locks.

HASKELL (LINKED)
I'm sorry. You're fired.

PAGE TWOPANEL 1

Norden follows Haskell into her office. She's the head of the Institute: her bookshelves are packed with thick volumes on archaeology, broken up only by small artifacts, mementos or curiosities from days she didn't spend her time behind a desk, dealing with the university administration. She looks like she's preparing for another frustrating conversation.

NORDEN

Just like that? No warning?

HASKELL

You can't be that surprised, Arthur. With this Death Valley scandal, you're bad for the institute.

NORDEN (LINKED)

Like I've already said, I took all the proper --

HASKELL (LINKED)

It doesn't matter whether it's your fault or not, Arthur!

PANEL 2

Tempers are running high: Haskell is tired of dealing with the recent PR disaster that is Arthur Norden, and Norden feels like he's been completely abandoned. Whatever professional relationship they've had in the past seems to have evaporated completely.

HASKELL

What matters is that there's a possibility that two people died because you made a mistake.

HASKELL (LINKED)

Two. People.

HASKELL (LINKED)

If you had stayed quiet you might have been able to survive this with your job.

HASKELL (LINKED)

But you have taken every opportunity to deny that this might have been your fault, which only

HASKELL (LINKED)
 makes you look like a sociopath and
 a liar.

PANEL 3

Norden knows that, on some level, Haskell's right. He looks like he's been backed into a corner.

NORDEN
 I...

NORDEN (LINKED)
Sociopath might be a little strong.

NORDEN (LINKED)
 I was just hoping that the school would back me up on this a bit. I mean, I've brought in lots of good press over the years.

PANEL 4

Haskell kneads her forehead, eyes squeezed shut like she's fighting off a persistent headache.

HASKELL
 We did. That's why you've been able to go about your business these last two months.

HASKELL (LINKED)
 But you know that academics is as much about image as it is about actual accomplishment.

HASKELL (LINKED)
 And crazy professors who get people killed is bad for our image. Bad press.

NORDEN
 I'm not --

HASKELL (LINKED)
 It's what you look like. And we can't do that anymore.

PAGE THREE

PANEL 1

Norden visibly prepares to ask his next question; he knows it is ill-timed.

NORDEN

So is this a bad time to ask for access to the Fierro collection?

HASKELL

What?

HASKELL (LINKED)

Yes, of course it is. I can't conceive of a worse time.

PANEL 2

Norden appears to be pleading his case fervently.

NORDEN

But it's just gathering dust! And I think it might have something to do with what happened in Death Valley.

HASKELL

The collection remains the property of the Institute, Arthur, and letting you chase your monsters through it is nearly as bad as keeping you on the payroll.

PANEL 3

Haskell explains levelly, appealing to Norden's common sense. Norden, though, looks resigned.

HASKELL

You know this wasn't my decision, Arthur. I've done everything I can.

HASKELL (LINKED)

Please don't ask me to do anything else.

NORDEN

No. Yeah. I understand.

NORDEN (LINKED)
I know this wasn't you.

PANEL 4

Norden walks down the hallway away from Haskell's office, leaving behind all he has known, professionally, for a number of years, and every apparent hope of recovering his career. He realizes that even if he can prove his innocence, he's probably black-listed forever anyway. His cell phone rings, breaking his no doubt unhealthy train of thought.

HASKELL (V.O.)
"Good luck, Arthur. Really."

SFX: BUH-BA-BEEP-BEEEEEEP

PANEL 5

Norden takes out his cell phone, a newish model, regarding it with the look of someone who just drew a handful of dog crap out of their pocket. He really isn't good with technology and has very little idea how to work this gadget.

NORDEN
How do I -- ?

NORDEN (LINKED)
Oh, right. Or...yeah. Right.

SFX: BUH-BA-DAAAA

PANEL 6

Norden, cell phone raised to his ear awkwardly. And upside down.

NORDEN
Hello?

NORDEN (LINKED)
Hello?

PANEL 7

He eyes the phone dubiously before realizing his error and flips the phone over.

PAGE FOUR

PANEL 1

A wide angle view of the Brody Institute building as Norden emerges, heading for his car. He is talking on the phone with someone from WNN, calling to confirm his interview with Jennifer Hart the following day.

NORDEN

Sorry, I, uh...new phone. You know how that goes.

NORDEN (LINKED)

Yeah, I'm not really good at computer stuff.

NORDEN (LINKED)

Yes. Sure, I'm still fine for that interview tomorrow.

NORDEN (LINKED)

Well, except we won't be able to meet in my office after all.

PANEL 2

The view zooms out a bit; leaves are beginning to encroach on the view of Norden on the sidewalk.

NORDEN

Oh. Well is Ms. Hart there?

NORDEN (LINKED)

Oh. Can you pass along a message for me? An address?

PANEL 3

The view zooms further, now over-the-shoulder of a mysterious female figure, watching Norden from a position perched in a tree. She is tan-skinned, perhaps of Mexican or Native American descent, and unassuming.

NORDEN

No. I don't have the first idea how to send -- okay.

NORDEN (LINKED)

Okay, thank you. Here's the address...

PANEL 4

This new figure, a female Seeker (though not the one that has appeared in Vegas), from the front. She's attractive, but not outlandishly so; normal enough to draw little more than a few passing glances rather than lingering stares. One of the jeweled Seeker bracelets is visible on her wrist. Her brow is furrowed.

FEMALE SEEKER
You're not one of us.

FEMALE SEEKER
Who are you?

PAGE FIVE

PANEL 1

Caption: That night...

The image mirrors the view of the Institute from 4.1, though it is clearly late at night. No cars are parked outside, no obvious activity remains. The lights inside are out. A small figure approaches, limned by light from a streetlight. Norden has returned to do illegally what he couldn't do legally earlier in the day.

NORDEN
(handwritten caption,
excerpted from further
attempts at his letter)
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Drake,

NORDEN
(handwritten)
I can't tell you how sorry I am
about what happened to your
daughter
("your daughter" is crossed
out)
to Andrea.

NORDEN
(handwritten)
I wish I could tell you what
happened, or why, but I don't
know. I'm doing my best to find
out.

PANEL 2

Norden hides around a corner, peeking at the lone night guard sitting in a small gate house at the entrance to the rear employee lot. If there was any doubt he was up to something in the earlier panel, it should be clear now. He's dressed darkly, an outfit obviously meant to be hard to see in the darkness and difficult to identify him in.

NORDEN
(handwritten)
I'll do anything I have to to get
the answers that we both
want. ANYTHING.

NORDEN (V.O.)
"No - let's make this letter all
about me, why don't we? And maybe
we can sound vaguely threatening
while we're at it!"

PANEL 3

Norden runs past the dozing guard towards the back doors to the building, avoiding conspicuous pools of lamplight.

NORDEN (V.O.)
"Stupid."

PANEL 4

A bird's-eye view of Norden running across the vacant lot towards the building. Dominating the view, though, is the silhouette of the female Seeker, leaping through the air high above him in the same direction; she's following him. Her jeweled bracelet glitters in the moonlight, the only clear identifying sign on her.

PAGE SIX

PANEL 1

Norden tries the handle on a heavy door. A cardkey reader is visible on the wall, a small light glowing red in the darkness.

NORDEN
What's wrong with mechanical
locks? I could have picked that.

NORDEN (LINKED)
Well, I guess that would be what's
wrong with them.

PANEL 2

Norden moves to a window. He pulls a crowbar out from under his jacket.

NORDEN
Good, talking to yourself. This
bodes well.

PANEL 3

He levers the window open forcefully.

SFX: Krrck-uump!

PANEL 4

Norden disappears into the darkened interior of the building.

PANEL 5

The female Seeker drops to the ground deftly, effortlessly, and follows.

PANEL 6

Norden has heard her, perhaps - he waits just to the side, and below, the window in a crouch, ready to react to whomever is following him. He holds the crowbar in a white-knuckle grip, but his wrist is limp, like he's indecisive about whether to use it as a weapon. The female Seeker is just outside the window now --

PAGE SEVEN

PANEL 1

Across the top of the page (and joining with the top of the next), a dark van pulls up outside near the gatehouse. The guard in the gatehouse stirs.

PANEL 2

The female Seeker swings into the darkened building, hands clutching the window frame, anticipating Norden's ambush position. She leads with her legs, kicking Norden hard; the blow is not so solid as perhaps she intended, but sends his crowbar clattering across the floor.

PANEL 3

Surprised by the attack, Norden switches to defensive mode, fists clenched. His hands-on nature, drowned of late in guilt and academic posturing, rises to the surface - this isn't his first fight. He ducks a punch from the female Seeker and delivers one of his own, solid.

PANEL 4

The female Seeker expertly blocks his follow up, moving with unearthly speed and precision.

PANEL 5

She delivers a kick to Norden's chest, square and devastating, knocking him off his feet.

PAGE EIGHT

PANEL 1

Continuing from panel 7.1, the guard in the gatehouse has woken sleepily; his eyes go wide as he sees a pistol leveled at him.

PANEL 2

Norden is propelled by the Seeker's kick down the corridor and impacts the wall, hard.

NORDEN

Aaaagh!

PANEL 3

Norden slumps to the ground, back against the wall; he's hurt pretty badly. He has a few broken ribs, and his dominant hand is probably broken as well. His face is etched with pain. The female Seeker crouches next to him, fingers on her bracelet.

FEMALE SEEKER

Hold still. I mean you no harm.

NORDEN

Could have*cough*

NORDEN (LINKED)

I think you broke my ribs...

FEMALE SEEKER (LINKED)
 Yes. I apologize.

PANEL 4

Her bracelet glows slightly; it begins to accelerate Norden's healing.

NORDEN
 You broke my hand, too.

FEMALE SEEKER
You broke it when you hit me.

FEMALE SEEKER (LINKED)
Strange. You're just a human.

NORDEN (LINKED)
 Is that...bad?

FEMALE SEEKER (LINKED)
 No, just --

PANEL 5

Both Norden and the female Seeker look up in shock and surprise as they hear, from outside:

SFX: BANG! BANG!

PAGE NINE

PANEL 1

Caption: Death Valley.

Caption: The same moment.

A man stands alone in the dark and desolate landscape. He looks curiously out-of-place, not just because he's in the middle of Death Valley with no apparent sign of survival gear or companions, but because his garb and appearance are just somehow...*off*. He speaks to voices only he can hear. This is **the Gatherer**.

THE GATHERER
 Yes.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)
 This will complicate things.

PANEL 2

The Gatherer is looking slightly downward, at the ground; his gaze is distant, a bit glazed-over, like someone half in a dream.

THE GATHERER

This is not proceeding according to our protocols.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

I agree. Desperate measures may become necessary.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

At the very least, I must act more quickly than I had planned.

PANEL 3

His expression is unchanged.

THE GATHERER

No. I'm not sure why. Perhaps...

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

No, I was just theorizing. You won't like it.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

Could it be the Interloper that has caused this?

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

No! Of course all precautions were taken!

PANEL 4

He looks, if anything, slightly more determined. But only slightly.

THE GATHERER

I will take care of the situation. Some variables are inevitable.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

At this point we can make no assumptions about how quickly the others will awaken.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)

Assuming they haven't already.

THE GATHERER (LINKED)
This world's time may grow short...

PAGE TEN

PANEL 1

Splash: The Gatherer holds out his hand, palm down, his bracelet glowing brightly. The ground beneath, dry and dead, surges, shatters, reforms into a 2D map of the Earth's continents, albeit in a slightly different configuration: the Seekers charted it in an earlier geologic phase. Symbols are visible at certain points where individual Seekers are detected: each symbol is different, distinct. There is only one location where there are more than one clustered - San Jose.

THE GATHERER
...and I have a great distance to
travel.

PANEL 2

A small panel in the corner, picture-in-picture, zoomed in on the multiple San Jose blips. This will associate these to the reader with the scene at the Brody Institute, which will resume on the following page.