

COVERAGE, INK. COVERAGE

TITLE:
LOCALE: Mexico
AUTHOR:
PERIOD: 15 years ago; the present
FORM: screenplay
GENRE: action thriller
BUDGET: low or med.
DRAFT DATE: none
COVERAGE DATE:
PREPARED BY:

LOGLINE: A diving instructor discovers a plot to assassinate the US and Mexico presidents while leading a group of divers on a dangerous dive through sunken Mayan ruins.

SYNOPSIS:

Experienced Mexican divers JORHEY and CONCEPCION investigate a dangerous, sunken Mayan city where many other divers have perished. They enter the uncharted caves and encounter barracuda, moray eels, and silt which can blind you in an instant. Concepcion becomes disoriented and panics. Jorhey survives an eel attack which maims him and rushes back to find Concepcion dead.

Playa Del Carmen, Mexico—present. Divers arrive for a big annual dive of the Mayan cenote. Leading the dive is ex-Olympic swimmer DAVE LANCASTER (40s.) Along for the ride are his teenage kids BETHANY and LANE, Islamic couple ISABEL and ABDULLAH, good ol' boy JC (60s) and his wife MARCIE, and German HELMUT. MALCOLM, black cool guy, joins them later. Dave picks up his charges at the airport (where he holds up a flimsy paper sign) and they pile into a van to head to the dive site. On the way, Dave tells every how dangerous the dive is and that it's not too late to back out. Abdullah is concerned about Dave's kids, but Dave tells them they're both certified. At the dive shop, we see Jorhey—now scarred and missing most of his ear—and Dave's fiance SOPHIE preparing. As the van arrives & everyone unloads, Bethany tells Marcie Dave won a bronze medal in the 400 meters. Helmut unloads a large case that he says is a camera. Meanwhile on the TV we see a news story about the US president arriving in Mexico to sign a historic but controversial treaty with the Mexican president. The signing will take place in a city, Akumal, located directly above the cenote. As the group prepares for the dive, Dave stresses safety and the importance of following the guide ropes. There are only two people in the world who know their way around Five Points, the big room with 5 holes in the

walls (where Concepcion died earlier.) The other person is Jorhey, who is a Mayan descendant.

The group sets out through the jungle to get to the dive site. Rain begins. At the site, farmer ROMERO shoots a snake, scaring Malcolm. Dave gets a call from his ex-wife JENNY, who monitors one of the caverns via webcam. The group goes over signals, then descends. Dave immediately has problems with his mask and regulator but continues on. As they enter the cavern, Dave tells the group this is where the Mayans performed sacrifices. They pass the "turn back now" sign... Helmut seems to be acting pretty shifty...

They come upon a room full of vampire bats. Sophie's having problems with her air—she's dropped from 3000 to 500 lbs in minutes. She heads back. In the next cavern, Dave instructs Lane to shoot 2 flares through holes in the rock into the air, to alert Jorhey that there's trouble. Lane is pissed that Dave orders him to stay behind and shoot off flares. Dave says they'll wait for him at the next cave. The group continues to Five Points and the thermocline, and area where fresh water and saltwater meet, which causes disorientation. More problems arise as JC and Marcie go missing. Dave tells everyone to stay put and he goes looking for them. Dave finds Lane sitting around—he never shot off the flares. Lane didn't think it was an emergency! Lane gets bit by a giant spider and tells his son he's due for an ass-kicking. His son should have been in place as rear diver. Dave returns to the group and tells them this is now a rescue op. They all head back to the medium cavern. Dave decides to leave the group—he can get back much faster without them. But now Helmut is missing! Dave gets to the Cavern one, but his group takes it upon themselves (or Bethany does... Dave's kids have a problem with listening to him, it seems) to follow him. Suddenly, an enormous blast causes a cave-in. They're trapped. And their flares are missing. Suddenly 3 MEN in black wetsuits & machine guns are after them. Dave leaves the group to search for a way out. Bethany accompanies. They're both running low on air. Meanwhile Jorhey sees the flare Lane sent up and leads a team through the jungle to the rescue. But they stop in their tracks as they see bad guy RAMON guarding the entrance to the medium cavern.

Lane doesn't really respect his dad and calls him "Super Dave." Dave lost a diver once before but doesn't talk about it. JC returns to the group and reveals he's working with the bad guys. His wife is history. Ramon kills JC. Jorhey's Dive Helpers slash Bad Guy 2 with a machete. Bad Guy 2 joins the group in the cavern. Abdullah offers to treat the wound. Bethany and Dave make it to the lost city cavern and revel in the beauty. Bethany and Dave switch air tanks because he's almost out and she uses less air. Dave finds the sewer below Akumal but they're unable to get anyone's attention. Bad Guy 2 fires at Lane. Abdullah shoots Bad Guy 2 with a

speargun and Lane pops up out of the water where he had been playing dead. Isabel bandages Abdullah's wound. They swim off in a hail of machine gun fire. Dave & Bethany find Helmut's video case. Helmut tackles Dave. Bethany cuts his hose and they drag him out of the water. Helmut knows he is to put the case on the altar but thinks it's just a camera (?) As he dies, Ramon enters. Ramon tells them it's a chemical bomb which will kill thousands, including the US and Mexico presidents. Dave and Bethany escape under water. Dave takes the case. Running out of air, Dave drops the case and makes for the surface. Bethany shares her regulator with him. They make it to the camera cavern and desperately wave at Jenny, who may or may not be watching. Bethany freaks and tells her dad someone has to do something, again insinuating that Dave does not have control. Dave swims off, breathing air from his BCD vest. Dave finds Lane, and they share his octopus breathing apparatus long enough to break surface. Lane tells Dave Isabel and Abdullah and Malcolm are still alive. Dave takes Lane's tank and swims off to try to get help, leaving Bethany and Lane behind in the cold cavern. Dave must now put his speed swimming skills to work. He switches air tanks with a long-dead diver. Meanwhile, after Ramon goaded Abdullah about the place of the woman in Muslim society, Isabel begins to show resentment. Dave encounters a lost Malcolm and thinking it's a bad guy, cuts his hose. Malcolm and Dave impale a bad guy on a stalactite, then take his air. Meanwhile, Jenny sees the divers on her computer and calls for help. Malcolm stays behind with the kids while Dave swims on with the speargun. Dave retrieves Isabel and Abdullah and guides them to the others. But a bad guy lurks behind them. They wrestle. An eel gets the bad guy. Dave, Isabel & Abdullah return to the cavern but find once again his kids didn't listen to him and have vanished. If they stay here the water will rise and they can get out a hole. But at Five Points cavern they find Ramon holding the kids hostage. Ramon orders Dave to retrieve the case and place it in the Lost City cave or he will start killing. A bad guy prods Dave along. Dave tries to outswim the guy. They fight, and Dave gets hit in the leg with a spear. Dave steers the guy into a molten lava vent and the bad guy sizzles. Dave returns with the case and uses it to deflect a bullet meant for his kids. Dave hides in the silt in the batcave, and as Ramon enters the bats, panicky due to rising water, get him. Dave returns to find the party escaping via rope which Jorhey lowered. Isabel is already out. The crew worries about the bomb, which Dave left behind. Bethany gives Dave her tank and he swims off after the bomb. The kids tell Jorhey what's up and Jorhey dashes off to help Dave. Dave drops the case into a "fire hole" but gets caught in the underwater explosion and is blasted through stalactites. He hallucinates as he loses consciousness. Jorhey rescues him, and they buddy-breathe up to the surface. Sophie confesses to Dave that earlier in the day a man insisted she tell them about the dive or he'd kill her. Suddenly two black

helicopters arrive and a mortally wounded Ramon is lowered in a basket, along with a bunch of rappelling bad guys. He means to kill them all. Farmer Romero and his friends burst from the jungle and kill the bad guys as a joint US Marines/Mexico task force arrives by helo. Jorhey is mortally wounded.

COMMENTS:

Some good action and a few nice, tense moments in this undersea thriller, but a silly plot, weak bad guy and an iffy main character undermine (TITLE.)

Let's start with the good stuff: the writer clearly knows his stuff when it comes to diving, and tech in the script seems right. Some of the characterizations are good, particularly the way the writer sets up the Islamic characters vs. good old boy JC, only to reveal that JC is the actual bad guy—a nice twist. And the basic idea of Dave being a fallen Olympian who must prove himself to his kids is terrific, although the execution leaves a bit to be desired. More on that in a moment.

Now onto the weak stuff: first up, the plot. The idea of the US signing a treaty with Mexico which more or less merges the two countries is ridiculous. Even the NAFTA treaty, which did far less, is still hotly debated and derided. There's no way anything like that could ever happen. So if we don't believe the central premise, it's hard to really care about what's happening to the characters. Similarly, we totally understand Ramon's point of view. Hey, we don't want to AGREE with our lunatic terrorist in a movie, unless he's conflicted, as in *The Rock* (more on that in a moment.)

Ramon is the weakest character in the script and fails completely as a bad guy. We know nothing about him—does he represent an organization? What's his backstory? Where did he come up with the idea of bombing his own people, and why did anyone think this was a good idea? Surely they could have brought the bomb to Washington DC and left it on a park bench near the White House instead. We need to explain all the whos and whys: WHY is the bomb to be placed underwater? Is it more effective that way? Logic dictates that the sea would simply disperse the toxins, thereby attenuating any damage. WHO is Ramon and WHY is he so up in arms about this treaty? Has it affected him personally? Did he lose his family because the deal caused his farm to be seized? Let's give him some backstory, some reasons for acting like a black hat, and some real dimension. Part of the reason the bad guy in *The Rock* worked so well was because he was conflicted, which made him more believable. Ramon, on the other hand, is a one-dimensional mustache-twirling Snidely Whiplash. And if Ramon knows how to dive—as do, seemingly, all his men—WHY does he need to send Helmut to plant the bomb on Dave's expedition? Couldn't Ramon simply go out there with his guys and do it themselves? Or simply kidnap Dave's family and force him to lead them to the lost city? The whole set-up is just too contrived to be realistic.

And Helmut... it's obvious he's a bad guy from the very first scene. The writer obviously tried to make him less cliché by having him be an innocent dupe, yet he still comes off like a Nazi. Further, it's not believable that an experienced diver would never open this large case someone asked him to bring along, and simply accept it's a camera. Wouldn't he want to check it out, figure out how it worked so he could operate it? So the whole Helmut thing comes across as lame. By the way, Germans don't say "Nyet." Little things like that, and misspelling "Auf Wiedersehn" and "Andele" show that while the writer may have knowledge of diving, he didn't bother to do much other research, which again, undermines the script's verisimilitude.

On to Dave. Again, the Dave concept is a good one. But as written, it doesn't work, specifically because while everyone TALKS about Dave being a coward, Dave not being a leader, and his kids obviously resent him, what we SEE is that Dave is very capable and inexplicably no one in his party listens to him. Ever. Repeatedly. This is contrived and doesn't work. The only evidence that Dave might be a loser is the (funny) gag with the sign at the airport. So it comes across as a false note that his kids are on his case, since we've seen no evidence that Dave is anything but a competent, cool guy who is doing a pretty darn good job. The solution here is to use Act 1 to better set up the character of Dave. As it is, the divers go straight to the dive site and never even check into their hotels! This is downright silly. Let's take 10 pages in Act 1 to set up the character dynamics between Dave, his ex-wife, his (underutilized and entirely unnecessary as a character) girlfriend Sophie, and most importantly, his kids. Dave can be somewhat disorganized, fly by the seat of his pants, irresponsible. Maybe he forgets his kid's birthday. And what exactly happened between Dave and his ex? Why does she still monitor his dives via webcam??? By learning all this we'll be able to define the character without the writer having to tell us what we should be thinking about Dave through weak exposition. By the way, the whole bit with Dave not having good breathing control, yet he's a former Olympic swimmer, doesn't work. It goes nowhere and is not believable. Get rid of it.

There are other storytelling flaws—for example, the prologue with Jorhey should actually be the scene where DAVE, not Jorhey, lost a diver. Jorhey is not the star of the movie and is at best a minor character. Similarly, it should be Dave's KID or EX- who saves him at the end, someone with a close personal relationship. Perhaps Dave and Bethany can be at odds the whole movie until Dave finally proves himself. Then his daughter finally forgives him and rescues him, completing both their arcs. And from a writing standpoint, the writer should learn how to use slug lines to break up the action. There are many pages with "too much black" since

the writer doesn't know how to use slugs to break up the action and call attention to key moments. This makes for a turgid read, and often necessitates rereading thick paragraphs to try to find exactly what happened. The writer might consider using the slug line style in order to trim the fat and add white to the page. Here's a quick example of how an action scene, properly slugged, should look:

Dave swims off towards the hole when suddenly

A MORAY EEL

Flashes from a crevasse, bites into his leg! Dave wrestles with the creature as he struggles for air -

HIS AIR TANK

Hits the silty floor. Dave's done for-

FLASH OF CRIMSON IN WATER

The moray falls away, revealing Bethany, holding her bloody dive knife...

With quite a bit of character work and a rethinking of the central plot, this script could generate some interest for any producer looking for a medium-budget, claustrophobic aquatic thriller. As it is, it's a pass.



	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Very Good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>So-So</u>	<u>Not Good</u>
Artistically				X	
Commercial				X	
Premise				X	
Story					X
Main Characters				X	
Minor Characters			X		
Dialogue				X	
Visual Elements			X		
Title					X

SCRIPT: PASS
WRITER: PASS