# "RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK"

## Story Conference Transcript

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G -- We'll just talk general ideas, what the concept of it was. Then I'll get down to going specifically through the story. Then we will actually get to where we can start talking down scenes. In the end I want to end up with a list of scenes. And the way I work generally is I figure a code, a general measuring stick perameter. I can either come up with thirty scenes or sixty scenes depending on which scale you want to work on. A thirty scene thing means that each scene is going to be around four pages long. A sixty one means that every scene is going to run twenty pages long. (?) It depends on, part of it is the... (short gap in the tape) knock some of these out, and this doesn't work out the way we thought it would. You can move things around, but it generally gives you an idea, assuming that what we really want at the end of all this is a hundred and twenty page script, or less. But that's where we really want to go. Then we figure out vaguely what the pace of, how fast it's going to move and how we're going to do it. I have a tendency to work rather mathematically about all this stuff. I found it easier and it does lay things out. Especially a thing like this. The basic premise is that it's sort of a serialesque kind of movie. Meaning that there are certain things that have to continue to happen. It's also basically an action piece, for the most part. We want to keep things interspaced and at the same time build it. As I build this up, you'll see it's done vaguely by the numbers.

Generally, the concept is a serial idea. Done like the Republic serials. As a thirties serial. Which is where a lot of stuff comes from anyway. One of the main ideas was to have, depending on whether it would be every ten minutes or every twenty minutes, a sort of a cliffhanger situation that we get our hero into. If it's every ten minutes we do it twelve times. I think that may be a little much. Six times is plenty.

S -- And each cliffhanger is better than the one before.

G -- That is the progression we have to do. It's hard to come up with. The trouble with cliffhangers is, you get somebody into something, you sort have to get them out in a plausible way. A believable way, anyway. That's another important concept of the movie -- that it be totally believable. It's a spaghetti western, only it takes place in the thirties. Or it's James Bond and it takes place in the thirties. Except James Bond tends to get a little outrageous at times. We're going to take the unrealistic side of it off, and make it more like the Clint Eastwood westerns.

G -- The thing with this is, we want to make a very believable character. We want him to be extremely good at what he does, as is the Clint Eastwood character or the James Bond character. James Bond and the man with no name were very good at what they did. They were very fast with a gun, they were very slick, they were very professional. They were Supermen.

S -- Like Mifune.

G -- Yes, like Mifune. He's a real professional. He's really good. And that is the key to the whole thing. That's something you don't see that much anymore.

S -- And one of the things that really helped Mifune in all the Kurosawa movies is that he was always surrounded by really inept characters, real silly buffoons, which made him so much more majestic. If there are occasions where he comes up against, not the arch-villian, but the people around him shouldn't be the smartest...

G -- Well, they shouldn't be buffoons. The one thing we're going to do is make a very good period piece, that is realistic and believable. A thirties movie in the, even in the Sam Spade genre. Even in the Maltese Falcon there were some pretty goofy characters, but they were all pretty real in their own bizarre way.

S -- Elijah Cook.

G -- Elijah Cook might not have been the brightest person in the world. In a way he was the buffoon of the piece, but at the same time he was very dangerous and he was very... They were strong characters. If we keep it that mode of believability...

S -- It's just like you don't put Lee Van Cleef as an accomplice to... (garbled)

G -- No, you put Eli Wallich. Did you see "The Good, The Bad And the Ugly"? The Eli Wallich character is a goofy character, but at the same time he's very dangerous and he's very funny and he's ... We can have that kind of thing. The main thing is for him to be a super hero in the best sense of the word, which is John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Sean Connery tradition of a man who we can all look up to and say, "Now there's somebody who really knows his job. He's really good at what he does and he's a very dangerous person. But at the same time we're putting him in the kind of Bogart mold, like "Treasure Of Sierra Madre" or ...

S -- Or even the Clark Gable thing we talked about.

G -- Yeah, the Clark Gable mold. The fact that he is slightly scruffy. You don't know it until it happens.

Now, several aspects that we've discussed before: The image of him which is the strongest image is the "Treasure Of Sierra Madre" outfit, which is the khaki pants, he's got the leather jacket, that sort of felt hat, and the pistol and holster with a World War One sort of flap over it. He's going into the jungle carrying his gun. The other thing we've added to him, which may be fun, is a bull whip. That's really his trade mark. That's really what he's good at. He has a pistol, and he's probably very good at that, but at the same time he happens to be very good with a bull whip. It's really more of a hobby than anything else. Maybe he came from Montana, someplace, and he... There are freaks who love bull whips. They just do it all the time. It's a device that hasn't been used in a long time.

S -- You can knock somebody's belt off and the guys pants fall down.

G -- You can swing over things, you can...there are so many things you can do with it. I thought he carried it rolled up. It's like a Samurai sword. He carries it back there and you don't even notice it. That way it's not in the way or anything. It's just there whenever he wants it.

S -- At some point in the movie he must use it to get a girl back who's walking out of the room. Wrap her up and she twirls as he pulls her back. She spins into his arms. You have to use it for more things than just saving himself.

G -- We'll have to work that part out. In a way it's important that it be a dangerous weapon. It looks sort of like a snake that's coiled up behind him, and any time it strikes it's a real threat.

L -- Except there has to be that moment when he's alone with a can of beer and he just whips it to him.

G -- That's the sort of gung-ho side of the character, which is, if we make him sort of Super Samurai Warrior, meaning that he is just incredibly good with a bull whip and incredibly good with a gun. He's a dead-eye shot. He's got the wrong kind of holster for a quick draw, but we can always have him be a semi... we're not going to use the quick draw aspects of it, but he should be very fast and very quick. Maybe even, this has to do with the other part of this character, but I was thinking of Kung-Fu, Karate. But I don't want to load him up too much. The reason I was doing this is that his character is international.

G -- He's the guy who's been all around the world. He's a soldier of fortune. He is also... Well, this gets into that other side of his character, which is totally alien to that side we just talked about. Essentially, I think he is a, and this was the original character and it's an interesting juxtaposition. He is an archeologist and an anthropologist. A Ph.D. He's a doctor, he's a college professor. What happened is, he's also a sort of rough and tumble guy. But he got involved in going in and getting antiquities. Sort of searching out antiquities. And it became a very lucrative profession so he, rather than be an archeologist, he bacame sort of an outlaw archeologist. He really started being a grave robber, for hire, is what it really came down to. And the museums would hire him to steal things out of tombs and stuff. Or, locate them. In the archeology circles he knows everybody, so he's sort of like a private detective grave robber. A museum will give him an assignment... A bounty hunter.

S -- If there were these Arabs who just discovered some great king's tomb, and you see the tomb being taken out. And there are about twenty or thirty Arabs heavily armed, and like five trucks and you realize...there's this one guy who's all painted, and he's one of the pall bearers who slips a thing into the back of the truck, gets behind the wheel and as the caravan is going to turn right, this one thing goes left. And the rest chase him, but he gets away.

G -- The thing is, if there is an object of antiquity, that a museum knows about that may be missing, or they know it's somewhere, He can go like an archeologist, but it's like rather than doing research, he goes in to get the gold. He doesn't really go to find cheap artifacts, he goes to gather stuff. And the other thing is, if something was taken from a tomb, stolen and sort of in the underground, sometimes they may send him out to get it. Essentially he's a bounty hunter. He's a bounty hunter of antiquities is what it comes down to. If a museum says that there is this famous vase that we know exists, it was in this tomb at this time. It may still be there, but we doubt it. We think maybe it's on the underground market, or in a private collection. We'd like to have it. Actually it belongs to us. We're the National Museum of Cairo or something. He says okay and he tracks it down. If it's not in the thing, he finds it, finds out who's got it. And he swipes it back. A lot of times it's sort of legal. All he has to do is get it. It's not like he steals things from collectors, and then gives them to other collectors. What he does is steal things from private collectors who have them illegally, and gives them back to the national museums and stuff. Or, being that his morality isn't all that good, he will go into the actual grave and steal it out of the country and give it to the museum. It's a sort of quasi-ethical side of that whole thing. The museum

G -- does commission somebody to go into the pyramids and you know, whatever they find, sort of get out without the Egyptian government knowing, because they were in the process of turmoil and nobody's going to know anyway and there's not going to be any official protest, so just do it. Anything that's quasi-legal, or amorphous, he'll do. He's not a totally corrupt person, where he'll steal. But if it's sort of fair game, then he comes in. As a result he's essentially an anthropologist and an archeologist. He is a professor. He knows antiquities. So nobody can pawn off a fake on him. He understands all that stuff. But he really got the adventure bug and and he just kept doing it. And it was good money. He gets a big commission on the stuff, a big bounty. So he just got into this crazy business.

Now, on top of that, I have added, I thought it would be interesting to have him be a sort of expert in the occult, as an offshoot of the anthropoligical side of this thing. He has a tendency to get into situations where there are taboos, voodoos, things, especially when you start dealing with pyramids you get into all that. So he sort of studies it because he's gotten mixed up with it. A study of ancient religions and voodoo and all that kind of stuff. He's a guy who sort of checks out ghosts and psychic phenomenon in connection with the kind of things he does. He's a sort of archeological exorcist. When somebody has a haunted house, or a haunted temple, and nobody will go near it, he is the one who will go in there and do it, and he has dealt with... Assuming that he believes in the supernatural because he deals with it, he is the one they send into the haunted house. Like one of these haunted house professors who try and figure out why a house is haunted. He does that. He gets involved with sacred temples and curses and all that stuff. And actually some were real, he came across some real curses and stuff. He said hey, this is really interesting. A lot of the times they are hoaxes. And he can figure it out. This is just a general history of where he comes from. People will use the pharoahs or a curse, and something will ahppen. People will walk through this particular temple and they will die twenty-four hours later. Nobody knows why. The curse of Mabutu is on that place. Well, he looks at it and sees that there's a fissure in the thing and there's a deadly gas that's coming out of the ground. Because he's an intelligent professor, he knows his science and he can sort of deduce a hoax. There was a comic book a long time ago about a guy who did nothing but show up hoaxes. It was like Ripley's Believe It Or Not. They would send things to this guy. They would send him eight-legged dogs and stuff. It was like a TV show. If you couldn't figure out how the hoax was done then it would be on the show. It was all him trying to show these complicated ways that people come up with hoaxes.

G -- That was just a side light. When he confronts his antiquities and stuff, half the time he's dealing with hoaxes. Not only hoaxes in terms of taboos and things, but also hoaxes in terms of the antiquities. They send him out to get them, but they also send him out to deal with the supernatural.

L -- Some of the hoaxes may have been set up by the natives.

G -- Yeah. They may be an original native thing, or it might be some shyster in town who thinks he's going to pull a fast one on somebody, for various reasons. It's a millieu I've created for this guy that I think is interesting because it also makes him somewhat of a ghost chaser in his own way. I don't know actually how much of that aspect of it will fit into the script. It's something I've added to the character.

L -- He's bound to run into those kind of things.

G -- Yes. The thing is, if he is an intelligent sort of professor who has experience with the occult and that kind of thing, then he not only is not afraid to stand up against any man, but he's also not afraid to stand up against the unknown.

L -- If he walks into a cave and he adds a yellow slash to a symbol, you don't have to say too much about how he found that out, you know.

G -- We've established that he's a college professor. It doesn't have to be done in a strong way. It starts out in a museum. They just call him doctor this and doctor that. We can very easily make that transition, and very quickly establish that whole side of his character. In the story the ramifications of him as a ghost hunter have not been dealt with yet. But I put it in his character for use in some other way.

L -- (I can't understand what he is saying here, something about a sword and a basket.) It seems like it would be nice if, once stripped of his bullwhip, left him weak, if we had to worry. Just a little worried about him being too...

G -- That was what I thought. That's why I was sort of iffy about throwing it in. If we don't make him vulnerable...

S -- What's he afraid of? He's got to be afraid of something.

G -- If we don't make him vulnerable, he's got no problems. We'll shut that idea for now.

G -- The other thing, which is like the Kung-Fu and the ghost thing, which given the plot and the way it's working, there's not really time to cope with it in an interesting way. It's a nice aspect of this thing, might be able to deal with it, might not. It's not really that important. It's the same thing with the Kung-Fu. We might be stacking too much into his character that is not necessary. Just the fact that he's good with a bullwhip is going to be fun enough. You could fill a script. In one way it's better to keep it clean.

S -- As long as he has brains. He should be able to talk his way out of things.

L -- I think that would be his first choice.

G -- Right.

S -- The guy should be a great gambler, too.

G -- The thing of it is, I think it's good if we delineate a fairly clean personality so that it doesn't become too confused.

L -- Assume there's an archeologist, who's spent years studying this, he might have some kind of awe and respect for virgin tombs. This guy has obviously gone past that into, "I can make a good living out of this." what's his stance on this? Does it bother him to go in and...

G -- I think basically he's very cynical about the whole thing. Maybe he thinks that most archeologists are just full of shit, and that somebody's going to rip this stuff off anyway. Better that he rips it off and gets it to a museum where people can study it, and rip it off right. That's the key also. He knows how to enter a tomb without destroying it. He knows what's important. He knows not to go in there like a bull in a china shop, and destroy half the stuff that's valuable.

S -- He should have a mentor in this. Somebody you never see, but he refers to from time to time, somebody you want to see. The man who taught him everything. The man who gave him whatever power he has now. Maybe some supreme archeologist who's maybe ninety years old like Max Von Sydow, and is dying now. So you know it didn't start with this guy. There are other greater predecessors around of this sort.

L -- Is it necessary that he really be trained?

G -- It's not absolutely necessary. I just thought it would be amusing if people could call him a doctor.

S -- I like that. The doctor with the bullwhip.

G -- It's such an odd juxtaposition, especially going around. The first sequence is in the jungle and you see him in action. You see him going through the whole thing. And the next sequence after that you see him back in Washington or New York, back in the museum. Where he's in a totally academic thing, turning over this thing that he's got. Then in the rest of the movie you see him back in his bullwhip mode. You understand that there's more to him. Plus, it justifies later things that he... the fact that he's sort of an intelligent guy. Peter Falk is one way of looking at him, a Humphrey Bogart character. The fact that he's sort of scruffy and, not the right image, but...

S -- Peter's too scruffy.

G -- Yes. We'll figure a way of laying that out in his personality so it's easily identifiable.

S -- Remember the movie "Soldier Of Fortune" with Clark Gable? There was a good deal of Rhett Butler in that character. The devil-may-care kind of guy who can handle situations. He's so damn glib he bluffs everybody around. People think that he's a push-over. He's challanged, and he always appears like a push-over. But in fact he's not. He likes to set himself up in these subordinate roles from time to time to get his way.

G -- What I'm saying is, that character just would not fit in a college classroom or even as an archeologist. He's too much of a scruffy character to settle down. A playboy, or however you want to do it. He's too much of a wise-guy, maybe that's a better way to say it, to actually be a college professor. He really loves the stuff, but he bacame too cynical, he's too much of a wise guy to fit into an academic situation, or even an archeological situation. He's really too much of an adventurer at heart. He just loves it. So he obviously took this whole bent that was different because it's just more fun. He just can't settle down. It's a nice contrast. It's like the James Bond thing. Instead of being a martini drinking cultured kind of sophisticate, he's the sort of intellectual college professor James Bond. He's a superagent.

S -- Clark Kent.

G -- Yeah. It's that thing, which is fun. It's the same idea, only twisted around a little bit. A soldier of fortune in the thirties. And also, when you think of the thirties, you think of colleges as real institutions. That whole genre was much different than it is now. And also, soldier of fortune was a real genre.

S -- His main adversaries will be the Germans?

G -- Yeah, I think they should be. I've been trying to move him around the world a little bit to see if we can't get a little Oriental influence into it just for the fun of it. I may have fit it in. The fun thing is, he's a soldier of fortune, so we can move him into any sort of exotic thirties environment we want to.

S -- Keep him out of the States. We don't want to do one shot in this country.

G -- I have the second scene taking place in Washington. It's just interior museum. But at the same time we also want to keep it, budget-wise, and everything else. We don't want to have eight thousand screaming Chinese coming over the hill being straffed by Japanese zeroes, unless we can find some stock footage somewhere. We want to keep it on a fairly ... I think generally, over all, I've tried to keep it on a very modest scale. A la the first James Bond. A la the first "Hang 'em High" thing. Where it is essentially a conflict between people and things. Obviously there is a lot of stuff going on, but there are certain big set pieces that are fun to play with. And if we can divide these set pieces so we can shot them sort of second unit, then we can have all that fun stuff in the period, and essentially it's a set piece. We'll just send a stock footage crew out to get certain things that we might be able to come up with without too much money just by sending a camera and crew and getting a shot here and there of various things that we want. The concept is that somehow we have to figure out a way of making this cheap, meaning six or seven million dollars.

S -- One thing, there aren't any opticals, so right away that saves a lot of money.

G -- And we want to spend our money on stunts. We want to have "Wind and the Lion" action. Spend it all on stunt guys falling off horses, rather than one crowd scene scene with sixteen thousand extras for one shot.

S -- You can also steal that anywhere in the mideast.

G -- Maybe we'll work something like that out. Even then, for production value and entertainment value, it's much better to have a terrific stunt than to have a scene with eight thousand extras. I don't think we need lots of crowds.

S -- (garbled) You can always get that in some other countries. It's no problem.

G -- It's all period. That's the problem.

S -- In places like Bombay it doesn't make any difference.

G -- Again, that's one of those stock footage things. You want to send an "A" camera man and a production manager over there, tell them to make a deal with some New Delhi film company to supply fifteen old cars and eight thousand extras and we'll pay them seven thousand dollars. You photograph the stuff and bring it back here. Or like Hong Kong, go to Run Run Shaw, say we want three shots like this. You gaff the whole thing and we'll pay you X number of dollars send. Send your cameraman, or a good second unit camera man whom you trust, and a production manager to handle it financially, and they do it, and you come back with dailies of an establishing shot with ten thousand extras.

S -- You have a small smoke-filled room in Rome with your two actors..

G -- I think we can hopefully sort that out. Part of it is the energy of making it reasonably low budget. It's also a test of the idea. If it's good, then we'll be okay.

I think I will go down and describe, roughly, the plot. After we do that, we can go through scene by scene. Then we can start the long arduous process of saying, well this is what the first scene should be and we really want this scene, but how can we fit it in. and really get down to specifics.

The film starts in the jungle, South America, someplace. We get one of these great scenes with the pack animals going up the mist-covered hills. Very exotic mist-filled jungles and mountains. There's a... We actually talked about it a little different from this, but you can correct me if I have gone off what we had talked about the last time. I'm going back, I think, to the original.

S -- Where he goes into the cave?

G -- This is where he goes into the cave. We had it where there's a couple native bearers, whatever, and sort of a couple of Mexican, well not Mexican... Let's put it...

S -- They're like Mayan.

G -- They're the third world local sleazos. Whether, they're Mexicans or Arabs or whatever.

S -- They carry the boxes over their heads. They fall off cliffs.

G -- The sleazos with the thin moustaches. Those are the peon laborers. And you have the two guys who are the local gaffers. Foremen, or whatever. The guys he hired. They speak English. The interpeters, or whatever.

G -- We're assuming at this point that when we come into it, the talk is like they're all sort of partners. He's a partner with these other two guys. He said, "Look, I'll cut you in on the stake. I'll pay you X number of dollars when I do this, if you do it." We'll they're not very trustworthy, Eli Wallich types. They're going up this hill and they come into a clearing and you see the temple across the way. All the natives get restless and start to split. One of the guys goes to him and says, "The natives are leaving. They're not going to go any further." It's the curse of that Buddha, or whatever. He says they can probably get there from here without them. So the three of us can do it. See if you can get a couple of them to carry on, to come along.

They get about two or three guys to go with them. Our guy, the other two guys, and about three other guys, three other natives who are a little braver, they get. So they continue on into the jungle with the snakes and the spiders and the bugs and all that stuff, and they walk forward and all the natives are looking around.

It's all sort of misty and primeval, King Kongish. The pressure builds and one of the natives cracks, throws down his thing and scurries off. He splits, and the other guys realize he's gone and they split. Pretty soon, when they get right to the clearing, right in front of the temple, it's just three guys. Along the way they lost the three natives.

Also in the process of this, you understand that the two guys are plotting against the other guy. Not only is there the spooky danger of the curse, but you get a hint that these two guys are plotting against our hero. He gets up to the temple. They're nervous about the whole thing. And they sort of sit outside the clearing and they talk about the curse and about how dangerous it is, and how nobody had ever survived. We set up the whole thing, the perameters of going into that temple. They have a map, not a map but sort of a crude drawing. It has the interior of the temple onit, that somebody else made. He brings it out at this time, they're saying that nobody has ever survived. He says that with this information we've got here, I think we'll be able to manage it. He says not to worry guys, it's gonna be okay. I think we can get in there. We have enough information here where I think I can deduce my way through it.

They focus on the map as he's surveying the thing. One of the guys tries to kill him and take the map, shoot him in the back or whatever it was. That's when you first see him with the bullwhip. That's where the plot comes alive. When he says with this information, he thinks they can get in, they don't realize that you have to know

G -- how to interpet that information. He kills this one guy and the other guy sort of backs off and says he didn't have anything to do with it, he's crazy, and I knew he was a crook. And you knew they were in on it together, but the guy says, "It wasn't me. It wasn't me." So he and the other one guy go into the temple. You know the guy's going to shoot him in the back eventually. As they get into the temple you get into all these things, like there's this giant spider in there.

S -- The thing is, they're walking and our hero goes into a shadow. When he comes out of the shadow there's two tarantulas on him. He doesn't notice them right away. He goes into another shadow, and he comes out with four tarantulas on him.

G -- The other process of the thing is that the guy who is with him is beginning to freak out. He can't take it, so he gets to a point where he can't do it any more. He runs out and that's the last we ever see of him. We can use him as a foil to establish the pressure. It's getting crazy with the tarantulas and it's all very spooky.

We get to a point in the tomb and we do this thing where there's like this light shaft coming down from inside the temple. It's sort of a very narrow shaft. The stone tunnel that he's in is about this wide and right in the middle is a very thin shaft of light coming down through a hole, a little beam. You see him look at it. We had him go through the wall. Actually we had it happen first...

S -- What happen?

G -- We had it first where he sees the light and he tosses a thing in it, a stick, and these giant spikes come out, and go...

S -- When the spikes come out and go like that, there should be remains, skeletal remains skewered on some of them, of victims that have been there before. It's kind of like one of those rides at DisneyLand.

G -- So he tests it first, and we know...

L -- Why are we letting the second sleazo get away? Why can't we sacrifice him to the temple.

G -- We can. I just did it as building the pressure, but we can keep him in. We'll follow it through, and then we'll see where you want to dispose of him.

L -- If the hero tells him to stick with him, and the guy in his panic makes that fatal one step sideways, you can build the terror.