

Sliders: Darkest Hour #2

Plot

PAGE 1

Copy on these first two pages acts to bridge the visual vignettes and bring the reader up to speed on the SLIDERS plight in progress.

EXT. FIFTIES HOUSE, DAY. Beneath the front porch, with VERN. He's sweaty and frustrated, the small garden spade he holds in one hand digging a new hole beneath the porch. There's at least a dozen empty holes under there, piles of dirt scattered around him as he searches for his missing jar of pennies.

CUT TO: QUINN (dressed as we saw him last issue), smiling slyly, hefting the big jar of pennies. The whirring sliding portal turns behind him, whipping his hair and clothes around him as he prepares to turn into the tunnel.

CUT TO: EXT. "ROBOT WORLD" STREET, ANGLE on an incredulous looking WADE as she watches last issue's CONSTRUCTION WORKER casually/callously litter with a burger wrapper as he stuffs the meat and bun into his busy mouth.

CUT TO: THE CONSTRUCTION WORKER sprawled on the ground as an enraged WADE straddles his body, wailing on his head and shoulders with the planter (another view of last issue's shenanigans). Sparks and exposed metal makes it clear the WORKER is robotic in nature (or cyborg, as the case may be), but that doesn't take away from WADE's uncharacteristic fury.

CUT TO: ANGLE ON THE FOUR SLIDERS as they tumble through the multi-colored sliding corridor, copy laying in some general exposition on their travels.

PAGE 2 - SPLASH

A montage style image, but very severe and disturbing in nature. Swirling, crackling energy is the backdrop, like the center of a twister. At the center of the visual, we see ZERCURV MARAUD, wrenching the sliding controls inside his ship to max; he's quite mad in appearance, like Ahab working the wheel of the Pequod. Yellow Zercurv sliding energy is firing off around him and the device.

Around the core of the montage we see the four SLIDERS, each caught in the grip of the tremendous rip of malicious energy that's been sent their way. Each of the foursome arch back in pain and shock, their bodies going negative, their skin shining translucent to reveal sections of bone beneath.

PAGE 3 & 4

INT. PROXY CENTRAL. WIDE SHOT of the SLIDERS passing down a long, high corridor, led by the unctuous MORAVEK. On the wall is a large mural, a stylized version of the "classic" image of man evolving up from the ape (proceeding from left to right as an ape, a hunkered down caveman, an upright caveman, and finally a "modern man.") The difference and addition here is the final figure that is a robotic man, looking very advanced and civilized in comparison to all its fleshy ancestors.

CLOSE ON MORAVEK, smiling as he peels up a flap of skin from under his neck (Mission: Impossible style) to reveal his mechanical skeleton beneath the "flesh." He's commenting on making some changes to his design (and this also gives another visual opportunity to bring new readers up to speed on this world!)

MORAVEK passes the SLIDERS off to ELLIE, an attractive "woman" in her early forties. As MORAVEK gestures in her direction, his hand passes through her hologram, revealing ELLIE to be another of this world's organic-to-electronic life form. (She's really a holographic projection over a robotic "interior:" a crude mechanism, in the style of something off an auto assembly line. It rides on treads, and features multiple lenses to project the ELLIE illusion). She's flinching slightly as MORAVEK "intrudes" on her hologram, MORAVEK quick to apologize.

Left with ELLIE (to escort them to their rooms) QUINN can't help but blurt out his opinion of this world and its people: in effect, there's nothing human left.

ELLIE frowns deeply, condemning their assessment as unfair, and championing human nature over human DNA.

Part of her hologram retracts/fades, allowing several of the lenses beneath to whirl/click into position -

- the assembly then projecting a 2D image in the air near to ELLIE and the SLIDERS. It shows a computer screen style image: on the "screen" is a picture of a smiling young man, about 20, and several lines of text, on the order of, "Hi, Mom, how've you been. Let me tell you what I've been up to..." A proud/pleased ELLIE is explaining that this is her son, who took the route to have his entire thought process made digital; now he wanders the global 'net and "lives" in cyberspace.

ARTURO doesn't know whether to laugh or explode. He settles for a terse "Charming." Do you have any other family, madam?"

A smiling ELLIE changes the projection: the 2D screen in the air near to her now shows a picture of a 20-something woman, smiling wide. There's no text here. ELLIE explains that this is her daughter, who chose the same route as her brother.

CLOSE ON A SUDDENLY SAD ELLIE as her smile falters, and her eyes dart to the floor. She admits that something happened out there -- her daughter got too "into" the 'net, or couldn't keep her consciousness together. One day, she just got lost out there.

PAGE 5 & 6

INT. SLIDERS ROOM, NIGHT. A big suite of rooms, with a central living room area: they're slightly futuristic in style but nothing overtly "sci-fi" - this is still '96, just on a different Earth. QUINN'S at a big table, working with his pennies. Off to one side, WADE is working a "hologram computer:" the monitor and keyboards are translucent holograms that float in mid air. ARTURO is over by a set of double doors, leading out to an open air balcony, and REM is studying his features in a mirror (contemplating the end of last issue's chance at "immortality.")

CLOSE ON QUINN, with the jar of pennies emptied out in front of him, making tall, teetering stacks.

CLOSE ON WADE, as she leans back in a chair, self-righteous belligerent as she hammers at the keyboard. The screen in front of her shows a 19th century inventor - Charles Babbage, muttonchops, tweed suit. His early invention of the computer leapfrogged the industrial age into the information age. The information highway was up and running by the 1920's and that accelerated man's efforts to interact with it directly.

CLOSER ON WADE, making a surly, dismissive gesture at the keyboard. She condemns the "info highway" as a horrible metaphor, suggesting travel that doesn't let you experience where you're going: you just zip along on soulless, endless strips of madacam.

ARTURO at the doors leading off to the balcony, asking REM to join him, "for a breath of fresh air!"

EXT. BALCONY, NIGHT. A conspiratorial ARTURO confiding his concerns to a seemingly compassionate REM. ARTURO is still worried about the darker sides that have shown up in QUINN and WADE.

CLOSE ON THE TIMER in ARTURO's hand, the readout showing just under 24 hours.

LOOKING PAST ARTURO and REM, as they look back into the suite checking out what's up with their fellow travelers.

CLOSE ON QUINN as he puts his hands on the back of WADE's shoulders, but not friendly or affectionate; he's pretty close to sexual harassment here, a salacious streak evident in his come on.

WADE spins up from her keyboard, harshly shoving a startled QUINN back and away, making sure he's clear that just 'cause they're on a world of artificial people he shouldn't treat her like some blow up doll. WADE's hard edge

is at least partly due to her suppressed feeling (now more prominent) regarding QUINN being so blind to her feelings so long.

Back with ARTURO and REM, the professor further confiding his theory that they may have inadvertently picked up QUINN and WADE doubles along the way.

CLOSER ON REM, assuring the professor, "You can trust me!" But there's something a little dark in REM's eyes that ominously tell us otherwise.

PAGE 7 THROUGH 9

INT. "SURGERY CENTER," a slick technology room for updates between the organic/electric elements of this world's "humans" and their robotic or holographic forms. There are large bubbling man-sized tubes of fluid, long surgical tables with various metal fasteners, and robotic machinery that resembles nothing so much as fantastic welders and stitchers.

A disturbed REMBRANDT stands near to one table, where the "husk" of an attractive woman is laid out neatly. In essence, this is the naked skin and muscle of a woman, ready to be attached over the metal under-skeleton of one of this world's robotic characters. REM is afraid to touch the skin, but comments, "This is a new look for you, Moravek..."

ANGLE ON MORAVEK, also naked, being lowered into one of the large tubes by a gentle series of cables that attach below his arms. He's smiling that salesman smile (more eerie given the circumstance and his state of undress).

Inside the tube, the fluid bubbles and boils, MORAVEK'S "flesh" (this is all just a simulation, remember) sloughing off and revealing the gleaming robotic skeleton underneath.

ANGLE ON REM, watching the process, caught between revulsion and rubber necking.

The cables lift MORAVEK back out of the fluid tube, his metal skeleton dripping as he rises.

MORAVEK joins REM near to the table that holds the female husk, the "robot" reasoning with REM over his desire to join their immortal fold. REM is torn between his own morality...and the darker, self-serving side that's been released in him.

As MORAVEK continues his spiel, he stretches his arms out to each side. Behind him, robotic arms from above (like assembly line machines) lift up the woman "rind" like a tailor holding out a new suit jacket to try on.

The robotic arms slip and stretch the woman-skin over MORAVEK'S robot shell. The skin distends and bunches in disturbing fashion. MORAVEK just rambles on, mildly discomforted by the pushing and twisting, but more, "Hey, I've done this a thousand times before!" *This should be somewhat satirical in its exaggeration, but still unsettling.*

Other robotic arms swing down from above, their ends like massive sewing/stitching machines: they pierce MORAVEK'S new skin hammering out lengths of microthin thread to attach his new outside to his metallic inside.

MORAVEK shudders as the process goes in, like a man (or now woman!) working a jackhammer.

Now an attractive woman, MORAVEK slips on a long, clingy robe. He considers the options that the digital age has afforded his people: since they're all essentially ones and zeros, they can indulge changes like this at will. REM, for his part, is simply wide-eyed and unsure of what to make of all this bordering-on-mad-doctor craziness.

MORAVEK directs REM's attention to a holographic computer monitor - floating in mid-air, as WADE's was earlier. MORAVEK is tapping keys on a holographic keyboard. On the screen are two faces. On the left is an image of REMBRANDT'S face. On the right is REMBRANDT again, but now, "Michael Jackson-ized"; his nose is thin, his hair is straightened, he's much more average than distinct. MORAVEK uses this to suggest ways to overcoming prejudice roadblocks REM may have encountered in his days as a performer.

SIMILAR ANGLE as previous, and now the image on the right has made REMBRANDT over into a white man. MORAVEK uses this extreme example not so much to suggest REM remake himself this way, but to drive home the "foolishness of our exterior skins! Think of the options open to you when you decide what face you show the world!"

ANGLE ON REMBRANDT, a bit of bitterness in his expression - he's keying into those prejudices MORAVEK drove home. But he's also determined looking here, seriously considering playing Judas and delivering his friends to MORAVEK and his other three "body buyers!" But he's still got to mull it over further.

MORAVEK is delighted at the prospect...and demonstrates this by closing in close to REMBRANDT, the woman seductive as she places one hand on his chest.

Too weird for REM - he backs off quick, hands up, declaring, "Hey, man! A minute ago you were...a man!" MORAVEK'S not offended ... although he looks a little disappointed. She reiterates the malleability of their society, how everything is just data in different shells.

MORAVEK heads off, giving a come-on wave and smile. She's telling REM, "Call me if you change your mind..." referring to the body swap - and whatever else.

PAGE 10 & 11

CUT TO: INT. SUITE. CLOSE UP ON TIMER in REMBRANDT'S hand. We're down to just under 3 hours.

ANGLE ON A TROUBLED REM in the shadowy suite. He's got the timer in hand, the singer standing over a sleeping WADE (in loose sweats) as she lies on a bed, twisted up in sheets. REM wonders if it would be so bad to take what he wants at the expense of these people.

REM stands over a sleeping ARTURO, the professor sprawled out on a sofa. He's still in his tweed suit, his tie loose and collar open. REM ponders selling out.

REM stands over QUINN, the physicist in bed, sprawled on top of sheets, in t-shirt and loose sweat pants. REM's still wrestling with his darker impulses, maybe about to overcome them -

When we CUT BACK TO A FLASHBACK of REM, at the wheel of his car, both being sucked into the first sliding portal. END FLASHBACK.

Back on REM in the suite, the singer's face now hard and with no interest beyond his own.

QUINN comes awake, groggy and innocent as he squawks out, "Rembrandt? What's up?"

REM shoves a hand held tazer into QUINN's side, the shocked (literally!) physicist jerking and crying out as his nervous system is short-circuited.

A panicked WADE and ARTURO charge into the room, fearing for QUINN, wanting to know what's up.

REM uses the tazer on WADE, dropping her quick; the look of betrayal in her eyes is painful.

Like an enraged bear, ARTURO grapples with REM, trying to get hold of the tazer. He marks REM as having fallen prey to the same "darkness" that's eating at QUINN and WADE.

REM gets the tazer into ARTURO's side, dropping him, too. He shrugs at ARTURO's accusation, the singer basically, "What's your point?"

PAGE 12

INT. SURGERY CENTER. WADE, QUINN AND ARTURO, are all fastened to a trio of angled gleaming metal tables. They're now awake and struggling, but metal fasteners holding their wrists and ankles fast.

A worried MORAVEK (now in a stylish suit) paces back and forth in front of the abductees, wringing her hands. The body swap was supposed to be volunteer: they weren't going to stoop to forcing their desires on the SLIDERS.

Now it's REM's turn to play salesman. He faces off with MORAVEK, demanding to know "Can't you still *want*?" Have they lost all their desires?

ANGLE ON MORAVEK, looking covetous, tapping at a holographic keyboard that now floats in front of her: she's contacting the other three buyers, telling them to get to the center quick.

A righteous WADE declares that MORAVEK and his ilk want the SLIDERS' organic forms because this world has become barren: there's no more reproduction, only the endless existence of those who were alive at the time of the first transformation.

MORAVEK shakes her head sadly, telling WADE, "You read too much into our motivation!" MORAVEK sums it up as just another experience for her and her partners to add to the list.

PAGE 13 THROUGH 15

ANGLE ON QUINN, demanding he gets a chance to go along with REM and choose to be a convert to this new techno-life; it's what they were originally offered.

MORAVEK breathes a sigh of relief, flipping a switch on a mechanical control panel; it's easier if the SLIDERS are into the process, and she hopes WADE and ARTURO will also go along.

MORAVEK shows the now free QUINN (rubbing his wrists) several mechanical skeletons laid out on nearby tables: they run the range from well-built (i.e. "muscular") to tall and gaunt. MORAVEK explains the different options available, suggesting QUINN might want the additional mental co-processors to augment his own intelligence.

ANGLE ON A CURIOUS REM and a thinly smiling QUINN, laying his hands on one large skeleton. REM is openly surprised that QUINN would be into the process, QUINN telling him, "I'm full of surprises!"

ANGLE ON THREE MORE PROXY CITIZENS: TWO MEN, ONE WOMAN, all appearing "middle-aged" in the way they look, with venerable wrinkles and gray hair, choices made to evoke a "noble" look. They're dressed in contemporary suits, like rich fat cats with the money to look good. In their eyes is open desire for the fleshy life style the SLIDERS represent; they're even reaching out with their hands in a grabby way.

"Just in time for the show!" QUINN quips--

- before heaving up on the large skeleton -

- and flailing it down like a mace on the physical control board MORAVEK was working earlier. Equipment smashes, sparks flying.

The metal cuffs spring open on ARTURO and WADE, the other two SLIDERS rolling free of their tables.

QUINN flings the battered, twisted metal skeleton into the two PROXY MEN; they stumble back in shock; tangling up on the metal.

A furious REM tackles into QUINN, the crazed singer cursing his lost chance at "immortality!"

CLOSE ON REM and QUINN grappling, QUINN having a hard time keeping REM from throttling him; QUINN has managed to get the timer from REM, QUINN in the process of tossing it to WADE.

WADE catches the timer -

- just as the PROXY WOMAN grasps at her, wide-eyed at "how soft!" WADE is, the WOMAN still thinking she has a chance to take over WADE'S body.

WADE settles that misconception by kicking the PROXY WOMAN away HARD!

WADE fires the timer, the sliding portal vortexing open.

ARTURO comes in behind REM, grabbing the ranting singer in a bear hug, pulling him off the choking QUINN.

PAGE 16

The SLIDERS tumble through the portal, QUINN and ARTURO on each side of REM, dragging him through against his will.

A desperate MORAVEK jumps through the portal after the SLIDERS, still wanting a chance at "real life."

CUT TO: EXT. CITY STREET, DAY. *This is "RONIN WORLD" a parallel Earth very heavy on the Japanese cultural influence in terms of architecture, landscaping, design and clothing. It's most notable aspect, however, so far as our visit, is the free use of RONIN: traditional, Yojimbo-style samurai, freed from their service to specific lords. In this time and place they are ubiquitous in their hiring hired out as mercenaries, using their sword to settle their disputes on everything from corporate takeovers to someone cutting in line at the movies.*

The SLIDERS - with MORAVEK following - tumble out in a heap onto the sidewalk, clearly stressed with the near-brush with disaster.

A frightened REM staggers to his feet, holding his head, wondering aloud, "What was I doing? Why was I acting like that?"

QUINN puts a hesitant hand on REM's shoulder, telling the singer to pull it together. He wasn't alone back there; QUINN admits before he straightened himself out, he was *serious* about wanting to do a body swap, too, to tap into the info potential back on the other, wired Earth.

PAGE 17 & 18

A scared MORAVEK staggers to her feet, wheeling around like a woman suddenly trapped in the dark. She's no longer connected to the information network that connected all the wired citizens back on the electronic Earth, and she feels the loss.

MORAVEK staggers away holding her head, crying out for what she's been cut off from, wanting it back more than a chance at a physical body.

MORAVEK lurches into the street, cutting in front of a sleek sports car -

- the auto just barely screeching to a stop before running her down.

An arrogant YUPPIE tears out of the driver's side of the sports car, berating MORAVEK for almost causing an accident...and just generally pissing him off.

From out of the passenger side of the car, a large RONIN emerges, dressed in traditional samurai clothing (like Toshiro Mifune in Yojimbo, or the Seven Samurai), beginning to pull out his sword.

The RONIN brutally slashes MORAVEK from throat to crotch, dropping her without mercy. There's sparks flying from her internal metalwork as the attack does her in.

The YUPPIE glares in the SLIDERS directions, demanding "What are you pukes looking at?"

ANGLE ON THE SLIDERS, in a lineup. They're shrugging off the violence they've just witnessed, fairly nonplussed by it all.

The sports car tears off, leaving MORAVEK's body torn up in the road.

ANGLE ON THE SLIDERS, still in a lineup (same angle as the previous panel like this). They're all now visibly shaken, both at the violence and the fact that it took several minutes to hit them.

PAGE 19 THROUGH 21

EXT. PARK/PLAYGROUND, DAY. CLOSE UP ON A SANDBOX, a long stick jutting in from off panel drawing exotic, complicated physics formulae in the sand.

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL QUINN AND ARTURO sitting on the edge of a large sand box, working out the physics formulae behind sliding. (ARTURO'S collar is still open, his tie still loose, from before their escape from the ROBOT WORLD). REM and WADE are coming up with some eats they've scored from a nearby food stand.

QUINN grimaces as he bites into what he though was a hot dog. WADE corrects him, explaining that it's a sushi roll; it's all they could find.

CAMERA PULLS BACK FROM A WIDE SHOT OF THE PLAYGROUND/PARK. Similar to a contemporary park - swings, slides, sandbox, benches - but with a STRONG Japanese influence. Landscaping like a Japanese garden, small gazebos in the style of Oriental temples, food-stands with "rising sun" banners, etc. Families - all ethnic types, but a larger than normal Asian population - stroll about, enjoying the day. ARTURO is commenting that this world has a clear Japanese influence.

CLOSE ON WADE, looking warily over her shoulder. A MOTHER is pushing along a stroller, and at the MOTHER'S shoulder is another RONIN, keeping an eye out for the woman's benefit. WADE is wondering about the specifics of that sandbox, worrying about another confrontation like they witnessed with MORAVEK.

ARTURO starts in on some background on the RONIN; a frustrated REMBRANDT cuts the professor off, wanting to know what's been figured out about the dark changes they all seem to be going through.

An arrogant ARTURO turns the question on QUINN, demanding to know exactly how much QUINN understands about the theories he realized to get the sliding process to work. The accusation is that although QUINN got the machine going, he really hadn't thought through the consequences.

Three kids - one white, one Latino, the third Asian, all about 8 or so, and in young kid "grunge" clothes - come up to the edge of the sandbox, wanting to play.

All the SLIDERS turn on the kids, snapping at them to "Get lost!"

The kids mope away, grumbling over their shoulders, "You'll be sorry!"

ARTURO continues his condemnation of QUINN'S work habits, condemning his protégé's for moving past theory too quickly. "A career in experimentation is a fallback for those who can't cut it as theorists," he sniffs.

A ticked off QUINN fires back, "Bullshit!" (in essence!) From his point of view, "the smooth rubber of mathematically elegant hypotheses have to meet the pot-holed, twisting road of reality laid out by nature. If theorists had to commute across country to experiments, physics wouldn't get done!"

QUINN snatches away pendant around ARTURO'S neck, from where it's hidden under the professor's shirt. QUINN wonders if the professor's time with the "WITCH WADE" on the Satan world might not be to blame for their current troubles.

An embarrassed ARTURO snatches back the pendant, demanding QUINN focus on the problem at hand - a problem directly attributable to QUINN'S shoddy work.

REM and WADE step in between ARTURO and QUINN as the teacher and student really start to rip into each other, dark sides again kicking in full.

All the SLIDERS turn silent, and turn in response to the return of the 3 KIDS - and behind the little ones, a trio of large and glaring RONIN. They have their swords drawn, the steel gleaming with cold menace, promising bad times for the SLIDERS next issue.

END OF ISSUE #2