

SLIDERS: ULTIMATUM #1**PLOT****D.G. Chichester, Bernard Chang, Dick Giordano****PAGES 1 & 2**

INT. BIG TOP, DAY. We're under an enormous circus tent, on a large platform that's high up along one of the tent's support poles. The platform is gaudily decorated with streamers and balloons, and it leads out onto a thick high wire cable. The cable stretches between this first platform and one just like it on the opposite end of the tent, attached to another thick support pole.

We open CLOSE ON a thoroughly disgusted ARTURO, dressed in the style of a European clown, his baggy pants more like that of an oversized street urchin than a "Bozo" look. He wears an exaggerated beret, and his face is painted in bright colors, including a painted-on smile that smears over his beard. It doesn't do much to hide his deep frown as he glares out at the camera, not at all happy with his situation.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal WADE, dressed in an over-the-top "Ringling Brothers" style clown getup - floppy feet, giant flower in her lapel - also face-painted. She's popping a red rubber nose onto the end of ARTURO'S nose, chiding him to "Get with the program!"

CAMERA PULLS BACK A BIT MORE, revealing REMBRANDT, done up as a fun-frumpish female clown, also face painted, wearing a big, baggy sun-dress and twirling a large parasol. He's grouching, "This ain't the way I was supposed to land back in show biz!"

CAMERA PULLS BACK YET AGAIN, revealing QUINN in traditional "Bozo" garb (a big and loose jumpsuit style), his face painted and wearing a wig that creates "Einstein-like" shoots of hair off both sides of his head. He's studying the timer, telling the crew that while they're close to the gate, they're not close enough where they can get out of what they now have to do.

A heavily muscled and burly sized MILITANT CLOWN heaves himself up the ladder that comes over the edge of the platform. He's done up more like a biker tough than somebody you'd want at your kid's party, but he's still obviously a clown. He's chewing on a stogie and growling for the SLIDERS to "Get going!"

CUT TO: EXT. EST. SHOT OF THE CITY. We're looking at a wide horizon of this Earth's urban center, but instead of skyscrapers, we see a long and wide expanse of all manner of circus tents: big ones, small ones, tall, gaudy etc. This Earth is a carnival world, and one of its "rites of passage" is you have to put on a good show

or face dire punishment. That's the predicament the SLIDERS find themselves in right now.

CUT TO: INT. BIG TOP. The MILITANT CLOWN shoves the foursome off the end of the platform

-sending them staggering out onto the high wire. They're barely keeping their balance, arms wheeling wildly.

- CLOSE ON THE TIMER, turning over to "00:00:00"

QUINN on the highwire, wheeling way out to one side as he fires the timer below them, a gateway beginning to warp open below.

PAGE 3 - SPLASH

The SLIDERS topple off the highwire into the swirling gateway, clown costumes billowing, their real expressions as wild as the painted looks on their faces.

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ANGLE ON AN AUDIENCE OF DIVERSE CLOWNS down below, looking up with expressions that are a mix of astonishment and confusion. "Now that's an act!" one of them whispers in awe.

CUT TO: BETWEEN DIMENSIONS, as the four SLIDERS tumble through the multi-colored corridor that connects the worlds. WADE'S tumbling head over heels, her big feet flapping right into ARTURO'S mug, the grumbling professor ineffectually waving his hands to brush her away. QUINN has his arms and legs outstretched like a parachutist, his clown costume flapping around him as he "rides" the dimensional wave. REMBRANDT'S parasol is open, seeming to pull the panicked-looking singer along for the slide.

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EXT. SAN FRANCISCO, DAY. *This is "Rapture World," an Earth where the population has come to believe that Judgment Day is at hand. Ghostly apparitions flit in and out of view, and friends and family vanish into thin air - seemingly "called" to God in preparation for the Second Coming. In response to these phenomena, the world (or at least America) has gone severely to the Religious Right. Christian crosses appear as design patterns in clothing, and as ubiquitous lapel pins.. Burger Kings are now Burger Popes. KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) has become CFC (Catholic Fried Chicken).*

We open on a seemingly deranged BLACK PREACHER, in thread bare clothing, whomping a battered bible against his open palm, sermonizing to an audience of none. For all purposes, his message appears as non-essential as the ranting preachers who populate Times Square. He's thundering on about the Rapture, about the call the righteous hear that takes them home to God.

The sliding portal roars open in the sky behind the PREACHER, dumping out our foursome of QUINN, REMBRANDT, WADE and ARTURO. The PREACHER doesn't miss a beat.

CLOSE ON THE PREACHER, forceful in the foreground as our SLIDERS stagger to their feet behind him. "And then there are the sinners who are cast out," he fire-and-brimstones. "And forced to return..."

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A surly ARTURO is using the sleeves of his clown costume to wipe off as much of the offensive makeup as he can. He's delivering a withering indictment of the preacher, just for the hell of it.

ANGLE ON ARTURO AND REMBRANDT, the singer much more considerate of the religious view. "Not a religious man, Professor?" he wonders. "Science is my religion, Mr. Brown," a proud ARTURO declares. "I have seen 'God' studying the physics that hold together our universe!"

CUT TO: EXT. SALVATION ARMY, DAY. But this is like no Salvation Army we'll ever see in *our* world, no run-down thrift shop. This place is on par with Bloomingdales, with a sleek exterior and sign that says MONEY. Affluent SHOPPERS swirl in and out, sporting slick bags with the SA emblem. the SALVATION ARMY "SOLDIERS" - in more stylish versions of their traditional uniform - are having trouble keeping track of the cash that's overflowing their contribution buckets.

Our SLIDERS are exiting the store, free of clown-garb and sporting new outfits that are along the lines of their "standard" outfits. ARTURO'S in a tweed suit and bow tie; REMBRANDT'S got on boots, slacks, a turtleneck and vest.; QUINN'S in a oxford shirt, sleeves rolled up, jeans and sneakers; WADE'S wearing jeans, a tie-dyed T-shirt and a colorful jacket with fringe sleeves.

They're all adjusting their new clothes, WADE looking back and commenting how generous people are on this Earth.

The foursome make a move to catch a ride on a cable car that's rumbling down the street.

ANGLE ON THE CABLE CAR, carrying about 20 or so PEOPLE, including the CONDUCTOR. They're all looking up as they're captured in a swirling twist of bright blue energy.

REVERSE ANGLE ON SLIDERS, caught in the bright glow coming off the passing cable car. The light only serves to highlight our players' pale expressions as they witness this incredible event.

CLOSE ON A MAN AND WOMAN sitting in the cable car, the two in their late thirties; their reaching out to each other to tightly grasp each other's hand. They're looking up in wonder and delight as the bright energy twisting around them dissolves their bodies to nothing.

ANGLE ON THE CONDUCTOR, nothing more than an energy flicker now; he, too, is vanished to nothing with an expression of expectation and seeming joy.

CLOSE UP ON THE CAR'S DEADMAN STICK as it snaps open, no one there to hold it closed.

WIDE SHOT ON THE CABLE CAR as it rattles to a lurching stop.

Our SLIDERS are running toward the mystery car -
- but come to a sudden, confused stop as other people on the street begin dropping to their knees around the cable car, calling out, "Praise the Lord!" "Take me next, dear God!"

A dazed REMBRANDT looks around at the proclamations, muttering out, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph..."

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ACOLYTE GEORGE, a kindly faced man in his late fifties, places a hand on REMBRANDT'S shoulder. "Exactly, my friend!" he says in response to REMBRANDT'S exclamation. "And all the holy hosts with them!: GEORGE is wearing a stylish robe over his suit, like a priest's vestments; the robes are marked by large crosses, blazing with blue energy. The ACOLYTES are religious observers, helping put miraculous events in perspective for the common man.

GEORGE spreads his arms wide, taking in the event they just witnessed, explaining it to all within earshot as another example of the Rapture in progress. *It bears saying that GEORGE, other ACOLYTES, and most people on this Earth are "genuine" in their beliefs. Although there are individuals or personalities here who are manipulating events to their own end, or taking advantage of the situation, the intent of the story is not to slam-dunk religion wholesale. Rather, we're playing up the exaggerated good and the bad in this situation, as we would in any.*

A shaken WADE and QUINN consider this isn't home.

A dazed ARTURO is forced to agree, waving his fellow travelers over to see what he's looking at.

FROM BEHIND THE SLIDERS, we can see a large billboard atop a low and nearby building. It shows a smiling PAT BUCHANAN, and reads, "PRESIDENT PAT BUCHANAN: Taking U.S. Right to the Rapture"

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CUT TO: CLOSE UP ON A TV SCREEN, where a pretty, prim ANCHORWOMAN reads the news on CBS: The Christian Broadcasting System. There's a graphic of a dove on the screen, superimposed next to her in the style of TV station IDs.

CUT TO: News footage of SECRETARY OF STATE RALPH REED (real life leader of the political Christian Coalition) is shaking hands with MUSLIM LEADERS, trying to convert them before the final day.

CUT TO: News footage of VICE PRESIDENT PAT ROBERTSON, walking along with several deferential SUPREME COURT JUSTICES, as the ANCHORWOMAN'S VOICEOVER reports of the final repeal of Roe V. Wade.

CUT TO: News footage of SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE RUSH LIMBAUGH, bringing down a gavel in Congress, as the ANCHORWOMAN'S VOICEOVER reports on the Constitutional Amendment which unites Church and State.

CUT TO: News footage of BROTHER MILTON, head of the ACOLYTES, and our primary "villain" for the story. He's a tall, impressive, almost puritanically severe, dressed in robes like those we saw earlier, except his are red. We see him here conducting an impressive choir, singing glory to God, and preparing for a concert in San Francisco.

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CUT TO: EXT. CHURCH, DAY. It's a Southwestern mission style, in the center of the city.

INT. CHURCH, where are raging and uncomfortable ARTURO is declaring the entire Rapture situation, "Irrational!"

A more reasonable WADE is asking, "How can you say that?" wanting to know how that's any weirder than all the other things they've seen and been through.

CUT TO: ANGLE ON A WOMAN kneeling to light a candle.

A ghostly apparition, like an angel, appears to pass over and through her, staggering her back in wonder. WADE'S observations continue over these visuals.

WADE pressing her point home to a musing QUINN and a blistering ARTURO. "You're scientists!" she declares; they're supposed to judge the evidence, and not reject what *might* be just 'cause the evidence suggest the impossible.

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A thoroughly shaken REMBRANDT suddenly bolts from the church, the issues at hand too overwhelming for the singer's sense of self.

EXT. CHURCH, where a concerned QUINN, WADE and ARTURO hurry after their friend, wanting to know what's spooked him so.

Laughing without humor. REMBRANDT points around him.

CUT TO: A WOMAN wheeling a baby carriage is suddenly enveloped in the blue light, her and her child vanishing away.

A distraught BUSINESSMAN throws down his briefcase near the carriage, dropping to his knees. Declaring his life righteous, too, he prays that he be taken next.

An ACOLYTE - BROTHER GEORGE, again - hunkers down near to the BIZMAN to console him.

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An almost tearful REMBRANDT turns to his friends, trying to make them understand what he's feeling.

CUT TO: REMBRANDT'S FLASHBACK. INT. SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH, DAY. We see a young REMBRANDT, about 18, singing his heart out in a church choir. He's wearing a choir robe, really into it.

ANGLE ON A RECORD PRODUCER sitting in a pew. He's a slick Motown huckster, a shiny suit, diamond rings, the showbiz works. He's smiling wide at what he hears, clapping along with REMBRANDT'S music.

CUT TO: REMBRANDT'S FAMILY HOME, NIGHT. Poor but clean. A belligerent young REMBRANDT (t-shirt and jeans) is arguing with his parents, both grayed with the years and poverty. They're seated at a small kitchen table, trying to tell him that his voice is a gift from God, and he should use it for that purpose - not pop music. REM's more of the mind, "God helps those who help themselves!"

CUT TO: EXT. DIRT ROAD, NIGHT. A focused REM is tossing a small duffelbag in the back of the PRODUCER'S Cadillac convertible, the PRODUCER smiling wide and promising REM, "You'll be driving one of these soon!"

END FLASHBACK.

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QUINN and WADE flank the troubled REMBRANDT as he wrestles with his conscience. He turned his back on God once before, and look where it got him. Maybe this is a second chance to lend his talent to heavenly choir...

An equally supportive (but trying to stay rational) ARTURO submits his observation that "Every culture has its version of a Rapture, Mr. Brown. That's not to say what we're witnessing is the Rapture."

A touched REMBRANDT, very emotional as he replies, "Can we afford to take that chance, Professor?"

ANGLE ON REMBRANDT as he lays his hand on the smiling ACOLYTE GEORGE'S shoulder, the religious guide delighted to direct REM'S talents to God.

ANGLE ON THE OTHER THREE SLIDERS, all rather grim. QUINN is checking the timer, and noting that they're on this world for another 168 hours. "God created the world in 7 days," ARTURO muses. "Now we have that long to find out whether or not He's out to destroy it."

PAGES 15 & 16

CLOSE UP ON A TV, news footage of a smiling PAT BUCHANAN taking a sledgehammer to a computer. The news VOICEOVER relates how President Pat shut down the smut-ridden Internet.

CUT TO: EST. SHOT UNIVERSITY, DAY.

CUT TO: EXT. UNIVERSITY DOORS, a swaggering ARTURO storming in with QUINN and WADE in tow. He's determined if there's one voice of reason on this world it must be his own.

INT. CORRIDOR, ARTURO blustering ahead. He doesn't notice that FACULTY and STUDENTS he's passing are giving him looks of disgust and derision.

Several STUDENTS block QUINN and WADE, momentarily cutting them off from ARTURO. The STUDENTS wear crucifix pins or jewelry, all very religious and earnest. "How can you stand to be near him?" they want to know. A stunned WADE and QUINN are shaken at how much this Earth's professor is obviously despised.

Two SECURITY GUARDS (crosses on their badges) roughly grab ARTURO, telling him, "You were told to keep your heretic ideas out of this university!" The blustering ARTURO tries to reason with them --

-- but he's only finally released on the command of BROTHER MILTON, who strides out of the crowd.

MILTON faces off with ARTURO, MILTON quite condescending and disrespectful of who he believes to be this Earth's ARTURO. It's obvious from everything this world's ARTURO is an outcast because of his anti-Rapture views.

From behind MILTON steps out this world's QUINN MALLORY. It should be clear who this is, but there's no mistaking him for our QUINN. This MALLORY is painfully gaunt, and dressed like a monk, having gone so far as to even shave his head in a tonsure. There's a dangerous fanatic's gleam in his eyes.

MALLORY spits in a shocked, shaken ARTURO'S face.

Our QUINN and WADE break through the throng to catch up to ARTURO after MILTON and RAPTURE-QUINN have turned and left. This detour has only fueled their need to discover more about the Rapture, and what it's doing to this world.

ANGLE ON A BROODING ARTURO, considering it's time to go home.

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EXT. ARTURO'S HOUSE, DAY. A pleasant affluent San Francisco brownstone in episodes of the TV show, here it's a hellhole, a graffiti marked condemned building. There are boards across the windows, trash in the yard, broken bottles all about. ARTURO, WADE and QUINN are gingerly navigating their way to the front door.

WADE and QUINN pass through another of the spirit-angel apparitions, the duo chilled and thrilled by the experience. WADE wondering aloud if it would be so bad for this to be the rapture.

ARTURO bangs heavily on the front door.

RAPTURE-ARTURO (R.A.) wrenches the door open from the inside. He's a ragged, surly reflection of our ARTURO, in worn and tattered tweed suit, his bowtie frayed, his hair matted and filthy. Being an outcast doesn't suit the professor well. "Who is it?!" He's snarling, half-bluster, but also half-fear for what has been long years of prosecution.

A cordial ARTURO extends a, "Good day!" to R.A., the pale double knocked silent by this strange introduction.

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INT. LIVING ROOM, clean but cluttered in the way of a recluse who has only his surroundings to keep him company. R.A. is serving tea in chipped and mismatched glasses, admitting "I don't get many visitors!" ARTURO is at a blackboard, admiring some of his double's formulae. QUINN and WADE are hunkering down on the floor, pawing through stacks of papers and magazines, look for more info on this world's changes.

OVER-THE-SHOULDER-SHOT WADE, looking down at a copy of PEOPLE. MADONNA is on the cover, dressed as a nun - a *real* nun. "Material Girl Goes Spiritual" the cover copy reads. R.A.'s OFF PANEL info relates how as the Rapture movement gained steam, many public personalities begin changing their song to curry favor with "whatever powers that be!"

OVER-THE-SHOULDER-SHOT QUINN, with a copy of Newsweek, sporting the picture of HOWARD STERN, caught in a crosshairs. The difference is the gunsight is a cross. The copy reads, "Radio's Last Sinner." "I suppose even Howard Stern cleaned up his act," says QUINN.

R.A. purses his lips as he sips his tea, thinking that STERN proved unrepentant and went to the desert to transmit from a UHF station.

ARTURO'S holding up a copy of Time Magazine, sporting a picture of MILTON, and the copy, "Vanguard of the Lord." R.A. relates from OFF-PANEL how it was MILTON who did the first study of the vanishings, promoting the cause that the Rapture was upon them all.

R.A. steps to the blackboard, offering his own theory on what's happening on this world.

He draws two worlds, two Earths. They're connected by a "bridge" of energy (the Einstein-Rosen bridge), much like the sliding corridor our "team" rides from Earth to Earth. "You're of course familiar with this model," R.A.

ANGLE ON R.A. and ARTURO, as R.A. mentions, "an eccentric, little known physicist named Hawkings - you've probably never heard of him!" "I might have," a bemused ARTURO replies.

R.A. back at the board, but now there are dozens of tiny holes between the worlds. It's Hawking's theory that there are constant gateways open between the dimensions, but they're microscopic and innumerable. And under the right - or wrong - circumstances, objects or individuals might slip through these planes.

ANGLE ON QUINN and WADE, excited at the idea. WADE compares it to QUINN'S adventure on the astral plane in the "Gillian of the Spirits" episode.

A grim R.A. gives the downside of the theory: if something has begun to wear at those tiny holes to the degree thousands are vanishing across dimensions, the entire wall may come down soon. And then it really will be the end of the world.

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INT. TEMPLE HALL, NIGHT. CLOSE UP ON REMBRANDT, in a slick choir robe, sing his heart out.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to show REM as part of a big, Mormon Tabernacle style group, up on a stage in a concert hall. An enthusiastic audience is applauding, as BROTHER MILTON conducts the singers.

BROTHER MILTON thanks his singers, waving them goodnight as he heads off stage.

REM with BROTHER GEORGE, our singer getting the true sense of how responsible MILTON is for the Rapture movement. A deeply moved REM feels he has to personally thank the ACOLYTE leader.

REM heads into the shadowy dark corners of the temple, looking for MILTON.

CUT TO: EXT. EST. SHOT TEMPLE. It's the Transamerica Pyramid with a monstrous cross grafted into its rooftop.

INT. TEMPLE BASEMENT. A totally lost REM is stumbling down a long, dark flight of steel stairs calling for MILTON or anybody.

REM comes upon a thick steel door - like a bomb shelter would have - lightly ajar. Swirling blue light is coming from within the slightly ajar door, along with the voices of MILTON and RAPTURE-QUINN.

The singer approaches slowly, peeking in carefully so as not to be seen.

INT. SLIDING CHAMBER. Beyond the door is a large spread of hi-tech equipment, a more refined version of QUINN'S original sliding machine. We're close on RAPTURE-QUINN and MILTON, as QUINN works a piece of equipment. He's adjusting dials, the gleam in his eyes making it clear he's an over the edge zealot. MILTON is calmer, but equally intense.

From their conversation, it becomes clear that this QUINN'S experiments in sliding tore open the fabric of micro-holes, and triggered the first vanishings. MILTON seized on the idea to promote the Rapture, and believing himself to be doing God's work an eager QUINN accelerated the process further.

QUINN bowing his head slightly, admitting that they've pushed things so far there's no stopping it now: the tiny holes are running together, like a frayed fabric that begins to tear itself apart. Soon it will overtake them all, and the illusion they spawned in the name of the Creator will destroy them all. MILTON has a gentle hand on QUINN'S head, a benediction that says, "All in a good cause!"

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CAMERA PULLS BACK TO SHOW THE CHAMBER and its crackling equipment. A huge warp of energy is across one whole wall of the room, a stretched and distorted rend between dimensions. We see ghostly apparitions - trapped and torn apart as they're sucked between the worlds. It's a terrible, disturbing display of energy, suggesting it's going to cut loose at anytime and consume the planet. MILTON is smiling nobly, declaring, "The world's got to end sometime!" QUINN is grinning ear to ear.

In the background, we can see REM'S worried face peeking in through the just open door.