

October 24, 1997

FROM: MARC SCOTT ZICREE
TO: David, Bill, Chris

Dear Fellow Toilers,

Here's the rough first pass on SLIDECAGE. I've broken the first half down by scenes, then just given an overview of the rest. Naturally, as time is short we need to turn this around quickly and I'd like your notes as soon as possible. (Additionally, David, I need to know if you want to run the story by Sardelli or have me do it.)

One concern: I'm aware that Colin gets captured by Kromaggs both in "Dying Fields" and in this, but the look and emotional dynamics of it are very different. If need be, we could have Remmy snatched instead, though I prefer the "genius outcast" parallel we can play between the boy and Colin.

As I get deeper into this, I'll want to mine the emotions of the characters and examine their issues, something only touched on briefly here.

Beyond this, I also want to get more into the "prisoners running the prison" aspect of it — SLIDERS meets Tom Fontana's OZ.

That's it for now.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Marc", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

"Slidecage"

by Marc Scott Zicree
(10/24/97)



TEASER

1. EXT. SKY - DAY. Open on a gorgeous blue sky. Silence, then we hear the THRUMMING OF ENGINES and a magnificent golden ZEPPELIN flies into frame, filling the screen with its ornate beauty. We see the name on the bow: CHANDLER. CUT TO:

2. INT. CHANDLER ZEPPELIN - BAR. Redress of our standing set. COLIN and QUINN sit at a table, sipping their drinks and poring over figures, microdots and the timer, arguing over twelve-dimensional equations and being seized by sudden bursts of inspiration.

MAGGIE and REMBRANDT sit by a picture window, looking at the clouds go by. MAGGIE: Hard to believe there's a world with the Chandler in the clouds... REMBRANDT: Yeah, well, on this earth the Hindenburg never blew up, so it's only reasonable you'd have a luxury hotel making the L.A. to San Francisco run.

Their idyll is interrupted by QUINN saying, I think we've got it... They hurry over to him and COLIN. The screen on their laptop (acquired by Colin selling rights to some wacky infomercial-type invention he'd come up with that this world didn't have) shows a cross-section of the two microdots, the data from them combining and scrolling up to reveal one set of numbers. QUINN and COLIN have been busting their brains to salvage the data from the two microdots, to gain the coordinates of their homeworld. And now — victory.

REMBRANDT: You're sure these are the right coordinates?
QUINN: Yeah, no doubt about it. A big grin stretches across his face as he inputs the numbers into the timer: Grab your bags and hold onto your socks. He turns to COLIN: Ready to go home, brother? COLIN: I reckon I will not know until I get there. REMBRANDT: Sounds as good as a yes to me. QUINN pushes the button.

3. INT. ODD BUILDING - NIGHT. QUINN, REMBRANDT, MAGGIE AND COLIN materialize inside a long corridor, in an odd, silent building. No doors in evidence, no way out. They all get a creepy feeling about this, it just feels wrong...

Finally, REMBRANDT spies a window. They rush to it and peer out. The landscape before them is a shock — two moons, a hellish, unearthly landscape with the ruins of alien buildings. MAGGIE murmurs, We're not on earth...

ACT ONE

4. INT. ODD BUILDING - CONTINUOUS. QUINN corrects MAGGIE: This may well be an alternate earth, but one very different from what they've seen before. Moreover, it doesn't fit the sketchy descriptions of the Kromagg homeworld they've gotten previously. REMBRANDT: Maybe you got the coordinates wrong, Q-Ball. QUINN shakes his head, not a chance. He holds up the timer... and sees to his dismay that it's stone dead, as though something's put a damping field on it.

They don't have long to ponder this, as suddenly electricity (or smoke or whatever) arcs down the hall toward them, driving them into:

5. INT. ROOM. The door slides closed, trapping them. They hear a voice: Welcome, newcomers. They turn to see a wall-size viewscreen, with a smiling man's face on it: Hello, I'm Michael Mallory... QUINN and COLIN recognize it as their real father, COLIN tries to speak to him. But QUINN cuts him off: It's a recording, he's not really here.

On the screen, MICHAEL MALLORY explains that, as one of the inventors of sliding, he felt it only appropriate he should greet the "newcomers" and explain the ropes to them: Sorry for the rough handling. But I thought it best to shepherd you here... and the slidenet isn't always exact enough as to where it deposits our arrivals within the structure...

He begins to explain the how and why of what brought them here, but the image scrambles, the sound and picture getting distorted. REMBRANDT smacks a piece of equipment (like he used to do to his old TV) and the image stabilizes in time for MALLORY to conclude: Unfortunately, we cannot return you, as it would pose a security risk. Your needs will be provided for, food and air and shelter. Do not tamper with the dispensing machines. If you attempt to venture outside, the toxic atmosphere will kill you. Other than these strictures, you are free to live by the rules you create. Make the best of this world. It is now your world... for the rest of your lives.

The screen goes blank. QUINN and the others are stunned. But QUINN's put enough of it together to conclude that the way the homeworld is cloaked so the Kromaggs can't return is via some alteration in the wormhole that shunts anyone who tries to slide there here instead, onto this dead earth.

REMBRANDT: So who else is here, do you think? QUINN: Probably anyone who's tried to slide back there. MAGGIE shivers: You mean, just us and the Kromaggs... COLIN: But why would our parents cloak the world and not come get us? QUINN: They did, but they were told I was dead, and you were

lost on a non-technological world, where you didn't have a chance in hell of building a device like this.

This "Slidecage" was probably set up 20 years ago, when the human/Kromagg war ended, so the screen breaking down is an ominous sign. No upkeep, and they're reliant on the Builders for their food and water and air. What else isn't working here? The door has slid back open, so our guys venture cautiously outside.

6. INT. HALLWAYS. QUINN, COLIN, MAGGIE and REMBRANDT poke around, try to get the lay of the land. They discover the place is a vast labyrinth.

Suddenly, there's a hub-bub. Our guys duck into hiding, spread out from one another. A ragtag group of humans and Kromaggs surge into the hall, it's like an ongoing street rumble between two gangs. REMBRANDT wants to jump into the fray, but QUINN holds him back — let's see what the rules of this place are first. *and*

Within moments, it's clear the Kromaggs are getting the upper hand, the humans taking flight, getting away. MAGGIE's been watching from hiding, a sound from a nearby vent gets her attention. She peers into the darkness, spies a shadowy figure who, seeing her, draws closer. He murmurs, amazed: Maggie... MAGGIE recognizes him — it's her husband STEVEN, who she thought died back on her own world! *forced*

But just then, COLIN fumbles somehow, gets discovered by the Kromaggs and dragged off. The figure in the vent darts back and is gone, we can't even be really sure what we saw. *— prevents Kromagg from being in the back of door of vent*

At the same time, our guys try to intervene to save COLIN, but a hatch slides closed and we can't get to them. The Kromaggs hustle him away.

7. INT. KROMAGG LAIR - DAY. COLIN is roughly dragged in, brought before KOLITAR, the scruffy-looking Kromagg who's the de facto leader of the group. None of these Kromaggs are military, just a haphazard group who had the bad fortune to try sliding back to their homeworld. Most of them have been trapped here for twenty years, and so they know nothing of the recent Kromagg victories, only that their race got its ass badly kicked by the humans. One exception is KALDEEN, Kolitar's son, an eighteen-year-old Kromagg born in this "prison." The radiation of this place makes conception almost impossible, his mother died in childbirth and KALDEEN himself is a mutation, both physically (he's disabled) and mentally (he's far gentler than the other Kromaggs). He's interested in this new arrival, wants time to talk with him. But KOLITAR orders COLIN put to death!

ACT TWO

8. INT. KROMAGG LAIR - CONTINUOUS. Before the Kromaggs can put COLIN to death, COLIN speaks up — he's noticed the wound on KOLITAR's body, why hasn't it been treated? KOLITAR grumbles that the "foul food" the replicators put out has left the Kromaggs malnourished, unable to use their telepathic healing power. And because they've always had such power, the Kromaggs have no knowledge of medicine. But COLIN knows a folk remedy to treat that wound, he can cobble together the ingredients from what's at hand. KOLITAR agrees to spare him... temporarily. At least, until they can see if his "treatment" works.

9. INT. ANOTHER ROOM. QUINN, MAGGIE and REMBRANDT are discussing their next move. Clearly, they have two pressing agendas — to rescue COLIN and find some way to slide out of here. MAGGIE, though, has one other thing on her mind... her husband. She presses QUINN: You said my husband was killed by Rickman — are you sure he was dead? QUINN: Yes, Maggie, there was no doubt. But she can't accept that, holds on to a desperate hope: Maybe he survived, maybe he used the sliding equipment to get away before the pulsar destroyed my world. REMBRANDT: Maggie, we know those Kromaggs can mess with your mind, make you see your loved ones... But MAGGIE rejects this, feels sure it was no Kromagg trick.

QUINN tells her that, whatever she saw, their pressing problem is to find and save COLIN. But, without knowing the layout of this labyrinth, it seems virtually impossible. They need help... and the obvious place to seek it is with the humans who live here.

10. INT. CORRIDOR. QUINN, REMBRANDT and MAGGIE head off in the direction the humans escaped. Thanks to MAGGIE's savvy, they manage to elude several nasty booby-traps. But in the end they get captured and hauled off to:

11. INT. HUMAN STRONGHOLD. QUINN, MAGGIE and REMBRANDT are hauled before ALANA (40s), their tough-talking leader, essentially the Bitch Queen of the Universe. QUINN pleads for them to aid in saving COLIN but ALANA replies: He's Magg chowder by now, forget him.

Our guys learn that this bunch of scurvy humans are from the Kromagg homeworld but they were outcasts, fugitives, somehow didn't get back in time to beat the deadline. Moreover, they're as bad as the Kromaggs, if not worse. ALANA's managed to keep control of them by being the meanest of them all — and having the only functioning blaster. She likes the looks of QUINN and REMBRANDT (nice thighs...) but feels threatened by MAGGIE. ALANA's been the only woman here, and she likes it that way. None of this is helped by MAGGIE getting in her face, not backing down from her bullshit.

ALANA orders MAGGIE chucked outside. QUINN and REMBRANDT try to stop this, but are beaten down. A makeshift hatch slides aside, noxious fumes seep in, MAGGIE's shoved out. We hear her choking, 'dying... then an ominous silence. QUINN and REMBRANDT are in anguish. *(too passive)*.

12. INT. CONDUIT CENTRAL. MAGGIE comes to in this odd makeshift crawlspace/vent living area (possibly with some magnificent view of the weird alien terrain outside). She feels like shit. Suddenly a figure rises up out of the darkness. It's hideous, looks like a monster... but then we see it's actually someone in a cobbled-together environment suit. He throws back his hood to reveal himself as DR. STEVEN JENSEN, MAGGIE's husband... and she's astonished to see that he's walking. He smiles and says: Welcome back from the dead, darling.

ACT THREE

12. INT. CONDUIT CENTRAL - CONTINUOUS. We soon learn that this is actually a duplicate of MAGGIE's husband from another earth. On his world, he didn't have an accident that left him crippled, so his Maggie stayed a fighter pilot — and was killed in combat. He's been grieving for her ever since. Seeing her alive again — and realizing she must be a duplicate of his wife — he followed her and the others surreptitiously, saw her ejected and managed to save her.

Over the next two acts, we run three parallel lines:

MAGGIE bonds with STEVEN, they share their grief over losing each other, it blossoms into passion, they go to bed. Next morning, however, MAGGIE realizes she went too far. This isn't her Steven, and she isn't this man's late wife. They were trying to recreate the past. She tells him she has QUINN now — the beginnings of a relationship that might eventually blossom into something really powerful. She learns that Steven's been living secretly, a hermit, the others unaware of him. He managed to cobble together the environment suit, make forays to the ruins of the long-dead creatures who used to live on this planet (perhaps sentient reptiles, perhaps aliens from space). He shows her a few small technological wonders he salvaged. MAGGIE realizes these might help QUINN find a way to get them off this rock. She urges STEVEN to reveal himself, join the others. He doesn't want to. Here, he's safe. But MAGGIE points out that, the way he's living now, he's as dead as his dead wife. He must go on with his life, that's what she would want of her Steven. She sways him, and he agrees to go with her to find QUINN.

At the same time, COLIN checks the poultice on KOLITAR — the wound seems to be getting better. The Kromaggs will retain

COLIN as their healer, putting him in chains to ensure he doesn't escape. COLIN learns that the brilliant KALDEEN is their "fix-it" man — he's kept the air recyclers and replicators running. COLIN bonds with KALDEEN, shares his own feelings of growing up a misfit, longing for a larger world. In turn, KALDEEN shares his great secret — he's telekinetic, has the power to move things with his mind. He's never let the others know for fear of what they might make him do with it. At some point, he might use this power to try to loosen COLIN's chains, help him escape, but it comes to nothing.

Meanwhile, QUINN and REMBRANDT are making various excuses to put off ALANA's amorous advances... while not pissing her off so much as to end their lives? QUINN tells ALANA he wants to see the equipment that generates the Slidecage, keeps them all trapped there. ALANA leads him to it: Be my guest. REMBRANDT heads for it, but QUINN stops him... it's too easy. He tosses an object at the equipment — it disintegrates. The control equipment is shielded from all interference. In fact, when people crack and can't stand it anymore, they come here to commit suicide, throwing themselves into the field.

Over all of this, we find that neither the humans nor the Kromaggs are all bad (though their leaders are) — it's just that they've gone stir crazy cooped up here and taken to slaughtering each other.

MAGGIE and STEVEN show up at ALANA's encampment, talk her into not killing them. They've come with the possibility of everyone getting off this hellish world. QUINN inspects the alien devices STEVEN's brought, says they might help him reprogram the Slidecage matrix. But it's not enough to do the trick. From eavesdropping, STEVEN's observed that the Kromaggs have some other vital piece of the puzzle. But that would mean getting them in on the mix, forging some truce with them. ALANA's dead-set against this, but QUINN sways her followers and finally she grudgingly agrees.

En route to the Kromagg encampment, REMBRANDT takes QUINN aside and points out that, if he disables the cloaking device, the Kromaggs would be able to invade QUINN's homeworld. QUINN replies that he has no intention of letting that happen, even if it means stranding them all there permanently. He has another plan in mind... which he prays will work.

Under a flag of truce, QUINN, REMBRANDT and the others make their way to the Kromagg lair. It looks like a major brawl might break out, but QUINN's able to get through to KOLITAR that, unless they work together, they'll all die here. Despite his hatred of the humans, KOLITAR sees the sense of it. He throws in his knowledge, equipment, whatever. This is what QUINN needs to get into the database — if he could

somehow disable the disintegration field. COLIN urges KALDEEN to speak up. Hesitantly, KALDEEN reveals his telekinetic power.

At the Slidecage equipment, KALDEEN is able to telekinetically throw a switch within the disintegration field, turning it off.

QUINN checks out the matrix, sees a way to reconfigure it to create a feeder loop, so it will home in on everyone's sliding trace and slide them back to the world they most recently came from. Set on automatic, it will continue to do this indefinitely (in other words, if someone tries to slide to the Kromagg homeworld, they'll instead simply be bounced back to where they left from).

There are only two snags — our guys can't go to the homeworld, either, and since KALDEEN is from this world there's no slide trace to lock onto — when everyone slides out, he'll be stranded here permanently, alone.

But KOLITAR doesn't want to return to the world he last came from — he wants QUINN to uncloak the homeworld. He seizes MAGGIE, prepares to kill her unless QUINN complies. ALANA, in a fit of patriotism (which we lay in earlier, so it doesn't seem out of the blue), kills KOLITAR, dying herself in the struggle. MAGGIE grabs up ALANA's blaster, holds everyone else at bay: What the hell do we do now?

COLIN doesn't want KALDEEN abandoned. But KALDEEN sees there's no other choice... his evil Kromagg brethren must not be allowed back on the homeworld. And besides, this equipment will need someone to keep it going, be the keeper of the flame. QUINN sees the wisdom of this. COLIN bids KALDEEN an emotional farewell. MAGGIE says her goodbyes to STEVEN (his world, incidentally, was not destroyed by a pulsar) go home and live your life.

Telekinetically, KALDEEN throws the switch, sending everyone back. QUINN, COLIN, MAGGIE and REMBRANDT find themselves back on the airship, reflecting on what they've just being through, what they've won and lost... with QUINN telling COLIN that, in time, he'll find another way to the homeworld, whatever it takes.

THE END