

"Slidecage"
Prod. #K2815

by Marc Scott Zicree
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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, COLIN, MAGGIE AND REMBRANDT 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, COLIN 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, REMBRANDT, MAGGIE and COLIN poke around, try to get the lay of the land. They discover the place is a vast labyrinth.

MAGGIE hears a sound from a nearby vent, 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!

Suddenly, there's a hub-bub. The figure in the vent darts back and is gone, we can't even be really sure what we saw. Our guys duck into hiding, still spread out from each other. 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.

Within moments, it's clear the Kromaggs are getting the upper hand, the humans taking flight. One WOMAN is about to be killed by a Kromagg. REMBRANDT dives in and saves her. The WOMAN gets away but REMBRANDT is captured by the Kromaggs and dragged off. (Later we'll have her remember REMBRANDT saving her and do something to aid REMBRANDT.)

Our guys try to intervene to save REMBRANDT, but a hatch slides closed and we can't get to them. The Kromaggs hustle him away.

7. INT. KROMAGG LAIR - DAY. REMBRANDT 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 REMBRANDT put to death!

ACT TWO

8. INT. KROMAGG LAIR - CONTINUOUS. Before the Kromaggs can put REMBRANDT to death, REMBRANDT 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 REMBRANDT knows one of his Mama's folk remedies 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 COLIN are discussing their next move. Clearly, they have two pressing agendas — to rescue REMBRANDT 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. COLIN notes that they've learned the Kromaggs can alter your thoughts, 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 REMBRANDT. 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, COLIN 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 COLIN are hauled before ALANA (40s), their strong-willed leader. She's the one who's held this band together, kept them alive. But she's clearly gone to an extreme, become a mini-despot. She demands to know how they eluded her booby-traps, is surprised MAGGIE was able to do so.

QUINN pleads for them to aid in saving REMBRANDT but ALANA replies: He's Magg chowder by now, forget him. We learn that she's hates the Kromaggs, has been waging a scorched-earth war against them. It's the Human/Kromagg War in microcosm, with no one the winner, only losers. (Neither the humans nor the Kromaggs are all bad — it's just that they've gone stir crazy cooped up here and taken to slaughtering each other.)

Our guys learn that this bunch of ragged humans are from the Kromagg homeworld but they were outcasts, fugitives, somehow didn't get back in time to beat the deadline.

ALANA tells our guys that they've got to choose sides, human or Kromagg — and it better be human. Furthermore, if it is human, they've got to two the line, follow ALANA without question, it's the only way to survive here. REMBRANDT and MAGGIE protest, QUINN tries to get them to shut up, now's not the time to take a stand. But MAGGIE won't be stifled, gets in ALANA's face. Says something that pushes ALANA's buttons.

ALANA orders MAGGIE chucked outside. QUINN and COLIN 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 COLIN are in anguish.

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

13. 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.

MAGGIE 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).

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. He tells her to rest now, get her strength back. They've got a lot of catching up to do... now that they're together again.

14. INT. HUMAN STRONGHOLD. QUINN and COLIN are beside themselves, mourning MAGGIE, beating themselves up for not saving her somehow (and for bringing her here). They might speculate whether the world they've been trying to get to is

anything like this place, whether it's somewhere worth getting to.

ALANA tells QUINN and COLIN they have to serve the community — if you don't work, you don't eat. QUINN tells ALANA he wants to see the equipment that generates the Slidecage, keeps them all trapped there. She finds him arrogant. Let's see if he's as smart as he thinks he is. She says: This way... Leads them off to the equipment.

15. INT. KROMAGG LAIR. REMBRANDT checks the poultice on KOLITAR — the wound seems to be getting better. The Kromaggs will retain REMBRANDT as their healer, putting him in chains to ensure he doesn't escape. REMBRANDT hates all Kromaggs and isn't doing much to hide his contempt for them. KALDEEN tries to talk with him, see if he's okay. But REMBRANDT is closed to this, lumping KALDEEN in with the other "Kromaggots."

16. INT. CONDUIT CENTRAL. MAGGIE bonds with STEVEN, they share their grief over losing each other. But there's a difference: STEVEN wants to continue his relationship where it left off with his MAGGIE. MAGGIE, though, realizes that this isn't her Steven, and she isn't this man's late wife. We play the realization that we have two choices when we lose one we love: get on with our life, fill the void in our heart... or bury ourselves with our loved one. She tells STEVEN that she has QUINN now — the beginnings of a relationship that might eventually blossom into something really powerful.

Within all of this, STEVEN shows her a few small technological wonders he salvaged from the ruins of the dead race that once lived there. MAGGIE realizes these might help QUINN find a way to get them off this rock. She urges STEVEN to reveal himself, join the others. But STEVEN refuses. Here he's safe, he won't be swayed.

MAGGIE angrily says that, the way he's living now, he's as dead as his dead wife. She starts off but STEVEN, feeling ashamed and not wanting to be alone again, hurries after her. He'll face his fear... or try to.

17. INT. SLIDECAGE EQUIPMENT CENTER. ALANA leads COLIN and QUINN to the equipment, flanked by several of her comrades: Be my guest. COLIN and QUINN heads toward it. Aside with her guys, ALANA says they'll be dead in seconds... so much for their "superior intellect."

ACT FOUR

18. INT. SLIDECAGE EQUIPMENT CENTER — CONTINUOUS. COLIN's about to reach the equipment when QUINN stops him: It's too easy. He tosses an object at the equipment — it

disintegrates. The control equipment is shielded from all meddling. ALANA's impressed, tells them that when people crack and can't stand it anymore, they come here to commit suicide, throwing themselves into the field. QUINN realizes there's no way now to crack the forcefield.

19. INT. KROMAGG LAIR. By now, REMBRANDT's worn down enough by hunger and loneliness to open up a bit to KALDEEN. He learns that KALDEEN is their "fix-it" man — he's kept the air recyclers and replicators running. REMBRANDT bonds with him, 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 REMBRANDT's chains, help him escape, but it comes to nothing.

20. INT. HUMAN STRONGHOLD. QUINN's talking with ALANA, trying to find out what attempts have been made to crack that forcefield. He learns that they've tried various things that almost worked but they were lacking some key item.

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 readily agrees — she's actually planning a double-cross but we don't know that.

21. HALLWAY. En route to the Kromagg encampment, COLIN 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.

22. Under a flag of truce, QUINN, COLIN and the others (or perhaps just QUINN) 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.

23. SLIDECAGE EQUIPMENT CENTER. QUINN, REMBRANDT and the Kromaggs arrive there under flag of truce. But ALANA's used it as a ruse to stage an ambush (perhaps using a weapon STEVEN salvaged from the ruins). It's shaping up to be a

massacre. But QUINN saves KOLITAR, maybe even kills ALANA, proving he was sincere in his offer. (We might pay off the WOMAN REMBRANDT saved earlier, who saves his life now, or warns him.)

At any rate, due to the ambush, the Kromagg equipment is damaged or destroyed, it can't be linked to turn off the forcefield. The switch to turn it off is within the forcefield itself. But there's no way to reach it without dying.

REMBRANDT urges KALDEEN to speak up — it's the only way. Hesitantly, KALDEEN reveals his telekinetic power, uses it to throw the switch. The forcefield is disabled (or some of our guys step inside it).

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 so that the Kromaggs can reconquer it an reign supreme, burn the human cities to the ground. He seizes MAGGIE, prepares to kill her unless QUINN complies.

Somehow our guys turn the situation, maybe kill KOLITAR or at least subdue him (KALDEEN might use his power to this end, though we don't want to lose our guys taking the central action). Neither Humans nor Kromaggs are ready yet to live together in peace, they won't even stop the war now, when it's senseless to continue.

REMBRANDT 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. REMBRANDT 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, that's what she would want of her Steven.

Telekinetically, KALDEEN throws the switch, sending everyone back. QUINN, REMBRANDT, MAGGIE and COLIN 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

NOTE: I think we need to trim the number of beats and the action. Act Three should end, I believe, on ALANA telling a confederate that she has no intention of honoring the truce... she'll kill the Kromaggs and take what she wants.

Additionally, the ending should be compressed, so that it begins this big battle, with our guys in the middle, everyone seeing them as the enemy, QUINN having to get everyone to trust him and particularly the humans to stop siding with ALANA.

We might move the Maggie death beat to the end of Act One. The thing to do is to track the things that are vital, to leave room to develop them. To wit:

ALANA pursuing the war, determined to kill every last Kromagg. QUINN being the peacemaker, bringing sanity to the situation, convincing everyone they have to work together.

MAGGIE coming to closure over the death of her husband. Allowing this Steven to get on with his life. Not losing him in the last act.

REMBRANDT bonding with the boy and putting aside his universal hatred of the Kromaggs.

So the overarching theme of this is how we carry the wounds of the past, the wrongs done to us, into the present and how it harms us, causes us to not live our lives.

Also: Remember that people can't have children here. The only one successfully born is KALDEEN, and he was born deformed.