

December 11, 1997

SLIDERS

“GOD’S COUNTRY”

outline by David Gerrold

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TEASER:

1. EXTERIOR. NIGHT. TECHNO-REDRESS OF BACK-LOT FRANKENSTEIN VILLAGE.

A chase through the darkness! Someone is pursuing Quinn, Colin, Rembrandt, and Maggie! Gestapo-like sirens wail in the distance. The four sliders are running for their lives through a medieval-looking village, but with some modern technology in evidence. It’s late at night, and the streets are deserted. As they pass a large Cathedral, we establish the religious symbol — a cross but with two diagonal arms instead of one horizontal. This symbol is in evidence everywhere.

They pause just long enough to get their bearings. They have landed on a world held in the iron grip of a theocratic society — and Quinn, who is not always known for his discretion, has apparently made the mistake of opening his big mouth and offending the locals. Whatever it was he said, it was heresy. And there is little tolerance for that here. Colin is angry at Quinn for opening his big mouth, but there’s no time for that argument now.

Suddenly they are pin-pointed by spotlights from above. A clattering noise suggests a helicopter. An amplified voice tells them to freeze. Instead, they run. Crimson laser beams crackle after them. Dark vehicles come chasing after the sliders. Distant Gestapo-like sirens howl mournfully, and pursuing red lights come racing out of the darkness. They look like the burning eyes of demonic beasts. Two black-uniformed Inquisitors come running. Their chests bear same symbol of the double-cross that we saw on the Cathedral, evidence that the Inquisitors act with the authority of the church. But these officers of the Holy Inquisition are equipped with high-powered weapons, night-goggles, helmets, and armor.

Quinn activates the gateway and it swirls into existence. As soon as the gateway is open, the sliders jump through as quickly as they can. Quinn is the last to jump. But just as he leaps, one of the Inquisitors raises his rifle and fires. The air crackles with red lightning and Quinn is impaled on the beam. It strikes him in the back, at the base of his spine. He topples forward into the gateway — the swirling maelstrom crackles with lightning.

Quinn comes falling through the other side of the Gateway, still flickering with red lightning all over his body. He topples to the ground. The others rush to help him, but they cannot approach until the lightning dissipates. Maggie and Colin try to help Quinn to his feet, but he cannot move. *He is paralyzed.*

ACT ONE:

2. AS BEFORE: TECHNO-REDRESS OF THE FRANKENSTEIN VILLAGE.

Quinn twitches uncomfortably — almost a seizure. He is experiencing an excruciating attack of “pins-and-needles.” Not knowing what kind of a world they’ve fallen into — it looks distressingly like the last one — the others must get Quinn to safety while he recovers. They drag Quinn into the shelter of an alley, where they wait for the effects of the beam weapon to wear off. Only they don’t seem to be wearing off — Quinn took a pretty bad hit.

Rembrandt and Colin are worried that this world will be as dangerous as the one they just left. Maggie disagrees; the two worlds are different branches of the same time line, but there are differences. For instance, there is no sign of the double-cross in evidence. The nearby Cathedral has a different religious symbol.

Quinn regains a measure of coherency — and almost immediately, he panics. He can’t feel his legs. He can’t feel anything from the waist down! The effects of the stun-gun aren’t wearing off! Colin and Rembrandt turn Quinn over. There is a scorch mark on his clothing, and a burn on his skin, just above the base of his spine. Uh-oh. This is more serious than they thought.

Rembrandt and Maggie go off to do a quick reconnaissance, leaving Quinn and Colin huddled together in the shelter of a narrow street. Quinn is scared. They know how serious the stun-guns are. They saw them in action. Colin tries to distract Quinn by gently steering the subject away. “A very sad people. How can they do those things in the name of God?”

This angers Quinn. He says that there is no objective proof for God, it all depends on faith. Colin points out, that’s the heresy that got them in so much trouble; he continues that if there were objective proof for God, people would turn it into dogma and would lose their ability to find God in their hearts. Faith is God’s test. Faith is the channel to God. Quinn is skeptical. “Then how do you know there’s a God at all, and not just your faith with nothing to back it up?” Quinn isn’t arguing against God, he’s just

annoyed that there's no evidence except the beliefs of others. "Belief is a wish for something to be true, even when there's no evidence."

Maggie and Rembrandt return; they've found a doctor. Colin and Rembrandt lift Quinn between them —

3. INT. DOCTOR'S HOME/OFFICE.

DOCTOR KRISLOV is a grizzled and grumpy old man, mid-forties. He examines Quinn with a glowing glass plate in a hand-held frame — obviously some kind of advanced technology. He looks through the frame and sees a real-time full-body scan. What he sees, startles him. "Where did you come from? I haven't seen this kind of wound since the war." Colin ducks the question: "We were attacked on the road." Dr. Krislov doesn't buy it. "These weapons were banned as sinful." "Yes we know, but what can you do for Quinn?"

Krislov is blunt. "I can't do anything at all." He obviously doesn't trust the sliders. "No one can. I mean it." And then he adds. "Don't be tempted either."

"Tempted?"

"You know what I mean. Don't go looking for miracles. Stay in the village, where you'll be safe."

The sliders exchange glances. Quinn says, "If there's someone who can help me walk —"

Krislov loses his patience. "Don't listen then! You're already lost! Get out of here! Go to the Linkers then! Go to hell for all I care!"

4. EXTERIOR. DAY. STREET.

Quinn is in a wheelchair. (Please don't ask where they got it.) Rembrandt is pushing. They arrive at a checkpoint. A barbed wire barrier surrounds the village, except for a single guarded gate. The guard looks at them. "Looking for a miracle, are you? I've seen a lot of pilgrims pass through

this gate. I've never seen any of them come back. You and your friends are risking a lot. Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Just let us through," says Quinn, grimly.

The guard raises the barrier, but adds, "Once you pass outside, you're no longer under the protection of the church. You're on your own."

As the sliders move on, they speculate about the difference between this world and the last. On the world they left, the Church of the Double Cross won the war. Here, they seem to have lost. The Linkers must have been the other side in the war — some kind of secular philosophy, perhaps? Quinn is eager to find out. Superstition always fears science and reason and rationality. Why would anyone be afraid of the technology that could heal a damaged body?

4. EXTERIOR. DAY. COUNTRYSIDE. BACK-LOT?

Soon they are through the gate and into the countryside. Quinn says that Dr. Krislov's behavior is evidence of the power of superstition to keep people crippled in their lives. Rembrandt insists that religion is not superstition, but a way for people to focus their attention on the pathway to God.

Rembrandt talks about the difference between ordinary and extraordinary — most conversations are ordinary, but when you talk about God your conversation is extraordinary, and when your conversation is extraordinary you are awake, alive, and conscious. The consideration of God is a way to wake the soul. "But do we really need God for that?" Quinn asks, angrily. "Do you really think that Dr. Krislov is on the path to salvation? With all that anger? And fear?" Rembrandt has no immediate answer for that.

5. EXTERIOR. DAY. THE FAIRE.

Very soon, the sliders arrive at what looks like a medieval country faire. Small tents and large — friendly-looking people. The whole is dominated by a large colorful tent.

The Linkers are easily identifiable. They all seemed to have a lustrous glow about them. Their skins have an identifiable pallor, but not grotesque — attractive. Their eyes are bright, they're smiling, they look healthy, they look happy, and they look *blessed*. There seems to be a remarkable cooperation among the various people working. Quinn and the others exchange curious glances. This was not what they expected; on the other hand, they didn't know what to expect.

One of the Linkers comes up to them — and the sliders react in surprise. The Linker is Dr. Krislov! No, it isn't Dr. Krislov — it's his twin! “Dr. Krislov?!”

“No, that's my brother. I am Krislov-L and I am the water-bearer. I offer you water.” He looks to Quinn, and drops to one knee in front of the wheelchair and takes Quinn's hands in his. “You want to walk again, don't you? We can give you back your legs — and more. I welcome you and your friends. May you never thirst.”

ACT TWO:

6. INTERIOR. TENT.

Krislov-L looks at Quinn's back and nods. A lot of technology was invented for the last war — including the stun-guns that burned Quinn. But one of the better developments was a combination of nanotechnology and biological engineering, the “water of life” that will be used to cure Quinn now.

The *aqua vitae* is a glittery bright solution of trillions of nanotech-bio-engines. Once these nano-engines are inside Quinn's body, they will transmit their results and instructions will be beamed back to them. These tiny engines will then go through Quinn's entire body, repairing whatever damage they find. The process is painless. If anything, Quinn will feel euphoric.

What's the catch? There is none. The process leaves you healthier than ever. The nanotech engines can even repair nerve damage. They will link themselves into a replacement network which will replace the damaged tissue. If necessary, the nano-engines will replace Quinn's entire nervous system. People injured far worse than Quinn have come from all over to drink the water of life and be restored to full health.

Quinn is ready to drink. But before he does, Colin asks, “What's the catch? What do you get in return?” Krislov-L smiles with real warmth. “Whatever you want to give. Your participation is sufficient reward.” “Explain?”

Krislov-L says, “When you drink, you link. It's necessary to the healing process for the entire network to monitor what's happening. For that time that the linkage is active, you will be in tune with the entire cluster here. You will learn from us, and we will learn from you. Don't worry, the effect is only temporary — you have to drink a lot of *aqua vitae* to make the linkage permanent. Some people are afraid that we are brain stealers, but you can't join the linkage permanently unless that's what you really want. When you drink this, you'll get a sense of who we are and what we're up to, but as your body heals, the effect will wear off.”

Quinn exchanges a glance with the others. They nod. There really isn't any choice, is there? Krislov-L says, “Considering the severity of your wound,

you should be able to walk again in a week.” Krislov-L arranges two or three tripods around Quinn’s bed on each tripod is a small array of antennas. Krislov-L switches the devices on and Quinn is enveloped in a golden glow. Krislov-L explains that these are the communication transceivers for the nanotech engines. They will create a temporary linkage with the rest of the colony.

Quinn drinks. For a moment, nothing happens. Then he starts to giggle. “It tickles.” And then ... he passes out, unconscious.

7. EXTERIOR. DAY. OUTSIDE OF TENT.

Outside, Krislov-L assures the others that Quinn will be fine. They ask him about his brother. “My brother and I came to the Linkers together after the war because we believed in the promise of new technology, but my brother became disenchanted when he found out that the linkage is more than just a medical process. It’s a transformational one.”

Krislov-L explains, “Some people believe that the linkage makes it possible to see God. And once you have seen God, you will never be the same again. You’ll never make war on your brothers and sisters again. That’s why the people of the village are so afraid. They’re afraid of not being able to make war. They’re afraid of being defenseless. Did you notice how scared and bitter my brother is?”

Rembrandt asks the question, “*Does* the linkage make it possible to see God?” Krislov-L says, “You have to drink to see. Would you like to drink?” Rembrandt is tempted, but Colin and Maggie keep him from asking further.

8. INTERIOR. TENT.

Rembrandt, Colin, and Maggie return to check on Quinn. He is conscious again, and he tells them what the process feels like. He can sense things outside of himself, but it isn’t scary, it’s like being connected.

Rembrandt is still intrigued by the process. He asks, “What if it’s true? What if the linkage really does make it possible to see God. Wouldn’t you

want to do that?" The others consider the question. Colin says, "If he were a wrathful God, no." But Rembrandt doesn't believe in a wrathful God. He's had a revelation in his own life, he's felt the hand of God. He knows that God is joyous — just knowing that God really exists is such a joyous experience that it transforms your life. Maggie replies, "Not if it's self-delusion."

But what if it's real? That's the question that Maggie and Rembrandt and Colin have to consider. If you could access God, *would you?*

9. EXTERIOR. EVENING. OUTSIDE OF TENT.

Later, as the sliders are finishing a meal, they observe something bizarre.

JOE, an old man, approaches Krislov-L and tells him he wants to talk to his wife, Anna. Krislov-L agrees, but he says to the old man, "You don't have to keep doing this, Joe. You can be with Anna again if you want to." But the old man shakes his head. "No, I just want to know that she's all right."

A surprising change comes over Krislov-L. His features soften, become more feminine, as if another personality is now inhabiting his body. Indeed, he now looks and speaks to the old man as if he is the old man's wife of many years. Their conversation is brief, but touching. Anna (speaking through Krislov-L) reassures Joe that she's fine, she's happy, she's no longer in pain, and she's waiting for him to join her; she misses him terribly. At this, the old man starts weeping. He misses her too.

Anna starts telling Joe about what it's like to "be with God." Joe is distraught. He wants to believe, but he can't. Abruptly, Krislov-L is himself again. He says to Joe, "You don't have to keep doing this. You're only hurting yourself. Joe, you and I both know there's only one way for you to be sure. Please stop torturing yourself." The old man nods and accepts. "But I'm so afraid." "Sooner or later, you're going to have to give up your fear —"

But now ANDREW, an angry young man, come rushing up, determined to stop them; Joe is his grandfather. He accuses Krislov-L of preying on a defenseless old man. Krislov-L reminds him of the treaty that ended the

war, the charter that grants everyone religious freedom. The old man is free to drink if he chooses, and no one has the right to stop him.

Andrew begs, "Please, Grandpa, please don't do this. We've already lost Grandma. We can't lose you too. Please don't go. We need you." He turns to Krislov-L. "You don't need him. What good is he to you?" Krislov-L is unmoved. He remains pleasant, but firm. "Your grandfather has the right to make his own choice. What do you want to do, Joe?"

The old man is torn. He looks from one to the other, undecided. The young man begs him. Abruptly, Krislov-L becomes Anna again. "Joe, I need you too." This angers Andrew, and he lunges at Krislov-L with the obvious intention of killing him. But Rembrandt and Colin grab him and restrain him. The young man sobs, "Don't let him do this. You don't understand."

Joe looks to his grandson and says, "Forgive me, Andrew. I love you, but I have to go to Anna. You will come and visit both of us." Andrew sobs. "No, you've made your choice. I'll never forgive you for leaving me." And he runs off.

Joe drinks, and he straightens as if the years are falling away from him. He smiles with wonder and a joyous expression comes over his face. Krislov-L congratulates the old man and welcomes him to the linkage. He tells him that it will take a few days and he'll have to drink the water of life every day until the linkage is firmly in place. But he will begin to re-experience his connection with Anna very soon. "You will be reunited to Anna and you'll wonder why you waited so long."

The sliders exchange concerned glances.

10. INTERIOR. TENT. NIGHT.

Quinn is recovering. The process is working. He looks at peace. Indeed, he looks almost beatific — with the same kind of lustrous pallor to his skin as Krislov-L and the other Linkers. The other sliders are justifiably worried about him. "Can you feel anything?"

"You mean the linkage, don't you?" Quinn explains, "Yes, I can feel it, but it's hard to describe. I can hear people singing to me, and I know things I

have no way of knowing. I wish you could all feel it. It's so peaceful in here." And then he laughs, because he recognizes how silly all that must sound. "You must think of lost my mind, or that I'm drugged, or something. I'm fine, I really am—I feel like dancing. I can feel my legs again. I know it's just a physical effect, and I know it'll pass, but everything seems so clear to me all of a sudden, I wish I could share it with you."

He sits up, excitedly, "I have to tell you something. I'm finally getting it—how much you all care about me. You've taken chances for me, and stood by me, and trusted me. And sometimes I've taken all of you for granted. But not any more. Now I know how ... how wonderful you three are and how lucky I am to have you in my life. I wish you could drink the water of life and feel it too." The other sliders are taken aback by this. Is it a side effect of the process? Or is it real?

The sliders believe they're pretty much figured out what's going on here. These people have a kind of electronic telepathy which allows them to join themselves together into a kind of mass-mind. That must be the linkage.

Colin isn't so sure—the religious overtones concern him. If this were simply a mass-mind, why do people keep insisting that they see God? Rembrandt suggests, "If a single mind is a tiny lens for God, then a mass-mind must be a greater lens for God. He has been very moved by what he has seen. These people are sincere in their faith, they are happy, they are at peace, and they are going about the Lord's business: healing the sick and feeding the poor. If these people have away to touch the face of God, we'd be stupid not to drink ourselves." Rembrandt asks Quinn. "Tell me, the truth. Can you touch the face of God?"

Colin is wary. He tries to explain to Rembrandt, "He can only tell you what he believes."

But Quinn's eyes are bright. "I can tell you that what I am experiencing is something larger than ordinary humanity. Remember *extraordinary*? Well, this is what you were talking about. Drink the water—and you tell me if this is God."

Rembrandt picks up a flask of the water of life from the table next to Quinn's cot. He looks at it—the fluid is glittery and bright. He uncorks the vial. And he drinks. For a moment ... nothing happens. Then, Rembrandt

looks surprised. And delighted. And shouts, "Hallelujah! For I was alone in the desert and you brought me water!" His eyes are suddenly moist with tears. He looks up as if he is seeing a holy light. "My God," he says. "You are real — " And then, remembering Colin and Maggie, he offers them the flask. They back away, instinctively — horrified.

ACT THREE:

11. EXTERIOR. FAIRE. DAY.

Quinn no longer needs the wheelchair. He is on crutches now. He seems normal, but he and Rembrandt are starting to finish each other's sentences. He sits down to eat and Rembrandt passes him things like salt and pepper before he asks for them.

Maggie and Colin step apart from the others. They feel more concerned than ever. "Look," says Colin. "It's like they're one mind in two bodies."

"I can't stand the not-knowing," Maggie says, shivering and hugging herself, even though the sun is bright.

Colin warns her. "I come from a world where everybody had to be the same. I learned the value of being different. When you stand apart, Maggie, you see things that you can't see from inside. Maybe it is wonderful to be linked to everybody else — but right now, our job is to stand on the outside so Quinn can come back to us. And Rennie too."

12. EXTERIOR. TOWN. DAY. THE BARRIER.

Colin has gone into town to return the wheelchair. Quinn won't be needing it any more. At the barrier, he encounters Andrew. (Perhaps Andrew works as a guard?) Andrew warns Colin, "You'll never see your brother again. The linkage will never let go of him. They've taken my family, one at a time." Colin broods about this.

12. EXTERIOR. DAY. OUTSIDE THE TENT.

Quinn is learning to walk again. He is amazed at how fast the healing is occurring. Maggie takes away the crutches to see if he can walk without them, but he stumbles and falls into her arms. For a moment, perhaps ... but no.

They try again, but this time, Rembrandt steps in and parallels his movements with Quinn's — as if he is demonstrating to Quinn how to walk.

As if Quinn is “riding” Rembrandt’s mind. Maggie sees this physical evidence of the linkage — the two are moving in unison, and she is both intrigued and jealous.

Quinn and Rembrandt are beginning to look like members of the linkage. Each of them look beatific and at peace. Quinn’s skin has taken on a lustrous pallor. It’s a little harder for Rembrandt to look lustrous, but even he has a glowing quality. Both Quinn and Rembrandt are now able to finish each other sentences. They communicate in a shorthand of understanding that transcends language.

13. INTERIOR. DOCTOR KRISLOV’S OFFICE.

Colin goes to Dr. Krislov. “You know about the linkage. You were a part of it — and you left.”

Dr. Krislov explains. “There was an attack. Stun-guns, like the one used against your brother. It shocked the linkage apart. We had to put ourselves back together. But before we could do that, the village folk brought some of us back to town. We fought them at first, but then after a while, I began to realize that what I’d lost was my sense of self. Some of the others went back, but I didn’t.”

“What about God — they say they can see him? Did you?”

Krislov says bitterly, “Maybe I did. Maybe I didn’t. If I say it was God, it’s heresy. If I say it wasn’t, it’s heresy their. Whatever I say, it’s only my word. You’ll believe what you want to believe. And one day you’ll get so thirsty that you’ll drink too — and then you’ll know for yourself.”

Colin asks, “Are my brother and my friend lost?”

Krislov tells Colin a little bit about the war, how it devastated the country. Nerve weapons were used and people died horribly. The nanotech engines were a way to repair the damage and save lives, but the side effect — the linkage was both a blessing and a curse. Warrior-clusters, all mind-linked, were the most efficient killing machines of all — but then they found that they could spread the linkage through the populace and nobody would resist, they’d all be ... changed. So the war stopped. Many of us who survived,

sealed ourselves into walled cities to keep ourselves from being ... linked.
“We survive because we don’t challenge the colonies.”

Colin takes a wild gamble. “You know how to destroy the linkage, don’t you? You want your brother back, I want mine.”

Dr. Krislov looks at Colin long and hard — is this a trap? He turns away. He opens a cabinet and stares into it, long and hard.... “Young man, what you ask — it’s impossible. It would start the war again.”

Colin says, “But you know.”

“It’s too dangerous! No.”

And that *seems* to be the end of that.

14. INTERIOR. TENT. MAGGIE AND QUINN.

Rembrandt helps Quinn back to his cot. They exchange a simple glance and Rembrandt leaves. Quinn looks to Maggie. “You’re bothered by this.”

Maggie admits it. Her issue has always been loss of control.

Now Quinn takes her hands in his and talks to her ... almost like a lover, but not quite. He says, “Maggie, you don’t trust people easily. That’s why your trust in me has always been such a marvelous gift. Trust me now. I know how alone you feel. I felt the same way. I want you to drink and link with me. Once you’re linked, you’re never alone again.”

Maggie shakes her head. “I can’t. I have to stand apart — ”

There is an electric tension between them. “Maggie, can you afford the arrogance of not knowing something like this — the knowing of which could transform you?” He uncorks the flask for her and holds it close to her lips.

But she doesn’t drink, not yet. “I’m afraid of losing you. I’m even more afraid of losing *me*.”

Quinn says, “Look at me. Am I still Quinn? Trust your own experience of who I am. Am I better or worse than before?”

Maggie looks — and sees Quinn beaming like an angel. She cannot resist. She drinks. The transformation comes over her first like chocolate, then like champagne, then like the kiss of a lover ... and Maggie is linked too.

ACT FOUR:

15. QUINN, MAGGIE, AND REMBRANDT.

Quinn is walking now, with a cane. When Colin arrives, he is horrified to see that Maggie is linked too. He tries to remind the others that they have a job, that a promise was made that Quinn was not going to link forever — that this was only supposed to be temporary.

But all three answer him, finishing each other's sentences like a single mind sharing three bodies: "Maybe it's time we rethought our priorities, Colin. Maybe you should join the linkage too, so you can understand. It's like — being expanded, like having a hundred sets of eyes to see with and ears to hear with and brains to think with." And then he delivers the frightening news. "Krislov-L is going to be immersed tonight. He's asked me to immerse with him. It's a great honor. I want to do this, Colin. There's something there. I can feel it. I want to — know the rest."

"What happens at immersion?"

"You become one with the water."

"And — ?"

"You become one with the water."

"But what does that mean?"

"You become one with the water."

Colin realizes with barely concealed horror that the others have gone to a place he dare not follow. He breaks away from the others — Quinn hobbles after him.

"I don't want to go there, Quinn. I've spent a lifetime learning how to live apart. I've learned the value of being an individual."

Quinn says, "That's because you've never learned the value of being a part of something larger than yourself. Colin, what would happen if you let go of your fear — ?"

“And what would happen if you let go of the linkage?”

“Nothing would happen if I stopped being linked — but something would happen if you joined.”

There are tears in Colin's eyes now. “Quinn, I don't want to hurt you.”

“And I don't want to hurt you either.” He offers his hand. Reluctantly, Colin takes it. And the two of them head back toward....

16. THE TANK.

A ceremony. It is the time for Krislov-L's *immersion*. He was only a simple white world Quinn and Rembrandt are thrilled to be a part of the celebration.

As Krislov-L prepares to ascend the steps to the tank, he turns to Quinn and says, “Thank you for joining us. You have so much to offer to the mass-mind — and the mass-mind has so much to offer you.”

Quinn says, “I want to know everything there is to know. I want to go all the way. I have to know.”

“Would you like to be immersed? It is a great honor.”

Quinn looks to Maggie and Rembrandt. They are as entranced as he is. But Quinn hesitates. Despite his being under the influence on the linkage, he is still a rational being — and he still recognizes that he has a responsibility that transcends his personal desires. He expresses his misgivings to Krislov-L. “I seek knowledge — so I can use it. I have a job to do.”

Krislov-L replies, “You have a job to do here.” He takes both of Quinn hands in his and says, “Quinn, this is your last stop. After this, you can stop running.”

Quinn turns to Rembrandt and says goodbye. He turns to Maggie and kisses her. And he turns to Colin — still apparently unlinked. Colin says, “Quinn, if this is what you want to do then *I'm going with you.*” Quinn is overjoyed. He hugs Colin. The two of them step up the ramp together.

The tank opens, they look down into it — and we finally see what the immersion represents. In the tank, we see that naked nervous systems of every person who has ever joined the linkage, floating in a bath of nutrient solution. The partially dissolved body of the old man is visible. Colin is startled.

But Quinn does not see this as horrible. “Isn’t it beautiful?” He says. “This too too mortal flesh has been stripped away, leaving only the pure mental functions, with no distractions, with no pains, with no physical limitations. All that’s left is the pure mind, fully linked, giving itself to the mass-mind, and knowing the fulfillment of being a part a larger purpose.” He turns to his brother. “Are you ready?”

Colin looks grim, but he says, “Yes, I’m ready.” He takes his brother by the hand and they step down into the tank — but as he does so, Colin takes from his jacket, a piece of forbidden technology. It is a stun-grenade. And just as he steps into the water, he presses the button. The grenade flickers with red lightning. It is the same lightning we saw at the beginning — the same lightning that scrambled Quinn’s nervous system!

The lightning flickers across the tank, flickers up then down each and every nervous system in the tank, and scrambles every linkage. Everyone who is linked collapses, stunned.

As they recover, they react with horror, shock, anger, rage, fear — all of the emotions that sweep over a person when they are suddenly awakened from the sweet hallucinations into the cold dawn of their own personal reality.

There are screams among the formerly Linked. They have been attacked. The war has broken out again. The truce is broken!

Quinn is startled and confused and angry with Colin — and so are the others. “Do you know what you’ve destroyed?! Do you know what you’ve done?!”

Colin drags them out of the tent — “Did you see what was in the tank, Quinn? They were going to do that to you?” Rembrandt is suffused with anger. He moves to strike Colin, Colin runs —

17. THE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

Quinn and Rembrandt and Maggie chase Colin, cornering him near the village. They are ready to drag him back to the others — Colin manages to say, “Is this the way you serve God? By turning into a lynch mob?” And that breaks through to Quinn — and Maggie and Rembrandt — who realize, “My God, what have we done? What did we become?”

In the distance, the sounds of battle have begun. The war has broken out again. Flickering lights and sounds of explosions.

“We’ll talk about it later. Come on, we’ve got to get out of here.” Now the four of them are running through the night. Similar to what we saw in the beginning.

They reach a place near the nexus. Quinn says, “Colin, there was something there — something bigger than the linkage. Like Rembrandt said, the linkage was only an antenna. I can’t explain it, but I know it was important. Don’t think me crazy, Colin — but I think what I saw, what I felt, I think it was — maybe an aspect of God.”

Colin says, “I don’t think you’re crazy, Quinn.” And then he says. “I was ready to go with you — until I saw what was in the tank.”

Rembrandt says, “I hate to interrupt, but we have to slide. I hear people coming after us — and I don’t want to find out if they’ve got torches and pitchforks.”

“This is where we came in,” jokes Maggie. The other two jump. For a moment, Quinn and Maggie are alone together. Quinn says, “Maggie, what I said before — I meant it.”

She says, “I know.” And jumps.

Quinn looks back at the darkness, wistfully. “I still wish I could have touched the face of God...” And then he follows the others into the gateway and jumps to the next world.