

SLIDERS

THE DARKEST HOUR # 1

PLOT FOR 22 PAGES

D.G. Chichester, Dick Giordano

PAGE 1

Editor's Note to Dick: We're looking for a richer, darker looking series this time. We recommend you use more blacks, and rendering the characters and vehicles in a more filmic sort of way.

INT. WRECKED ZERCURVIAN SHIP, trapped between dimensions. *Everything that is Zercurvian has its basis in 2D, not 3D, so tight spaces, flat surfaces and right angles are the norm.* We're look at a wrecked jumble of exotic equipment, crashed together and exposing alien and incomprehensible innards. The shattered machinery hisses and sparks.

From seemingly *within* the equipment, we see a paper thin hand -- ZERCURV MARAUD'S -- slide out towards us. Jagged and menacing and existing in only 2 dimensions at the moment, he is literally slipping between the atoms of his 3D surroundings.

Editor's Note to Dick: We got a few complaints that the Zercurv aliens looked a little too cartoony. Is it possible you can give them a more "special effectsy," cinematic flavor? It doesn't matter if they don't look exactly the way they did the first time around, so long as they look more "realistic."

MARAUD emerges fully from within the equipment, "expanding" out to 3D. It doesn't help his appearance much. He's a distorted, distended wreck. One whole half of his face is badly scarred, one eye socket a ragged, empty mess. *Please make him especially distinctive, so as to stand out from the other Zercurvians.* He shows evidence of having been badly burned, and the smoke and sparks spewing off the equipment behind him suggests he may suffer that fate again if he stands in one place too long. His glare is pure fury, and the look in his eyes (*Excuse me eye*) is completely insane.

MARAUD staggers forward, leaning against the half--shattered discs that make up the navigation wheel of the Zercurvian sliding ship. He looks like an alien Captain Ahab, ready to hunt the white whale.

PAGE 2

EXT. DIMENSIONAL LIMBO. It's a swirling storm of harsh light and jagged color, swirling clouds of vapor and gas that suggest a tangle of forces nothing can escape. Certainly not the half dozen ZERCURVIAN SHIPS we can see in this SPLASH PANEL, all of them badly torn up and listing. Debris and sparks trail off them as they orbit about each other in crippled fashion, derelicts in a between Sargasso Sea.

Editor's Note to Dick: Remember to leave a lot of the environmental special effects to the new coloring studio we'll be using. They're pretty good at this stuff.

INT. ZERCURVIAN SHIP, in the shattered control room, where MARAUD and another ZERCURVIAN -- an ENGINEER, the left half of his body badly torn and "dimensionally rended": parts of him have collapsed back to 2D, and in sections have torn away, like shredded paper, leaving him a sad and malformed thing. The duo stand before large flat screen displays, 3 times the size of the Zercurvians. On the displays are grainy, haze images of our four SLIDERS. MARAUD'S comment lay savage blame on the humans.

The ENGINEER stands before a smaller flat panel screen, showing a power graph dipping dangerously low.

PAGES 3 & 4

INT. "SICK BAY" a thrown together treatment center for the many injured ZERCURVIANS, laid out on crude (flat) cots. Some are already dead, many have gone flat, almost completely 2D. MARAUD and the ENGINEER stand at the far end, surveying the disaster that has fallen over their proud (and let's not forget TWISTED!) race.

Angle on 2 grim and ragged looking ZERCURVIANS holding onto a third as he writhes atop one of the cots. The prone ZERCURVIAN is almost completely 2D -- flat out, so to speak -- and is beginning to dissolve away in places. MARAUD'S off panel info conveys that without the energy fix they were getting by draining dimensions, the ZERCURVIANS risk being pulled back into their old existence...or worse.

INT. ENGINEERING ROOM, where the massive rows of **sliding** engines have crashed into each other. A few still turn and spark, but for the most part it's a write off. The small figures of MARAUD and the ENGINEER survey the disaster. The ENGINEER is grim about their prospects; MARAUD is fixated on amassing what power they have to get revenge on the SLIDERS.

ANGLE ON THE ENGINEER, looking aghast (will, as aghast as a tattered and alien FREAK can look!) at the suggestion: they're barely maintaining dimensional stability as it is. Any further drain could doom what's left of them.

A savage MARAUD turns on the ENGINEER, the Zercurvian leader sinking his long and again 2D hands/talons into his shocked brethren. The ENGINEER is shriveling as MARAUD drains him.

A coldly smiling (and quite round the bend) MARAUD pulls hard on a large power switch -- like a sliding plate atop another sliding plate -- warping sparks and energy shooting off as he reroutes the armada's energy.

EXT. SHIPS, the wreckage of the armada rocked as massive waves of YELLOW energy drain off each ship, directed towards MARAUD'S flagship at the center. It's like a small solar system collapsing in on itself, flares of power erupting and drawing inward.

PAGE 5

CUT TO: EARTH, one of 'em anyway. BIG CLOSE UP ON A LOOSE FRONT PAGE OF A SAN FRANCISCO PAPER trapped against a park bench, the paper flapping wildly as it's hit by an OFF PANEL WIND. The paper features a picture of a drained NICOLE BROWN SIMPSON (pretty blond woman), and a smaller picture of a grinning JOHNNY COCHRAN. The headline reads, "NICOLE BROWN GUILTY IN O.J. MURDER!" Below that, a smaller headline reads, "L.A. Prosecutor Cochran told jury "If The Glove Fits, You Can Not Acquit!"

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO A MED. WIDE SHOT ON THE PARK, late afternoon. Dark storm clouds are brewing in the sky, and there's a flash of lightning in the distance. But what's really causing the wind is the massive sliding portal that's opened up as QUINN fires the timer out before him. The other three SLIDERS (ARTURO, WADE and REMBRANDT) are right behind him. Off on one side, we see the bench where the paper was stuck, the loose sheet now breaking free to fly across the scene.

CLOSER ON THE SLIDERS as they leap into the thundering portal. REMBRANDT looks bemused, QUINN and WADE have a "Hey, beats working for a living!" look, ARTURO is steaming and bitching about the indignity and what this has done to his life.

PAGES 6 THROUGH 8

In between dimensions, along the rainbow--plasma corridor of light and energy, the SLIDERS tumble. WADE and QUINN are jazzed, REM is tensed up like a guy on a roller coaster, ARTURO is annoyed.

INT. ZERCURVIAN SHIP, MARAUD leans heavy on a control switch in the shape of two flat discs atop one another, offset slightly like the ship's own askew disc shape. Smoke and sparks are swirling about him as he wrenches the wheel hard, resembling nothing so much as a mad Ahab at the helm of the Pequod.

EXT. ZERCURVIAN ARMADA. The other ships have gone dark, lit only by small explosions. Super charged pulses of energy are zapping from the outer ships and feeding into MARAUD'S brightly lit flagship. As they do so, great, ferocious arcs of yellow lightning--like energy are warping into the dimensional void in search of the SLIDERS.

It finds them. The hellish yellow energy warps around the SLIDERS as they tumble between dimensions --

-- the foursome arching in pain and shock, their bodies going negative, their skin shining translucent to reveal sections of bone beneath.

The following four panels are similar: close ups on the characters to help intro them more closely to the reader; each of the SLIDERS is slightly distorted, as if they're made of warm taffy being pulled. Each expression is tinged with pain, each SLIDER partly "negged out" with sections of bone showing through from their yellow--glowing skin.

CLOSE UP QUINN, copy establishing background

CLOSE UP WADE, copy establishing background

CLOSE UP REMBRANDT, copy establishing background

CLOSE UP ARTURO, copy establishing background

INT. ZERCURVIAN SHIP. A crazed MARAUD is standing neneath a large flat panel display, the static--warped image still clear enough to show the foursome of the SLIDERS tumbling through the plasma corridor.

Explosions erupt around MARAUD as he curses himself for his failure.

A shocked and distraught MARAUD looks down at himself as his body begins to flatten, vanishing from this reality.

EXT. FLEET, the massive ships listing away, flattening out to nothing.

Darkness falls over the once mighty ZERCURVIAN ARMADA, their epitaph MARAUD'S wailing lament at having failed in his revenge.

EXT. SUBURBIA, a nineteen-fifties style world of quaint houses and family values. It's 1996 here, chronologically, but the culture hasn't gone much past 1955. Our shell-shocked SLIDERS, their clothes singed and smoking from their encounter, are roaring out of the sliding portal to crash into a lemonade stand.

PAGES 9 THROUGH 11

A shaken REMBRANDT stumbles to his feet, feeling himself for injury, wanting to know, "What the hell was that?"

QUINN and WADE are helping each other to their feet, QUINN wanting to know if everyone's okay. WADE'S noting the burned edges of her outfit, declaring, "Whatever that was, it was a little too close for comfort!"

A scornful ARTURO holds up a handful of money, the currency badly burned, rendering it useless. ARTURO is pessimistic about the loss of their nest egg.

An amused REM calls the group's attention to a house across the street.

REM'S POV: A chubby kid --VERN-- is crawling under the high porch at the front of his house, lugging a large jar of pennies.

The following is an enormous "in-joke," revolving around SLIDERS' actor JERRY O'CONNELL (QUINN) appearing in the movie "Stand By Me" in the role of VERN, the kid who lost a jar of pennies he buried under his house's front porch. Please watch "Stand By Me" for reference on VERN'S character.

CLOSE ON VERN, puffing away as he gouges a big hole out of the dirt underneath his front porch. The big jar of pennies sits next to him, a proud nest egg.

VERN'S patting the dirt down on top of the now filled--in hole, looking up as his mother calls him in to do his chores.

ANGLE ON QUINN, looking across the street as chubby VERN runs up the front steps of his house. *Please get both QUINN and VERN in this shot together!* QUINN'S got a hard cunning in his expression, something we don't normally see there. "I see one quick way to put our bank account back in the green..."

WADE is shocked ("You wouldn't...Quinn, that poor kid will be devastated!") QUINN'S shrugging his shoulders, checking out the timer.

CLOSE UP ON THE TIMER: There's less than ten minutes. QUINN'S commenting he's not heading off into a new unknown without some security.

A pleased ARTURO claps QUINN on the back, delighted his protege's finally traded in some idealism in favor of pragmatism.

Looking past REM, WADE, and ARTURO as QUINN slinks across the street, angling for the big front porch.

Beneath the front porch, a hunkered down QUINN has already dug up the jar of pennies, sitting on the ground next to him. He's shoveling dirt back into the hole with his hands, his expression dancing with a mischievous glee.

QUINN rejoins the others, carrying the jar of pennies under his arm. WADE is aghast and incredibly disappointed. "This is so unlike you, Quinn!" He's brushing her off as silly. "There's whole sides of me you've never seen, Wade!"

QUINN fires the timer, the portal thundering open.

The SLIDERS jump through the gate into a new unknown.

CUT TO: VERN, under the porch. He's got a small garden spade, and an empty hole in front of him. His face is scrunched up in confusion, wondering where he buried his stash. *We'll come back to VERN a few times, to show the holes increasing!*

PAGE 12 THROUGH 15

EXT. ROBOT EARTH. *From a visual viewpoint, this world is much like our own. There's a slicker, more futuristic look to fashions and architecture, etc., but not so much as to scream, "Buck Rogers!" The riff here is that humanity concluded that flesh and organics were messy and prone to too much uncontrollable breakdown. They've therefore transplanted their brains into advanced, human looking robotic shells, or have transferred their electrical impulses into a planet-wide "neural net" of consciousness.*

The SLIDERS spill out of their portal, onto a seemingly normal city street (normal except for the slightly more futuristic look (sharper edges, a little more chrome, a slicker cut to the clothes).

The SLIDERS get to their feet, scanning the PEOPLE making their way down the street: Shoppers, construction workers, business people. Nothing seems terribly out of the ordinary, and the SLIDERS comment to each other that though this clearly isn't home, it seems harmless enough.

WADE turns on QUINN, still clutching his big jar of pennies. She's aghast at his "out of character" action. He's shrugging, wondering how much he scored.

ARTURO steps in, looking for a debate with WADE; the professor's ready to reiterate his "need to survive" routine, but WADE'S suddenly distracted, look OFF PANEL.

WADE'S POV shows us a large, rough and tumble looking CONSTRUCTION WORKER chowing down on a greasy burger he's just bought from a hamburger stand. The WORKER'S letting the burger's wrapper drift idly, carelessly to the ground.

An angry WADE snatches up the litter-wrapper, crumpling it, calling after the WORKER.

She chucks the crumpled wrapper at the back of the WORKER'S head, where it bounces off. He barely notices.

ANGLE ON ARTURO, as the rebounding wrapper flies into his hands, the professor making an awkward catch.

An even angrier WADE shoves the WORKER in the back, belligerently lecturing him on the ecology.

REMBRANDT lays a hand on WADE'S shoulder, telling her to "Lighten up!" She's giving him a brutal look, warning him to stay out of the way.

ANGLE ON ARTURO, holding up the burger wrapper by its edges. It's glistening with a heavy sheen, more machine oil than meat grease. The curious professor is trying to call QUINN'S attention, but the young physicist has his attention on what's going on with WADE.

WADE grabs a heavy metal pot off an open-air florist display that's out on the sidewalk --

--and swings the pot around to violently slam the construction WORKER in the back of the head. He crumples --

--and WADE wails on him repeatedly with the pot, holding it two-handed as she delivers a flurry of blows.

QUINN and REMBRANDT pull the enraged WADE back from her attack.

OVER-THE-SHOULDER-SHOT, the trio of stunned SLIDERS (WADE, REMBRANDT and QUINN) as they look down on the battered CONSTRUCTION WORKER: beneath his now torn "skin covering" he's a sparking machine, a seeming android.

ANGLE ON THE SHOCKED SLIDERS (all four) as they turn in reaction to an off panel command, "Step away from the wreckage!"

WIDE SHOT as we see the SLIDERS surrounded by a half-dozen ROBOTIC COPS. Not quite as fully mechanical as a ROBOCOP, but more clearly androids than the (seemingly normal) CITIZENS we saw a few moments before. The COPS are hulking and intimidating looking, covered in shock troop gear and helmets, brandishing thick electrical batons as they close toward the heroes.

An OLD WOMAN blusters over to one of the COPS, declaring, "I recorded the whole thing, officer!"

A confused REMBRANDT tries to calm the old broad, going to touch her gently on the shoulder --

-- the singer's eyes going wide as his hand slips *through* her in a shimmering haze. The "OLD WOMAN" is really a holographic projection over a robotic "interior" that is only a crude mechanism, in the style something off an auto assembly line. It rides on treads, and features multiple lenses to project the OLD WOMAN illusion.

The OLD WOMAN ROBOT reels back, shimmering edges of the hologram floating around the assembly underneath as it screeches out, "Hologram breach, hologram breach!"

A COP puts a firm hand on ARTURO'S shoulder, proclaiming, "Enough from all of you!" --

-- the surprised COP'S hand squeezing the shaken professor's shoulder a bit more, sensing the fleshy resiliency. "Whoa..." the COP mutters.

Two other COPS grab hold of ARTURO from each side as the first COP commands, "Hold him!"

CLOSE ON A WIDE EYED ARTURO AND THE COP as a thin but deadly looking blade slits out the end of the COP'S forefinger, the COP clearly preparing to use it on the professor.

ANGLE ON THE OTHER THREE SLIDERS, struggling in the unbreakable grips of 3 more COPS, holding our heroes fast. "NO!" they shout. "What are you going to do!?"

The COP uses the blade to gently prick the end of ARTURO'S finger.

The shocked COP holds up the blade, fascinated/frightened as he sees the drop of blood that oozes down the length of the blade.

WIDE ANGLE, DARK MOOD as the COPS hold the SLIDERS fast and the first COP calls in an ominous report on a wrist radio.

PAGES 16 & 17

INT. PROXY CENTRAL, the main command center for the continued transfer of human essence -- physical brains, electrical impulses -- into various forms of electromechanical shells. We're in a big, cold metallic room, very much like a brig. There's a long metal table in the center of the room, and cold hard benches along the walls. A single massive door -- like a bank vault -- is along one wall. The SLIDERS mill about. ARTURO is just beginning to consider the oddity of WADE'S outburst ("What's wrong with you, young lady! I've never seen that behavior in you before!" says Arturo. "I...I don't know," says Wade, with a dark, almost sorrowful look in her eyes.), and QUINN is complaining that they took his pennies.

CLOSER ON THE SLIDERS, as a panel in the table slides open, a platform beneath rising up to bring a bowl of fruit into view.

A hungry REMBRANDT grabs a banana, takes a big bite, and then immediately spits it out, complaining about its oily, unwholesome taste.

QUINN takes the rest of the banana, and he's munched up the fruit in between his fingers: indeed, a black, oily ooze comes out of the otherwise normal looking fruit. QUINN compares it to the fluid ARTURO found in the burger wrapper.

A tall and impressive figure -- MORAVEK -- enters the room, apologizing profusely for the mishap with the fruit. With all the grace and flamboyance of Peter O'Toole at his best, MORAVEK hurries toward QUINN.

MORAVEK wipes the slime fruit off the end of the surprised QUINN'S fingers, MORAVEK explaining that while foodstuffs are manufactured to have the appearance of natural fruits, or common cooked items (the burger) they're really only delivery vehicles for the "transmission fluid" that keeps their mechanical selves running.

MORAVEK sucks the slimy, munched "fruit" off the end of his fingers. So much for grace.

The rest of the group responds to this chow-down with looks of disgust and "What *are* we into this time?"

PAGES 18 &19

MORAVEK is gracious as he ushers them out through the now open vault door, the SLIDERS proceeding cautiously.

INT. HALLWAY, a long hospital-like corridor. The SLIDERS are passing a large window, like the kind that looks down on a operating theater (which, in effect, is what this one does!). MORAVEK is beginning to explain the peculiarities of this world, and he's directing our guys' attention down through the window by way of example.

SLIDERS' POV, looking down on an automatic robotic surgical proceeding. Large, Detroit-style robotic arms manipulate surgical steel and laser scalpel, as well as forceps style pincers, removing an organic brain from the head of one robot -- a thoroughly human-looking YUPPIE man --

-- and transferring the brain into another humanoid android, this one looking like a strikingly beautiful WOMAN.

The SLIDERS are shaken by what they're witnessing. MORAVEK is elated, arms wide like a showman on a roll, as he explains how humanity perfected these processes and cast off their flesh bodies for the immortality and convenience that electronics and robotics could offer. There are no homo Sapiens left on earth -- only homo electric.

ANGLE ON THE ENTHUSED MORAVEK as he further details of the process: images swirl around him in montage fashion. showing an ASIAN TEENAGE GIRL being scanned by a grid pattern of laser lights--

-- her body fluids then being drawn into a robotic shell by dozens of fiber thin tubes connected to pressure points on her body. A different set of fibers -- this time wires -- is connected from her head into the jacks of sophisticated looking computers. MORAVEK explains this "higher plane" that is also an option for the disembodied: a pure, direct connection to the worldwide neural net.

A shaken WADE considers that this world has "given up on humanity!"

PAGES 20 THROUGH 22

INT. GALLERY, a big museum-like room, decorated with large plants and plush chairs. Along one wall are a long line of sample android forms of both genders and all ethnic backgrounds; on the opposite wall is a similar display of hologram projections, set off from the androids by being semi-transparent, and shimmering in the air. The room is dominated, however, by a big renaissance-style painting that covers one wall from floor to ceiling. It's like a detail from the creation painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, where man reaches up to touch the finger of God. The difference here is that it is a reclining robot reaching up to touch the finger of God. The SLIDERS and MORAVEK are small figures at the base of the painting, MORAVEK explaining they have simply adjusted the definition of humanity.

ANGLE ON ARTURO, WADE AND MORAVEK. ARTURO has picked up an orange from a large fruit bowl, and is sniffing it delicately, trying to gauge if it's real. MORAVEK is off to one side, assuring him that it is, (especially arranged for the SLIDERS). An angry WADE is wondering if ARTURO can think about anything but his stomach, the pragmatic professor once more citing the priority of survival.

ANGLE ON MORAVEK, smiling with car salesman cunning, glad to hear such thinking coming from the SLIDERS. He begins to explain PROXY'S interest in the foursome: there are certain rich -- very rich -- individuals who have grown weary of the electric realm, and once more desire, "the pleasures of the flesh -- literally!" The SLIDERS are the first organics to be seen in a generation...and MORAVEK is authorized to deal with them in trading their bodies for the best the Proxy has to offer.

ANGLE ON MORAVEK, the line of android bodies behind him: Beautiful man and woman forms of all ethnic races. His hands are wide as he plays up the selection.

SIMILAR ANGLE ON MORAVEK, now backed by the line of hologram projections. MORAVEK plays up the simplicity of projection any figure, mood, form.

ANGLE on the SLIDERS, ARTURO, WADE and QUINN emphatically shouting MORAVEK down. REM looks grim about the whole matter, but has nothing to say.

MORAVEK with his hands up in a "Hold on!" gesture, assuring the SLIDERS he's only here to offer, not to force the issue on them.

The SLIDERS stalk past MORAVEK out of the gallery as he offers them quarters and to arrange the return of the timer. REMBRANDT hangs back slightly...

...and then slides up to MORAVEK, the performer admitting to liking the idea of immortality and looking good forever. He wants in, but MORAVEK is forced to admit that his offer is only good if all four SLIDERS go along.

BIG ANGLE ON A DARK, CUNNING REMBRANDT. We're looking at his dark side coming through here as he assures MORAVEK he'll get the other SLIDERS to give up their bodies, "one way or another!"