

## SLIDERS

### "The Long Way Home"

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The Sliders are bored.

They've been stuck in city of Industry for almost three weeks, one of the longest stays in one place in Slider history.

It's called City of Industry because there used to be a tire plant here. But Goodyear closed it several years ago, and, what was once a bustling city of almost 10,000 is now a wasted desert by-station with more prairie dogs than people. Twenty miles west there is a deserted mission called "La Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de Los Angeles." Years ago the padres gave up on the idea of converting the heathen bikers native to the area.

A local explains it this way: "This is a desert with no natural supply of water. We get violent earthquakes, raging forest fires, and when it rains, it floods and everything washes away. Why would anybody with good sense want to live in Los Angeles?"

The Chandler on this earth is a fly-blown motel. the only place to eat is a greasy diner with four stools at the counter and a juke box that doesn't work. There's a gas station with a soda pop box that takes block ice and a yellow dog that sleeps on the pump island, a cinder block tavern where the local ranchers drink, a post office that doubles as a general store, and a bus stop where, three times a week, mail is dropped as well as newspapers from the nearest big city, Kingman, Arizona, over on the mighty Colorado River.

So why, you ask, with such time on their hands, don't they hie themselves to Kingman and good times in the casinos there? No money. Their cash doesn't work on this world, and Remmy can't fool the ATMs. They have to try to find part time jobs just to be able to buy food, and pay the hotel bill.

Quinn helps out part time at the gas station. Remmy busses tables at the diner. Maggie is the night time cashier. Colin has probably done the best, working as a handyman and general laborer on nearby farms. Basically, it's Minimum Wage World.

At night Quinn works with the timer and a calculator, trying to work out a way to get back to his home world (a trip that now requires not only circumventing the slidecage, but also defeating the shunt that Quinn himself installed on that world.)

One redeeming quality of this town is its library. Not much of a collection, -- it's leftover from when there were enough people here to have a high school. But it's better than nothing, and enough to interest Quinn and Rembrandt. Quinn finds some physics books that might help him in his research. And Remmy finds some thrillers and mysteries that help pass the time.

One day, the Alpha Geek who runs the library recommends a book to Rembrandt. "Do you like science fiction?" he asked. "I have no choice," is Remmy's cryptic response. The geek gives him a novel called "Flow My Blood, the Soldier said," by one HARLAN CLARK.

Back in the motel that night, Colin and Maggie are watching the latest episode of "Touched by a Ranger" on television while Quinn works with his books and timer, and Remmy starts the science fiction book. After a chapter or two about some kind of war between humans and a mutant species on another world, the story begins to sound familiar to him. He tells Quinn that some of action in the book seems similar to what they've learned about Quinn and Colin's home world from the brain chips both brothers have and information gleaned from Krolak, the Kromagg commander, "Common Ground," and Kolitar in "Slidecage."

The others at first suggest maybe Remmy's read the book before. Then he finds an illustration -- a pen and ink drawing of what is called, in the book, a "Gormak." It is unmistakably a Kromagg. Quinn then remarks that Gormak is a near anagram of Kromagg. This book may be a real story disguised as a novel.

If this author has knowledge of the Kromagg war on Quinn/Colin's home world, he may know more about that world, maybe even how to get there.

With more than a week left on the timer, the Sliders agree that it would be worthwhile to try to find this Clark person. At the very least, it'll kill the week.

Harlan Clark proves hard to find. They go back to the library and ask the Alpha Geek about this Clark person. Alpha Geek tells them Clark is notoriously impossible to find. No agent, no lawyer. He communicates with his publisher by maildrop. Speculation among Clark fans on the Internet runs from "He's CIA" to "He's an alien." Evidently, our people are not the first to suspect that his books are not fiction.

Quinn gets an idea. The masthead page in the novel lists a corporation as copyright holder -- Multiverse Inc. A phone call to the California secretary of State gets an address, a post office box in Lakewood.

Borrowing a truck from the gas station, our people stake out the post office. After a while a beautiful young blonde woman goes to the designated box and takes out some mail. Our people follow her up into the hills to a lonely rustic cabin.

The Sliders cautiously approach the house, and are rudely greeted by the blonde on the porch, a Colt Python in one hand, the leash to a cranky pit bull in the other. "We're big fans of Mr. Clark," Quinn tries to explain. No dice. Nobody by that name here. Why do you have his mail? I send it on to another location, the blonde says, now vamoose. That's a shame, Quinn goes on, we have some information about the world he wrote about in "Flow My Blood..." about the sliding technology needed to get there. A voice from inside the house: "Sliding technology?"

An old man in a wheelchair rolls onto the porch. Harlan Clark. He's been listening from just inside.

The Sliders share a simple dinner with Clark and the blonde, who turns out to be his daughter, DANA. She went away to college up north, but, after her mother died, returned to care for her dad as his health failed. She's bright, sweet, caring, and very attractive.

The Sliders have nothing to lose. They tell Clark their real story. At first the old man and his daughter are skeptical. Dana, in particular, sizes them up for another bunch of crazy sci-fi fans obsessed with her father. Clark asks Quinn a few questions, then, "I don't think I caught your last name." "Mallory." Clark pauses a moment before he tells them: "I knew your parents."

Then Clark lays out his story: I came here on a slide, just like you. On our home world I was a scientist, and worked on weapons projects that helped defeat the Kromaggs. "The Doomsday weapon," Quinn says. "You might call it that," Clark replies. Then, I knew your father at the academy. Once he had perfected his slider and had safely gotten you and your brother out of harm's way, he made the technology available to others of us who wanted to.

Why did he leave his home world once the Maggs were defeated? He was sick of war and destruction. "The work I had done caused such devastation and suffering, I couldn't face anything on my world again. I had to get away. Michael Mallory helped me slide here." Since he had renounced his former profession, he decided the best way to make a living here would be to convert science fact into science fiction. It's been a decent living.

First of all, this is news to Dana, who now has to come to grips with a whole new image of her father. She's very upset that she has never known this about her own father. Colin follows her onto the porch to console her with his own story. Dana was born on this world, raised by her parents with no inkling that there was anything unusual about her father except his imagination. Colin tells her that he and his brother went through a similar revelation, that they had lived to adulthood with people they thought were their real parents. Colin tries to

assure her that this revelation shouldn't change any of the experience she has had of her family. "He's still your father, always was, always will be. We're here to see if he can help us find our father and mother."

Quinn explains his mission to Clark. He has the timer which is programmable to a degree, but only if he has the right coordinates to log in. Plus there's the little matter of the shunt that he thinks he has figured a quantum way around.

Clark has to think it over. He escaped that world so he would never have to view the scene of the destruction he caused. "You know the old sanskrit quotation," he asks them, "I am become death and the destroyer of worlds. That's how I felt. But now."

Clark shares that he doesn't have long to live, and he's decided that, if the Sliders can pull it off, he would like to return to his home world to die.

Using data from Clark's workbooks, and his own calculations to avoid the slidcage and shunt, Quinn keys in the data. The vortex opens and the Sliders, along with Dana and her father and his wheelchair, slide out.

They arrive in a park near a very modern fountain-plaza complex. This is a very advanced world, the skyscrapers all around have a very futuristic look to them. Colin and Quinn look around in amazement. After all the years, all the slides, all the alien worlds, they're home!

They all move to a picnic table under the shade of some trees to decide on the next step.

Clark tells them he should have a younger brother here, and he plans to live with him if it's agreeable. He tells Quinn and Colin that, twenty years ago, the Mallorys were both important physicists at CalTech. They're probably still there, or, if not, they were such important people at the time, they probably will be easy to track down.

What about Maggie and Rembrandt. Is this the end of the line for the Sliders as a team? Remmy still wants to return to Earth Prime. His mother and the rest of his family still live under the cruelty of Kromagg rule. He has vowed to return there to fight for them, and now it looks like he'll have the chance to make a difference. He'll go with Clark. If he can take the formula and design for the Doomsday weapon back to earth, maybe he can help drive the Maggs off his world.

Maggie? She and Quinn talk apart from the others. They have been through so much together. They have come close to loving each other a couple of times, they've had a brief "bubble world" look at what their lives would have been like had they married; in short, they have bonded in a way few humans ever experience. Neither can imagine life without the other.

Maggie's world is gone. Her husband is gone. Her life has become sliding, her family, the sliders. She will stay will Quinn and Colin on this world, and make a life for herself alongside theirs.

Quinn turns to Remmy, "If you're going home, you'll need this." He gives Rembrandt the timer. It's like passing a torch. Rembrandt embraces his old friends and goes off with Clark and Dana to a new life.

Quinn, Colin and Maggie quickly find out that Michael and Elizabeth Mallory are co-chairman of the Physics Department at CalTech. Their articles in Who's Who go on for pages. Very important, world famous scientists.

The reunion. Colin, Quinn and Maggie wait in a quad on campus. They see their parents come out of a building and cross the quad. They approach, make sure it's the Mallorys, then, Quinn says "I'm Quinn... this is Colin. We're your sons." Shock, disbelief, confusion, relief, joy. It all bursts forth. Maggie is introduced as their best friend and travelling companion, and everyone repairs to the Mallory home for a celebratory feast.

The Mallory home. It's looks like a World's Fair exhibit. Very high tech. Over dinner Colin, Quinn and Maggie share their story -- the dozens of slides they've made to try to find their home world. To Quinn, Michael Mallory says "We tried to find you, but we were told you were dead." To Colin: "and we couldn't find you at all." Quinn explains his Earth Prime parents hid him, didn't want to give him up, and that Colin's parents died when he was a child.

Michael wants to know how they made it back here if their timer was so unreliable. They explain that they did it with the help of Harlan Clark. The Mallorys seem a little surprised at that. Clark came back to this earth? Quinn tells them Clark, his daughter and their friend Rembrandt have gone to stay with Clark's brother, and that Remmy intends to slide back to his home world with the plans for the weapon that beat the Kromaggs here. "It wasn't really a weapon," Michael Mallory says, strangely, "More of a method."

With Remmy, Clark and Dana. Clark discovers that his brother, fallen on bad times, lives in a run-down rooming house. The brother tells Clark that, in the twenty years since the Kromaggs were eliminated, the political environment has changed radically. There has been a kind of national penance about the methods used. The official stand is that, though we are grateful the Kromaggs are gone, there were things done in those times that are best forgotten, especially the heinous actions of Harlan Clark and his "Extermination camps."

Special commando groups have brought in numerous "war criminals" over the years, mostly from remote areas in south

America, and there have been lavish "show trials." Clark remains at the top of the wanted list. The very name Clark, in short, has become "Mudd."

Rembrandt wants to know what the hell is going on here? Wasn't there a civil war here, and didn't the humans find a doomsday weapon to defeat the Kromaggs? Clark tells him the truth. No, there was no war. It was more like a pogrom. Kromaggs were a harmless, but hated minority in this world, endlessly, if sporadically persecuted.

That is until a group of Radical Humanists gained control of the World Council. They initiated a "racial cleansing" program in which all Kromaggs were to be rounded up and placed in "detention camps." This meant several million Kromaggs confined in cramped and hostile conditions. After a few years of that, the Radicals, tired of the expense of maintaining these camps -- food and health services alone were ruinously expensive -- embarked on what was called "the final solution" to the Kromagg prolem. But how to get rid of several million Kromagg prisoners? That meant several million bullets or laser blasts, and then something would have to be done with the bodies.

Harlan Clark was the man who came up with the solution. It was called "Krolon-B," a colorless, odorless gas that not only killed instantaneously and quietly, but worked on the cellular level within the lifeless bodies to transform them into a gaseous state that was then eliminated into the ozone. Basically Clark's gas killed the Maggs, dissolved them, and scattered them into the air. It was perfect.

Clark tells Rembrandt that he has not had a peaceful night's sleep since he invented Krolon-B and saw what it did to the Kromaggs.

So, Remmy says, let me get this straight. On this planet the Kromaggs weren't the bad guys? No, Clark tells him they were simply a maligned and persecuted minority. Clark tells him, "The bad guys on this earth were us, the humans." Holy cow, Remmy thinks, this can't be Quinn and Colin's home world. He looks at the timer: 30 minutes to the next slide.

Back at the Mallory dinner table, Michael and Elizabeth are listening with fascination as Quinn, Maggie and Colin tell more of their adventures, about how the guys thought their alternate parents were their real parents until Quinn got the brain chip from his Earth Prime mother and the message from his real parents, and learned about Colin. Then Colin and his chip, and their subsequent quest to find their home, how they got here once, but found it protected by a slidecage and how Quinn defeated that with a special shunt, and, breathless now, miracle of miracles..."we're here."

Michael and Elizabeth excuse themselves clearing the table of dishes and going to their kitchen.

"Who are these men?" Elizabeth asks her husband, "They're certainly no sons of ours." Michael says he has no idea who they are or how they found their way here. One thing is certain. They've brought Harlan Clark with them, the inventor of Krolon-B, the most wanted war criminal in the history of this earth. They realize that if Clark is arrested and talks they might be implicated in helping him to escape twenty years before. "So we can't call the authorities." "What do we do?" Michael goes to his gun cabinet. "We handle it ourselves."

Back at the Clark tenement, Remmy tells Clark and Dana that this is all a big mistake. This is the wrong world. If Clark is a hunted man, then the Sliders will be wanted too for helping him. He needs their help to get back to his friends before the slide. Clark's brother has a beat-up car. They take it, with Dana driving. It's a real rattle-trap, spluttering and backfiring as it heads for the rescue.

At the Mallory house, Michael and Elizabeth come back into the dining room, not with cappuccino, but with a laser pistol.

"I don't know who you are," Michael tells them, "But you're not our sons."

Our people now learn what the real situation is. Both Mallorys were suspicious of Quinn and Colin from the start. Though they did place their own sons on alternate worlds to protect them from the dangerous times during the Kromagg Pogroms, the stories Quinn and Colin told of their worlds and adventures didn't add up. "And now," Michael announces, "We're going to take a little ride, and you're going to tell us where we can find Harlan Clark."

They hear an explosion from the front of the house. Our folks use this distraction to get the best of the Mallorys. Quinn is in the odd position of having to deck his own "father." Maggie takes out Elizabeth, and the Sliders run for it.

The explosion was actually a car backfire. The Clark heap hs pulled into the drive. Remmy has jumped out, looking for his friends, and here they come, barrelling out of the house.

"It's the wrong world," Remmy shouts.

Quinn: "Tell me about it."

They hop into the Clark car and roar smoking out of the drive.

In the house Mallory calls the cops. He reports being assaulted in his home, that the intruders escaped with someone who looks like Harlan Clark. They are all heavily armed.

Quinn is maneuvering the Clark car through traffic when they are suddenly hit with the spotlight beam from a helicopter above them. The military police. A couple of squad cars arrive and give chase, sirens wailing, lights flashing.

The Chase. The Clark heap Quinn at the wheel, is clearly going to be no match for the military vehicles. The cops have called for re-inforcements and the chopper continues to spotlight the Clark car.

The Sliders twist and turn, up and down alleys, and wrong way streets. Finally cornered, they hop out. Clark is clearly unable to run on foot. He tells his daughter to go with the Sliders who only have to avoid the police for ten more minutes before they can slide out of here. Dana doesn't want to go. "I'm the one they want," Clark insists. "I don't have that much longer anyway. Go with them." Quinn and the others agree that Dana can come with them. No more time. Here come the MPs.

The Sliders, plus Dana, run for their lives, up and down steps, through alleys, over fences. Just as it seems the MPs are closing in, our people dash down a tunnel on an escalator and come out on a subway platform. Our people manage to push their way through the crowd and onto the train, and the doors close just as the MPs rush up. The train pulls out of the station.

Remmy says it's no use, the cops will have people at the next station. Quinn checks the timer. Only one minute to slide, and the next station is two minutes away. The MPs are going to have a little surprise. And the people on this car are going to have a wild story to tell.

As Quinn activates the timer he turns to Colin who says, "Will we never get home, brother?" "I don't know," Quinn tells him, "I really don't know."

The vortex opens and the Sliders, plus Dana, move on to the next world.